

**ORIGIN STORIES IN THE TRADITION OF POLITICAL
THOUGHT: PLATO, HOBBS AND CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST
THEORY RECONSIDERED**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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**Origin Stories in the Tradition of Political Thought:
Plato, Hobbes and Contemporary Feminist Theory
Reconsidered**

by **Joanne Harriet Wright**

a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
York University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Political origin stories are myths constructed to unveil the beginnings of politics and power. They comprise a recurring motif in the history of political thought, and yet they have escaped systematic analysis by political theorists. This dissertation documents and analyzes this motif through its examination of three specific origin stories: Plato's *Timaeus*, Thomas Hobbes's social contract, and early radical feminist stories about the origins of patriarchal social relations. The question at the forefront of this investigation is, why origin stories? In each of the stories examined, the origins imperative is closely linked to the political dynamics of the historical period in question. Theorists are drawn to the motif of origins as a means to abstract themselves from the complexity of politics, and through the origin stories they posit, legitimize or provide the foundation for their preconceived political solution.

It is against the backdrop of Presocratic natural philosophy and of Athenian democratic politics that Plato formulates his cosmogony in which he correlates the natural order of the universe to his preferred, pre-democratic political configuration. This dissertation argues that Plato, in relying on patrogenic reproductive and birth metaphors, exhibits a phallogocentric ontology and politics. Three primary reasons are identified for Hobbes's participation in the origins discourse: to respond to the competing origins discourse prevalent during the English Civil War, to build a rational, scientific foundation for his political theory, and to increase the rhetorical purchase of this theory. Carole Pateman, in *The*

Sexual Contract, draws attention to the inconsistencies of Hobbes's theory with respect to gender relations, but she does not account for the fact that his state of nature has the (unintended) effect of opening spaces for a different conception of gender relations than his contemporaries, even religious women activists, would have entertained. Pateman's project, which is a response to liberal and Left political activists who elide gender in their analyses, is actually a later version of the radical feminist quest for the origins of patriarchy. Radical feminists repopularized the myth of an ancient matriarchy to legitimate the separation of the Women's Liberation Movement from the civil rights and New Left movements.

This dissertation reveals that political origin stories tend to begin where history and evidence leave off, and that they often do more to hinder than to aid the search for political solutions. Moreover, origins represent a theoretical *aporia* in that we are attracted to them, but they remain elusive to us. The persistence of origin stories suggests their ongoing political utility and attests to a fundamental human desire to render beginnings politically meaningful. In deconstructing and analyzing political origin stories, we gain a clearer knowledge of societal self-understandings, and we demystify and denaturalize some of the most provocative sustaining myths of Western society.

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Introduction

Our origins preoccupy us. A fascination and curiosity about origins in general, and an interest in the beginnings of human societies, human life, and indeed the cosmos itself, lies at the heart of religious, scientific and philosophic inquiry. Although these fields of inquiry produce disparate answers to the question, "Where do we come from?" they share an impulse to both investigate and posit origins.

For their part, religious creation stories reveal the existence of a causal force which is responsible for the composition and ordering of all things from the cosmos to human relations. Forming the cornerstone of most religions, creation stories reconcile the relationship between that causal force and human beings. Alternatively, the investigation into origins by science, taking a multitude of different forms, is constrained by the scientific method. In short, scientific theories that are no longer found to be plausible are cast aside in favour of new ones. Scientific inquiry is no less a product of the human impulse to know our origins, nor is it apolitical; nevertheless it does adhere to general rules that test the efficacy of its hypotheses.

The tradition of political thought is not exempt from the preoccupation with origins. Political theory shares with religious and scientific modes of thought the desire to uncover origins—in this case, the origins of political societies, the origins of power. The question of the origins of politics and power is fundamental to political theory and has generated significant historical and contemporary speculation. This speculation can take the

form of origin stories, which serve a variety of purposes and, at the same time, engender a unique set of problems for political theory. It is assumed that these stories of origin formulated within political theory contain indispensable data by which political solutions are either explained or justified. Politics is a subject about which people tend to require more than just immediately relevant information to render a decision. In fact, it is assumed that the history of political thought is relevant to contemporary politics, and moreover that the origin of a given phenomenon comprises essential knowledge about that phenomenon. At this point, several issues require clarification, first among them being the relationship between historical inquiry and the drive to uncover origins.

That a proper understanding of politics requires knowledge of history is axiomatic. We cannot know the present without understanding our past, and in this sense the drive to discover our history, on the one hand, and the origins impulse, on the other, are philosophically linked. "History should be studied because it is an absolutely necessary enlargement of human experience", writes historian Bernard Bailyn, "it is the necessary, unique way of orienting the present moment, so that you know where you are and where you have come from."¹ Without making contentious claims about the objectivity of history, it is nevertheless essential to obtain as accurate historical knowledge as possible to avoid unnecessary and potentially harmful distortions of the past. Indeed, as Bailyn testifies, accumulating knowledge of historical experience works against the competing

¹ Bernard Bailyn, *On the Teaching and Writing of History: Responses to a series of questions*, Edward Connery Lathem, ed. (Hanover, NH: Montgomery Endowment Dartmouth College, 1994), p. 12.

inclination to "fantasize about the past and make up myths to justify some immediate purpose." It is at this juncture, however, that historical study and the investigation into political origins necessarily part company.

Political origin stories are not so benign as all of this. Those who search for origins through the origin story often are led to hypothesize, to engage in conjecture, where there is no evidence, or where history leaves off. To state it simply, the drive to understand political origins is a drive to know what can never really be known. As such, it is an impulse that is itself embedded in politics, driven as it is by political needs as much as metaphysical or philosophic ones. The origin story's point of departure from historical narrative is precisely its willingness to distort history knowingly. Origin stories are outright fantasies about the past, myths that serve more to "justify some immediate purpose" than to illuminate our political beginnings. While the study of history has the potential, as Bailyn suggests, to *enlarge* human experience, and to orient the present moment, origin stories *delimit* the range of political solutions by presenting what is usually a reductionist view of our nature and our origins.

At this point it is crucial to clarify the distinction that is being made between the drive to uncover origins through story or myth, which is the subject of investigation here, and the search for the origins of specific phenomena by other means. The latter participates in the origins impulse but does not necessarily carry with it the same difficulties as origin myths, as will be discussed in Chapter One. Political theory as an enterprise also takes up the question of origins, for example by examining the origins of capitalism or specific events, and it also abstracts from immediate political circumstances to better understand politics. As well, political theorists

engage in creative speculation to formulate ideas about politics and theorize political solutions. This kind of thinking is a necessary theoretical exercise that, at its best, enables that same "enlargement of human experience" to which Bailyn refers. Origin stories are also a form of creative speculation, but it is my contention that they exhibit a range of difficulties that ought to be analyzed.

Why is there this collective tendency to invoke origins in political debate? What is the significance of the reliance on origin stories? This thesis examines three political origin stories with an eye to addressing these overarching questions. The origin stories selected, Plato's *Timaeus*, Hobbes's social contract and Second-Wave radical feminist stories about the origins of patriarchy, are representative of the three broad epochs of political thought: ancient, modern, and contemporary. This choice of thinkers and epochs provides a cross-section of the tradition of political thought and shows both continuity in the focus on origins and the different approaches to formulating origin stories over time. Certainly any number of different political theorists might have been chosen; particularly in the modern period either Locke or Rousseau would make interesting studies, and in the contemporary period, John Rawls invokes an originary position. I have deliberately chosen thinkers whose usage of origins is explicit, provocative, and conforms to a narrative structure. So while Rawls' political theory hinges on a thought experiment which invokes origins, it does not contain a narrative about the original state of human beings before political society was created.

Indeed, for the purposes of this thesis, an origin story is defined as a narrative constructed with the intent to unveil the beginnings of political

society. While the theme of origins is ubiquitous in political thought, not all thinkers who employ this theme actually tell an origin story *per se*. Both Aristotle and Machiavelli, for instance, refer to the foundations of political society, yet they invoke the theme of origins without constructing an origin story in its entirety. Stories of origins are nevertheless a recurring motif in political thought. As such, they have received little attention or examination, except in the context of discussing individual thinkers. In fact, there are few subjects as pivotal, as fundamental, in political thought that have, for all intents and purposes, escaped detailed analysis. Origin stories in the tradition of political thought require specific analysis for this precise reason. The intent of this thesis, then, is both to identify origin stories as a political motif and to address the gap in theorizing about them.

The thesis begins with an investigation into the politics of origins. Taking a broad view of political origin stories, Chapter One opens the discussion of the overarching questions as to why political origin stories should be examined further, why political theorists use origin stories, and the political significance of origin stories. In this chapter, the historical approach used to treat these individual origin stories is expounded and justified. I suggest that origin stories are both windows into a specific historical epoch as well as a means by which thinkers interpret their immediate political and social contexts and experience. The close relationship between the origin story and the political context in which it is written necessitates a historical approach to studying these stories. It is only by placing the narratives in that context—to the extent that this is possible—that their meaning can be discovered and unpacked. In addition

to having historical significance, origin stories function as justificatory narratives wherein the place of each citizen in the polity is accounted for. They are scripts of citizenship and are thus overtly political and contentious. Finally, the introductory chapter addresses the charge that one of the functions of masculine origin stories—although not feminist ones—is to compensate for male reproductive alienation. According to this view, the desire to be procreative, to be powerful enough to create something in our own image—thwarted in men by their inferior role in reproduction—is realized fully in the origin story. As one of the few metatheoretical analyses of origin narratives and by far the most provocative, this approach, articulated most clearly by Mary O'Brien, must be evaluated. This is a mode of analysis that surfaces repeatedly in feminist treatments of political theory, and so it is important to explicate its objectives as well as its shortcomings at the outset.

In addition to examining the broad theme of origins in the tradition of political thought, this thesis attempts to make inroads into the interpretation of each origin story selected. Chapter Two centers on Plato's cosmogonical origin story in the *Timaeus*. It makes sense to begin a thesis on origins with the foundational thinker in political thought. Although building on the Presocratics, Plato's theory differs from earlier thinking in two important ways. First, he makes unquestionable advances in philosophic thinking by effectively transcending the one-dimensional aspect of Presocratic thought, combining their approaches in his theory of being. Second, and most important for our purposes, his is the first *political* origin story in the western tradition. This is to say that he not

only investigates origins, as had the poets and Presocratics before him, he posits origins in a way that is politically useful for him.

Certainly the dialogue *Timaeus* has not escaped analysis in political theory, and so it is important here to distinguish this analysis from the others that do exist. This is a dialogue which has some of the most imaginative passages on birth, reproduction, and gender relations extant in political theory. Moreover, it exposes the close relationship between the subject of origins and that of birth and reproduction. In the traditional commentaries, however, these dimensions of the *Timaeus* with which I am most interested are either ignored or treated insufficiently. Significantly, feminist literature on Plato does not address this gap, as it is traditionally confined to dialogues such as *The Republic*, *The Symposium*, and so forth. The most extensive feminist treatment is Nancy Tuana's *The Less Noble Sex*, which analyzes a series of creation myths in brief. Tuana does not, however, address the aspect of the dialogue that is of most concern here, the role of the maternal receptacle.² Again, Mary O'Brien is the source of the most insightful treatment of Plato in general, and yet her analysis has philosophic and political deficiencies. The purpose of Chapter Two, then, is to discuss the political and gendered implications of *Timaeus* as well to offer an alternative approach to its passages on reproduction.

² Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993). In a 1975 article, Anne Geddes provides an insightful if brief analysis of Plato's usage of patriarchal theories in embryology. See "The Philosophic Notion of Women in Antiquity," *Antichthon: Journal of the Australian Society for Classical Studies*, Vol. 9, 1975. Even more brief is Susan Moller Okin's mention of *Timaeus*, and it too is restricted to the secondary birth of women on the earth; see *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 26.

Hobbes's origin story of the state of nature and the social contract marks a contrast with Plato, a point of transition between earlier ideas supporting hierarchical societal formations and the modern emphasis on equality and freedom. He is insightful on the deleterious consequences of origins thinking as he criticizes its prescriptive uses. His criticisms notwithstanding, Hobbes produces his own complex origin story from which he reads political conclusions. Why exactly he is simultaneously critical of, but drawn into, the origins discourse is the subject of Chapter Three. The choice of Hobbes over other social contract theorists is in some ways arbitrary, but it stems from an interest in his historical context, as well as from the recognition that subsequent contractarians, and even contemporary political thinkers, all must respond to the enigmatic and peculiar story that he put forth.

Hobbes is most peculiar when it comes to the treatment of gender relations in his story of the state of nature. His is a uniquely egalitarian argument on gender which has been systematically misrepresented by both Hobbesian scholars and feminists alike. My analysis of Hobbes in Chapter Four does not aim to position him as a feminist—quite the opposite. Rather, it is meant to reconsider Hobbes's theory in light of seventeenth-century gender relations and writings on gender; it reveals a different side of Hobbes that is only apparent when he is treated historically. Feminists have shown a reluctance to approach political thinkers historically, an unfortunate fact that constrains the enterprise of feminist interpretation. This chapter simultaneously draws upon and critiques the dominant feminist interpretation of Hobbes generated by Carole Pateman. While Pateman's argument that a prior sexual contract undergirds the social

contract is useful for considering social contract theory in the abstract, when it is applied to Hobbes's theory specifically it does not hold water for historical and textual reasons.

Indeed, in raising critiques of Pateman's treatment of Hobbes it becomes evident that the narrative of the sexual contract is but one more in the long tradition of political origin stories. Feminists, too, participate in this tradition. Chapter Five evaluates *The Sexual Contract* in detail, focusing particular attention on her analysis of Hobbes. In the end, the sexual contract that Pateman theorizes is found to bear little relationship to Hobbes's political theory. Like all origins theorists, Pateman has her own reasons for telling an origin story. She uses the dramatic story about the beginnings of modern liberal patriarchy to underscore the persistence and severity of women's oppression in the twentieth century. Influenced by radical feminism, and by Mary O'Brien in particular, Pateman constructs her story on assumptions about women's reproductive power and its appropriation by men in the masculine origin story.

The discussion of Pateman's own origin narrative opens the door to the consideration of origin stories as a motif in feminist as well as traditional political thought. *The Sexual Contract* is a late version—although perhaps more coherent and theoretically developed than most—of the standard feminist origin story about the beginnings of patriarchy. At a certain historical juncture many feminists turned to this type of narrative to justify the creation of an autonomous Women's Liberation Movement. Chapter Six identifies this trend, which is most evident in radical feminist writing from the late 1960s through to the mid-1970s, and links it to the emergence of the radical feminist movement itself. The creators of

feminist origin stories, from Gloria Steinem to Elizabeth Gould Davis and Robin Morgan, rely on a set of myths about a matriarchal past. At the same time as they adopt these matriarchal myths as fact, they also demonstrate a self-conscious awareness that their stories are not necessarily true but are nonetheless politically useful. In this chapter, the dichotomous aspect of feminist origin stories, as both true and fictional depictions of the past, is considered.

Indeed, for feminists as for all origins theorists, origins represent an *aporia*. While the exploration of origins is in some senses a necessary and fundamental part of any political inquiry, especially where the subject of discussion is the oppression or subordination of one group to another, it often proceeds at the expense of legitimate historical investigation. In other words, radical feminists are engaged in a quest that likely has no answer and no certain end. If the futility of this quest could be acknowledged, political energies might be, and indeed ought to be, redirected to more fruitful explorations. As a final point on feminist origin stories, it must be stated that, although radical feminism has become an easy target in post-radical feminist writing, the intent of this chapter is not to add fuel to that fire. Radical feminists are shown in this analysis to be engaged in a political struggle, the outcome of which was the recognition of feminism as a legitimate political movement and "patriarchy" as an autonomous system of power, distinct from capitalism. Contemporary feminist theory is entirely preoccupied with the important project of transcending the essentialism and theoretical reductionism of radical feminism, failing to recognize that it is only able to carry out its project on the foundation laid by the radical feminist movement.

Throughout this thesis, the question of "why origin stories?" is kept at the forefront of discussion. After all, it remains unclear as to why political solutions hinge on political origins, for rather than opening us up to innovative political solutions, political origin stories construct an imaginary political scenario which restricts our thinking to its narrow parameters. If political theorists wish to do more than "fantasize about the past and make up myths to justify some immediate purpose," if they wish to "enlarge human experience," they must demystify rather than perpetuate fabricated stories about the beginnings of political society. Feminist method, for example, needs to move from quasi-historical speculation toward a historical understanding of the operation of gender hierarchies in specific contexts, on the one hand, and toward an analysis of feminist political goals on the other. In short, the essentially fanciful exercise of justifying political proposals with the aid of origin stories must give way to legitimate discussion of the political problems facing us.

I The Origins Imperative in Politics

The desire to understand origins is as close to a universal phenomenon as might be imagined. There is, as Edward Said argues, "an aboriginal human need to point to or locate a beginning."¹ Yet it is also true that there is more at stake in locating beginnings than satiating an ontological need. In politics, the desire to *know* origins comprises only part of the fascination with the subject; this desire to *know* is, in fact, overshadowed by the desire to *make political use* of origins. Certainly, the impetus to "uncover" the origins of politics and power is never dissociated from the politics of the present. In point of fact, if origin stories did not serve multiple political purposes, if they were not of value to their authors, it is unlikely that they would be as prevalent as they are in the history of political thought.

The focus in this introductory chapter will be on the intended, as well as the unintended implications of these stories of beginnings, on the direction they are meant to give the political theory of which they form an integral part. This chapter establishes a definition of origin stories, comparing them to both religious creation stories and to foundation myths of nations. As well, it will be necessary here to examine the relationship between origin stories and the historical context in which they have been written. To examine this relationship is to raise specific methodological questions as to the appropriate means to interpreting origin stories and political theory more generally. I suggest here the importance of a historically-sensitive, critical method for interpreting political theory.

¹ Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 5.

One of the most important functions of origin stories is to organize and order relations between citizens in political society. Origin stories are, in this sense, scripts of citizenship.

Finally, this chapter must also account for the reproductive and, ultimately, the ontological significance of political origin stories. It is Mary O'Brien's contention that origin stories fulfill an aboriginal human need for men in particular, a need that women do not have. Presupposing a profound difference in the meaning of reproduction for men and women as well as a sexually-differentiated ontology, O'Brien suggests that political origin stories serve a compensatory function for men who, as a result of their alienated experience of reproduction, appropriate the language of birth and reproduction from women for the political realm. Do men create origin stories—and do they found nations and cities—to compensate for their reproductive lack? What, then, would account for the existence of feminist origin stories? It is to these issues that this introductory overview of origin stories attends.

I Defining the origin story: history, myth or fabrication?

Origin stories of varying types and structures are ubiquitous in the history of political thought. Their ubiquity establishes a need to define clearly what, for the purposes of this study, will be considered an origin story and what will not. In fact, the three stories selected here vary enormously, but their lowest common denominator is their similar narrative structure. Passing references to origins or theories about origins which are not embedded in a narrative are evidence of the preoccupation with origins but will not be taken as origin stories *per se*. This section articulates

further the definition of the political origin story and arrives at a preliminary sense of its significance.

To begin, the fact that these narratives are designated here as stories should reveal something about their nature. They are stories first and foremost and they should be analyzed as such. They neither reveal the past nor an ontological "truth" as they claim to. The Introduction presented an initial definition of the origin story as a narrative constructed with the intent to unveil the beginnings of political society. To expand this definition, it will be useful to consider the origin story's connections to religious creation myths and to myth more generally.

There is some rationale for grouping origin stories with creation myths, for many origin stories resemble the form, if obviously not the content, of the Judeo-Christian myth of Genesis. Of course myth is a catch-all term which has multiple meanings, but its most common denotation is a falsehood, "a religion" or simply an idea "that we no longer believe."² That myths are "not true" does not negate their importance, however. In fact, religious creation myths are theorized as being of greater significance than any other kind of religious myth, as there is an implied message within them that "what is said will concern the basic patterns of existence, something more than is contained in other myths."³ In this way, creation myths are central to their respective religions; they address the fundamental questions of life. Indeed, they are "concerned with the

² M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed. (Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988), p. 111.

³ Marie-Louise von Franz, *Creation Myths*, rev. ed. (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1995), p. 1.

ultimate meaning, not only of our existence, but of the existence of the whole cosmos."⁴

Moreover, according to the "projectionist" view of myth, derived from Jungian psychology, myths of this kind serve an important function in helping societies organize their ideas about themselves and about the universe. As one scholar describes it, a myth is "a narrative projection of a given cultural group's sense of its sacred past"; it is a "complex but revealing symbolism" that results from a society projecting its interests, beliefs and fears onto a cultural narrative.⁵ The creation myth, viewed through this lens, is a culture's means of making sense of itself; cultures create these myths precisely because it makes sense to them, or because they "feel better if [they] think in this manner."⁶ To delineate beginnings is to set the course for what is to follow and to carve out an identity for those who see their experience reflected in myth.

The story of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible functions in precisely this way. Unlike its counterparts in politics, Genesis has been thoroughly examined by religious and philosophic scholars for what it can tell its believers about their relationship to a creator, their relationship to their natural environment, and their inter-personal relationships. In a recent commentary, Karen Armstrong suggests that the ancient text should be read, not as a literal account of creation as some would have it, but as "a meditation upon the nature of being itself."⁷ It is, in her view, an

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ David Adams Leeming with Margaret Adams Leeming, *Encyclopedia of Creation Myths* (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 1994), p. vii.

⁶ von Franz, *Creation Myths*, p. 11.

⁷ Karen Armstrong, *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis* (Toronto: Ballantine, 1996), p. 18.

imaginative narrative that requires its readers to acknowledge the complexity of human existence; it offers no simple truths, no obvious answers, but is instead a contradictory narrative that reflects human isolation and estrangement. Furthermore, like all cosmogonies, Genesis is about the creation of order from chaos and disorder, attesting to the power of the creator and to the existence of a cosmic purpose.

In a similar way, the Jungian understanding of myth can offer something valuable to the study of political origin stories even if we do not adopt it wholesale. In one sense, all cultural production, from myth to fiction to political theory and so forth, can reveal something about the culture that produces it. We might think about origin stories and creation myths as a (contentious and political) way that Western society organizes and represents its experience—both real and imagined. In creating origin stories, political thinkers "make sense" of their history, their defining questions, and their very purpose. That these stories are fictional, and are often recognized as such, has little bearing on the cultural currency they achieve, as they become cultural symbols—and conceptual prisms—through which a society interprets the world.

This interpretation is particularly useful for discussing the depiction of gender relations in creation stories. Political and religious creation stories alike are expressions of the societal tension and ambivalence about gender. Genesis is viewed as an expression of how gender relations ought to be negotiated, even thousands of years after it was written.⁸ The ambivalence about gender emerges in the character of Eve, who is created second and

⁸ Indeed, no other myth has the formative influence in Western society that Genesis does.

punished by God for her "sin." The more interesting, but lesser known character in the story is Adam's first companion, Lilith. According to the original Jewish scripture, Lilith refused to submit to Adam, and was punished by God and banished to the Red Sea. Contemporary feminists have revived Lilith in an effort to reveal the deficiencies in Eve's character, and to valorize a sexually-dominant woman in Judeo-Christian mythology.⁹ In their view, the creation of Eve as a sexually-submissive partner to Adam reveals the patriarchal subtext of the Judeo-Christian tradition. While their interpretation is undoubtedly sound, it is essential to remember that the same tradition that reveres Eve is also responsible for Lilith's creation. Deborah Sawyer suggests that the record of Lilith "can be interpreted to mean that the notion of equality was an issue within ancient Judaism."¹⁰ The point here is simply that, no matter how hierarchical and patriarchal the system, equality is always at issue and all origin stories must grapple with the justification of its presence or absence. It would seem, then, that the banishment of Lilith to the Red Sea and her early extrusion from scripture indicates that, for the multiple writers of the Genesis origin myth—just as for their present-day readers—gender relations were unsettled and unresolved.

The gender dynamics of Genesis should serve as a reminder that the myth is no less political for being religious. It is a text, above all, and as

⁹ See Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983); Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith," in C.P. Christ and J. Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979); Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "The Lilith Question," *Lilith*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 1976. Most recently, Lilith has become a pop-culture icon as a result of the women's music tour named in her honour.

¹⁰ Deborah F. Sawyer, "Wisdom, Lilith and Mothers," Chapter 8 in *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 139.

such it has a specific origin, author, and emerges out of a political context.¹¹ Genesis, although a consolidation of writings from two different historical periods, was written to address a whole set of social and political relationships and as a religious creation story it calls upon the authority of a creator to sanction a particular configuration of these relationships.¹²

The origin stories being investigated here are obviously deeply political. As myths of political origin they not only reflect, in the Jungian sense, fundamental human concerns such as the fear of political disorder, or the proper ordering of political relationships, they normalize and naturalize conventional political relationships. In this way, they serve an immediate political purpose.

Myth in general accomplishes precisely this: it authorizes as God-given, or natural, arrangements that are entirely conventional. Myth is, in the language of Roland Barthes, "depoliticized speech." The "de-" must be understood here to connote an active process, according to Barthes, whereby myth actively "abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics," and thus it depoliticizes. It lends the legitimacy of nature to a given set of values but is interpreted by its reader (or listener) as factual.¹³ "Myth does not deny

¹¹ To analyze Genesis, however, is a challenge as it was not written as a cohesive text and therefore represents the concerns of more than one author and more than one historical period. There are also two different accounts of the origins of the earth offered in Genesis. For our purposes, interpretation will be one-dimensional, focused not on its historical origins but its contemporary significance.

¹² Bertrand Russell clarifies that, while theology did not "create cruel impulses", it did provide them "the sanction of what professes to be a lofty ethic, and [confers] an apparently sacred character upon practices which have come down from more ignorant and barbarous ages." See *Religion and Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 106.

¹³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Toronto: Paladin, 1973), p. 131.

things", Barthes carefully explains, "on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification."¹⁴ In the end, Barthes' definition of myth proves more useful to the analysis of political origin stories simply because it underscores the political dynamics of myth; it broadens our understanding of what constitutes myth to something more than an idea or "a religion in which we no longer believe."

Indeed, if we no longer believed the ideas contained in myth, this investigation would have little contemporary relevance. The endurance of mythical understandings is what makes their study of more than antiquarian interest. Our purpose here is to examine the process by which political thinkers use origin stories normatively, to justify, not just the past, but the present and future. For the present study, then, we must bring the competing definitions of myth together. Myth is a cultural symbol which reflects the preoccupations, interests and self-understandings of that culture. More than this, however, it portrays these preoccupations authoritatively and normatively; it constructs a scenario of origins which in turn confers a naturalness and permanence on contingent political arrangements. Myth, in Ronald Wright's words, "is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that resonate with a culture's deepest values and aspirations." Myth presents truths so "seemingly axiomatic, that they go unchallenged."¹⁵ The definition of an origin story can thus be expanded to the following: a myth

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁵ Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The "New World" Through Indian Eyes* (Toronto: Penguin, 1992), p. 5.

constructed with the intent to unveil the beginnings of political society that has the effect of rendering conventional political relations immutable and beyond question. In evaluating the theorists chosen for the present study, we see that Hobbes *and* the contemporary feminists theorists acknowledge fully that relationships are conventional rather than natural. Yet the feminist theorists examined here come dangerously close to naturalizing an imagined, matriarchal set of relations, whereas Hobbes's intent is not to naturalize human relations in the state of nature but to legitimize his own political solution through the use of origins. Origin stories are fictional, they are fabrications, but their influence remains too great to dismiss them out of hand. By deconstructing political origin stories, we gain a clearer knowledge of Western self-understandings, and we demystify and denaturalize some of the most persistent sustaining myths of Western society.

II Reading origin stories historically

Deconstructing or demystifying origin stories in political thought entails more than simply asserting their un-truth. It requires that the political motivations underlying their construction be revealed, which in turn shows the stories to be contingent on a set of historical and political circumstances as opposed to being natural and immutable. Their content is inevitably influenced by the environment of their author. Origin stories offer political thinkers a means by which they can organize and interpret their immediate political experience. At the same time, they bear an intimate—but not a straightforward—relationship to the historical context from which they emerge. They provide, then, a window into that historical

epoch, revealing to present-day observers aspects about the period in which they were composed. Given the relationship between origin stories and their specific historical and political context, I argue that a historical approach is required to understand them. Some methodological considerations follow from this assertion that must be taken into account to avoid confusion about the purpose of this thesis.

Reading a text historically can mean many different things, and in this context it refers to something relatively uncontentious. It is evident that interpreters approach texts for very different reasons and with diverse goals. The results of interpretation will depend on the motive and aims directing that interpretation, on the kinds of questions asked of the text. To suggest that there could be one eternally correct interpretation, or one correct method of formulating an interpretation of a political text would be inconceivable. Nevertheless, whatever the goals of the interpreter, as a general rule it is reasonable to suggest that interpretations formulated in complete absence of contextual inquiry will tend to produce one-dimensional, and in some cases outrightly flawed, interpretations. In this case, to examine an origin story as a product of specific historical and political circumstances affords a multi-dimensional view of its significance; the origin story will have greater meaning to its present-day readers if they are able to understand what the author was trying to accomplish, or at the very least, what issues the author was grappling with, when she or he wrote it. To be clear, the method chosen for this interpretation is by no means the only acceptable one; I suggest, however, that this historically-sensitive method will be fruitful for the study of origin stories.

Quentin Skinner is the most notable authority for developing and utilizing an intention-oriented historical method—often referred to as the "Cambridge approach"—to reading political theory. In his study of Hobbes, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Skinner asserts the necessity of reading Hobbes against the backdrop of the wider discourse from which his ideas emerge, of uncovering "what traditions he reacts against, what lines of argument he takes up, what changes he introduces into existing debates." Skinner's stated aim is "to return to Hobbes's texts armed with the kind of historical information" that he "regard[s] as indispensable for making sense of them."¹⁶ The basic premise underlying this method is that we will be better equipped to understand Hobbes's manipulation of gender relations, to take an example relevant to the present study, if we know how his contemporaries understood gender relations. Awareness of the actual configuration of gender relations as well as the popular intellectual justifications for that configuration illuminates both what Hobbes meant in his own usage and his similarity or difference from his peers. Similarly for Plato and for the feminist origins theorists—while full knowledge of these authors' intentions is beyond our reach—an understanding of what they were reacting against, or what their defining political questions were, aids us in our interpretation of their origin stories. In each of these cases, historical research and inquiry produces a more accurate interpretation than would be possible without it.

My desire to read these texts in light of their author's political and historical context does not mean, however, that I share Skinner's

¹⁶ Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 8.

contention that there are no perennial questions in the history of political thought. Skinner has gone so far as to argue that any statement made in political theory is "inescapably the embodiment of a particular intention" and is "thus specific to its situation in a way that it can only be naive to try to transcend."¹⁷ Put in other terms, "classic texts cannot be concerned with our questions and answers...only with their own."¹⁸ Avoidance of anachronism is undoubtedly essential, but Skinner's argument, it seems, takes the point unnecessarily far. The notion that there are "only individual answers to individual questions" and no overarching political questions restricts the benefit that can be derived from historical study. This interpretive approach constrains the inquiry, and reduces historical study of political texts to a matter of only historical—and not contemporary—interest.

The most obvious criticism that can be levelled at the Cambridge—Skinnerian approach is that it can, and often does, mean that critical ideas such as gender are excluded from consideration on the basis that they could not have been relevant to the author in question. The exclusion of gender analysis is evident in the works of several historical-contextualist authors—although there are notable exceptions¹⁹—and in the recent series offered

¹⁷ Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas," in James Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Notable exceptions include Gordon Schochet, whose works in historical political thought include consideration of gender dynamics, and James Tully, whose historical analysis includes power dynamics of all kinds, most particularly the dynamics between Aboriginal nations and European immigrants to North America. See, for example, Gordon Schochet, "The significant sounds of silence: the absence of women from the political thought of Sir Robert Filmer and John Locke (or, "Why can't a woman be more like a man?"), in Hilda L. Smith, ed., *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Gordon J.

by Cambridge which includes, among others, *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* and *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*.²⁰ Despite volumes of work being done by scholars on these two seventeenth-century English thinkers, work oriented toward interpretation of the public/private division, the family, and the masculine meaning of politics, none of this work on gender is included, or even cited, in these volumes. The work of Carole Pateman is an obvious omission given her focus on seventeenth-century thought.²¹ The assumption seems to be that, since gender was not of primary concern to Hobbes or Locke, to discuss their interpretations of gender is to read our political concerns and problematics into the past.

Yet, there is no reason to assume that because gender was not of *primary* concern to Hobbes, or to Plato, that gender divisions and dynamics did not occupy part of the backdrop against which they wrote. Gender is as relevant historically as a factor as it is in the present day: no society in which hierarchical gender relations prevail can possibly escape those tensions. That gender was less contested in ancient Greece or seventeenth-century England than in 1960s North America does not legitimate its exclusion from political analysis. Indeed, the Skinnerian constraint to account only for what could have been of relevance to Hobbes can be used

Schochet, "Thomas Hobbes on the Family and the State of Nature," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. LXXXII, No. 3, Sept 1967; and James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an age of diversity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁰ Vere Chappell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²¹ The defence of her exclusion from mainstream, historical political theory might be that she does not make history her primary focus. She does not try to place Hobbes and Locke in their historical context. However, she makes claims that are substantive and indeed radical enough that they ought to be considered, even if to be proven incorrect.

to show the *need to include gender* as a factor to be considered. The very fact that both Plato and Hobbes use and manipulate gender within their political theory is evidence enough that the subject merits further investigation. Moreover, this investigation will be enhanced if we can, at the same time, draw upon the historical context of gender relations and the intellectual history of gender in their respective periods to glean the significance of their particular usages.

This justification for studying gender in the history of political thought leads to a final methodological point about feminist interpretation. Recognizing the importance of historical perspective in interpretation of political texts has relevance for feminist political theory as well. The dominant approach in feminist political theory is to concentrate attention on the significance and implications of political arguments in historical texts, or to confine the scope of inquiry to the texts themselves, rather than positioning these political texts in context.²² Again, the point is not to suggest that all feminist inquiry should be historical, only that the lack of attention to the historical dimensions of a text *can* produce less-than-adequate results. Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* is the most obvious example since her origin story is considered in this thesis, although her results are not in any way "more skewed" than other feminists who have treated Hobbes. Although her motivating question is "what are the implications of social contract theory for women and feminism?"—i.e., not a historical question—her conclusions are marred to some extent by her

²² Examples include: Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); and the articles in Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman, eds., *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991).

undifferentiated treatment of the social contract thinkers. In the end, she assumes Hobbes to be arguing points that, in all likelihood, he was not, and she misses the significance of Hobbes's argument regarding gender. Part of the purpose of this thesis is to point to the necessity of increasing the historical perspective in feminist political theory. The method used in this analysis combines the critical perspective of feminism with the historical sensitivity of contextualist interpretation. These two approaches are not immiscible; they are, in point of fact, highly compatible.

An increased historical sensitivity is useful, not only for the interpretation of texts in the history of political thought, but for analyzing the history of the women's movement in North America. It has become commonplace to dismiss the claims of radical feminism, to point to its essentializing tendencies, and its creation of a "victim" culture for feminists and women.²³ Moreover, radical feminism is reproached for being responsive only to the experiences and needs of white, middle-class women. Yet, an examination of the early phase of the Second Wave reveals a picture far more complex than this. The strong political claims made about women's oppression, its severity and longevity in history, had an immediate political purpose in the early movement: to achieve recognition of feminism as an independent and legitimate political movement. The telling of origin stories formed part of this effort. The intent was neither

²³ See, for example, Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). See also the popular "feminist" books such as, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *"Feminism is not the story of my life": How today's feminist elite has lost touch with the real concerns of women* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1996); Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism? How women have betrayed women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); and Katie Roiphe, *The Morning After: sex, fear, and feminism on campus* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1993).

to essentialize nor to paint women as helpless victims but to unify women in a political struggle against a system of oppression that had heretofore only received scant recognition as a problem. The drive to create a movement for women emerged from women's experiences in other movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left—movements that had not addressed women's specific concerns. This is not to suggest that the Women's Liberation Movement did not evolve into a class and race-specific movement but that, at its inception, exclusion was not the issue that it became later. The lack of clear perspective on early feminist politics signifies a lack of attention to the historical development, and to the political complexity, of the rise of the Second Wave of feminism.

In the final analysis, a measure of historical sensitivity will aid the interpretation of the origin stories under consideration here. Each of these stories served as a focal point for their authors to address specific political tensions; they offer a means by which we can interpret the *dominant* as well as the *latent* concerns of these thinkers.

III Origin stories as scripts of citizenship

As political myths, origin stories are discourses on the subject of citizenship, broadly conceived. Every society and culture has its own foundation myths, its stories about the beginnings of the nation or city-state. Origin stories in political theory function similarly, although they are not usually meant to account for the origins of a specific nation or city-state but rather to address the generation of politics and power in general. Nonetheless, like foundation myths of cities and nations, origin stories

provide a context for citizenship, a narrative by which citizens are to understand, and consent to, their place in society.

Foundation myths are the primary organizing myths of nations: they establish a common history, a common origin, and a national identity. Their significance stems from the idea that "[t]he sense of 'whence we came' is central to the definition of 'who we are'."²⁴ Foundation myths often assert the glory and prominence of the nation and justify its rightful place internationally. They mythologize or construct an imaginary beginning to the nation, or take the historical givens of the nation's origins and legitimate them from a particular political perspective. All of the nations that comprise North and South America take the arrival of Christopher Columbus to signify the "discovery" of the continents. The effect of this is to re-write and mythologize history in favour of European immigrants at the expense of First Nations peoples who inhabited these continents. This process also has an effect on the construction of citizenship in the North American example for to suggest that this continent was "discovered" is to imply that no one (significant) was here upon the arrival of Columbus. If no one (significant) was here, then only those who arrive—or at least only the men who arrive—assume a rung on the citizenship ladder. Foundation myths account for who belongs and who does not, who is a proper citizen and who is rightfully excluded from full citizenship.²⁵

²⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), p. 22.

²⁵ In the Canadian example, that revision of history is incorporated into the foundation myth of Canada's formation, such that to refer to two founding nations, English and French, is the norm. It is not part of Canadian foundational mythology to

This negative example of North and South America draws attention to some of the problems with foundation myths. Myths that describe and foster a sense of national identity must inevitably come up against the charge that they are based on, not historical truth, but historical revisionism if not outright fabrication. As Eric Hobsbawm aptly states, "nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so." And furthermore, he argues, "getting history wrong is part of being a nation."²⁶ Nevertheless, a sense of national identity is derived from stories about the founding of nations. These stories enable citizens to know, not only where they fit in the hierarchy of citizenship, but where they fit in the world. The founding story provides a "social bond between individuals and classes by providing repertoires of shared values, symbols and traditions."²⁷ A sense of common ancestry, and a common national purpose or goal emerge from the founding story.

Origin stories in political theory function slightly differently from, yet perform many of the same functions as foundation stories. Origin stories are not nationalist myths in that they are often not territorially specific. Moreover, the origin narratives of Plato and Hobbes were written in pre-nationalist epochs. There was, in the period that Plato wrote, no Greek nation *per se*, only competitive, individual city-states, each with a strong sense of city-loyalty and patriotism. Although not a true nationalist foundation story, the *Timaeus* is nonetheless a patriotic myth written with

address First Nations' experiences of Confederation, and indeed to do so would be to fundamentally disrupt the Canadian self-image.

²⁶ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 12.

²⁷ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 16.

the intent of glorifying the birth and natural order of Athens. Plato's autochthonous myth of the metals, too, is an explicit attempt to manufacture a communal feeling and citizen-attachment to the *polis* in the face of potential class conflict.

Plato's myths serve the important function of legitimizing his political order and the hierarchy within it. By creating an autochthonous narrative to explain and justify the existence of classes in the *polis* he addresses the problem of citizen-unrest and discontent. If citizens of the *polis* understand themselves as having common ancestry, and as part of a functioning whole that has an ultimate purpose, they are thought to be less inclined to object to their specific place and role in the city. Similarly, the *Timaeus* is a script for citizens that justifies the ordering of the whole through the use of a natural cosmogony. Plato's narratives carve out the identities of members of the *polis*, as citizens ought to think of themselves as "true" Athenians in a rejuvenated, revitalized and post-democratic Athens and against the backdrop of barbarians and non-citizens alike.

Hobbes also wrote in an era prior to the development of nationalist sentiment and the modern nation. His origin story does not dwell, as Plato's does, on the glorification of the political entity of which he is a part. Rather, Hobbes's conclusions have a broader applicability: they could refer to, and be useful for, understanding any nation in a state of internal strife or civil war. Hobbes is less determined to show the glory of the English nation than to achieve the basis for English stability and order. Nevertheless, from his origin story, the state of nature and the social contract, the script of citizenship can be recovered. Hobbes infers an equality of subjection to absolute authority, on one hand, as the sovereign

assumed his place of authority over citizens who have mutually contracted to establish his power. The identity of citizens, in this script, is exemplified in their being named *subjects*; these subjects are not empowered or free in any liberal sense, but are instead radically constrained by the agreement they have just entered. On the other hand, within this political configuration the patriarchal family assumes its traditional place, so that there is no sense in which women are to view themselves as equal subjects, or as fellow-contractors in the new social pact. Women and servants, embedded in the patriarchal family unit, are equally obliged but doubly-subjected.

Feminist origin stories, having been written in the era of nationalism, are also influenced by nationalist drives but are not nationalist in a spatially- or temporally-specific way. The feminists who revert to the beginning of patriarchy, and the original, pre-historical matriarchal society to legitimate their politics do not explicitly acknowledge the desire for a feminist state or a matriarchal nation. Nevertheless, these feminists (with the possible exclusion of Pateman who, as we will see, moves beyond some of the more obviously naive aspects of the feminist origins tradition) imply that the (re)creation of matriarchy would solve many of the problems of dominance associated with patriarchy. They adopt many of the traits of true nationalists in that they revise history to suit their political imperatives and they advocate a separation from the excluded (men) in some extreme cases. They, too, use an origin narrative to muster consent to their political goals, to generate unity and conformity to the goals of the Women's Liberation Movement, all the while glossing over reality and inviting "belief in what is patently not so." Like the other varieties of

origin story, the feminist stories also offer their subscribers a ready-made identity.

In providing the context for citizenship, do foundation stories and origin stories perform a necessary political function? The negative implications of these myths have already been articulated, particularly in terms of their manipulation of history and their naturalization of conventional political relations. Up to this point, origin stories have been critiqued as justificatory scripts of citizenship. But does this critique overlook the value of these stories in generating a common language, a basis for shared understanding about citizenship and politics? Is it possible that some form of shared narrative is a prerequisite to citizenship precisely because it establishes a foundation?

Martha Nussbaum, in writing on the twentieth-century imperatives of multicultural citizenship, highlights the importance of literature, visual art, film and dance to citizenship. Literature, in particular, develops "a citizen's imagination"; it has an "ability to represent the specific circumstances and problems of people of many different sorts."²⁸ The arts, Nussbaum argues, play a crucial role in "cultivating the powers of imagination that are essential to citizenship."²⁹ In this view, the citizen needs more than a knowledge of history and social fact; he or she requires a deeper understanding of the nation, of other citizens and their unique experiences, than can be gathered from history. Here the role of fictitious narrative performs an essential function: it enlarges citizen awareness and

²⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 86.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

empathy at the same time as it establishes the framework within which citizen debate and dialogue can take place.

Following Nussbaum's argument, it is reasonable to conclude that we cannot escape the narrative contribution to citizenship and politics. Certainly the ability to understand our present situation in an abstracted and reflective way is aided by the arts. Indeed, the tendency to see such modes of articulation as extraneous to political understanding ought to be corrected. But this correction should not lead us to an uncritical acceptance of the origin story as one more aspect of our narrative imagination, necessary and benign in its contribution to our self-understandings. Origin narratives bring with them, not the positive connotations of mutual citizen understanding in a world of diversity. Rather, they bring with them the baggage of hierarchy and naturalized power relations, baggage that unquestionably compromises their utility for achieving deeper political understanding. They unquestionably tell us something about ourselves as citizens, but the utility of that knowledge is questionable. We might query whether the required precepts to citizen dialogue must necessarily be of a mythical nature. Could not the premises of the society, the shared understanding, be drawn from historical reality rather than from outright fabrication? Here it is essential to draw a distinction between artistic cultural production and the fabricated origin narrative.

Perhaps fictitious narrative in the form of the origin story cannot be completely eradicated. However, the goal of achieving deeper awareness and enlarged mutual understandings, of finding political solutions to ongoing and historically-based problems, is inevitably aided by exposing

the flaws embedded in the origins discourse rather than leaving them unquestioned.

IV Origin stories as compensatory masculine narratives

In the previous section, origin stories were discussed as scripts of citizenship, structuring the hierarchy of relations between citizens themselves, between citizens and non-citizens, and between men and women. Feminists are rightly interested in origin narratives insofar as they attempt to legitimate a patriarchal configuration of gender relations. The extent to which the stories selected here (feminist stories excepted) perform this function is one of the subjects under investigation in this thesis. But feminists, most notably Mary O'Brien, have also turned their attention to origin stories for another, tangentially-related reason. In O'Brien's view, origin stories serve a crucial function for the men who narrate them: they compensate for men's reproductive envy of women by appropriating the language and power of reproduction for the sphere of politics. As a provocative explanation for the prevalence of origin stories in the history of political thought, this argument merits further attention.

O'Brien articulates with theoretical clarity and rigour the view that the roots of patriarchal social relations lie within the "*total process of human reproduction*".³⁰ Feminism, then, ought to begin its struggle, and feminist theory its theorizing, at the process of human reproduction. Indeed, it is O'Brien's stated intent to formulate a theory of birth, a neglected and essential human process for philosophy to come to terms with. Having

³⁰ Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 8. Italics in original.

spent the first part of her adult life as a practicing midwife, O'Brien's choice to focus on reproduction and birth seems quite logical. According to her argument, men are forced by biological necessity to create and generate in the only way that they can: politically, intellectually and philosophically. "For women, anatomy is creativity" such that women are not in need of filling the creative-generative void. But nature is not so kind to men, in O'Brien's view of the sexes. The only relevant and awe-inspiring form of creation in the masculine world of politics becomes the creation of cities and nations. These entities emerge from the creativity of men, who neither honour nor require women for their contributions to reproduction. Men "must resist the alienation from nature...which is inherent in their reproductive praxis," O'Brien argues, "to heal the discontinuous sense of man the uncertain father."³¹ Men must find a way to make up for their biological shortcoming of not being able to gestate a child; investing intellectual activity and political creation with awe-inspiring significance is part of that compensatory process.

The compensatory process involves an inversion of reality: women's actual procreativity is portrayed as imitative and passive while men's creative potency is empowered and valorized. Birth is reduced to a biological event, base and unthinking, while creation in the intellectual-political realm is elevated above, and transcendent of, biological imperatives. This inverts what O'Brien takes to be reality: it is women who possess an awe-inspiring power to create, gestate and give birth to new life. The goal of feminism must be to uncover and reclaim that power, to

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

reconnect the intellectual with the physical process of reproduction for women, and to engage with the new politics of reproduction. There is a practical purpose here as O'Brien sees enormous potential for women in their newly acquired ability to control their fertility but, at the same time, she sees new reproductive technologies as a further dimension of men's desire to appropriate control of reproduction from women.³²

The envy-appropriation thesis comprises a central theme of this investigation of origin stories. It will resurface in the discussion of Plato, the treatment of Hobbes, and it is repeated in the radical feminist origin stories of the Second Wave. The question that we must face in each context is: why is it necessary to invest women's reproductive role with awe-inspiring significance? Can we not argue that women's role is unique without either investing it with fabricated importance, on the one hand, or comparing it to men's role and designating it as aberrant or anomalous on the other? To acknowledge women's reproductive significance without falsely elevating it or comparing it to male experience requires a different language, for even those who attempt to do so fall short. For example, feminist bioethicist Laura Purdy writes that "fetuses are dependent on women in an unusually fundamental and continuous way."³³ The sentiment is correct, and yet the use of the term "unusually" connotes women's difference—and difference always means "different from some objective and universal standard," i.e. the male.

³² See Mary O'Brien, *Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1989).

³³ Laura M. Purdy, *Reproducing Persons: Issues in Feminist Bioethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 94.

The additional problem with O'Brien's thesis is that it is beset with a contradiction: on the one hand, reproductive biology structures social relations insofar as alienation from the process is the root of patriarchy. On the other hand, birth is theorized as a unity between the intellectual and the physical. In other words, by the latter theory, birth would change and evolve historically and culturally precisely because it is a product of our consciousness. Indeed, cultures value and interpret reproductive processes differently.³⁴ Yet O'Brien's explanation for the rise of patriarchy is at odds with the recognition of historical and cultural variability in birth experiences. The idea that reproduction means something inherent (and inherently the same) simply does not correspond with the idea that reproduction changes with consciousness. While O'Brien acknowledges the historical changes in reproductive practice, her tendency toward biological determinism undermines this recognition and the strength of her argument.³⁵

In the end, the envy-appropriation thesis put forth by O'Brien as an explanation for the prevalence of masculine origin stories offers us a way into the discussion of origins, reproduction and gender but it does not offer the key to this discussion. It is certainly the case that Plato in particular has invested male creativity with a potency that is obviously derived from

³⁴ Robbie E. Davis-Floyd and Carolyn F. Sargent, eds., *Childbirth and Authoritative Knowledge: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

³⁵ O'Brien's writings exhibit a tension in this respect. She tends to present reproduction in a biologically-determinist light, as I have argued, but the core of her project is emancipatory. These two things stand in obvious tension, for if human beings are biologically-determined it is difficult to theorize that social relations might be altered or women emancipated. In my view, this is a problem that is never fully resolved in O'Brien's work.

parturition, but he does not appropriate woman's power in the way that O'Brien suggests. Moreover, the feminist origins theorists invert Plato's line on reproduction, *reclaiming* but at the same time *inventing* woman's power. Feminists, too, find origins a useful and convenient tool in politics. This fact alone would seem to disprove the thesis that origin stories are driven exclusively by a masculine ontological or biological need. Origin stories are driven by politics, and to ignore radical feminism's participation in this drive would be naive.

V Conclusion

It would seem that the larger ontological significance of origin stories is, in the end, not gendered, for all of the theorists examined here—male and female—use origin narratives. As we proceed through the various origin stories, it becomes evident that in addition to the political motivations for using these narratives, there is an underlying ontological drive at work. This origins imperative is as close to what Said has aptly termed an "aboriginal human need" as might be imagined. For this reason alone, it may be unrealistic to assume that curiosity about origins, or that narratives of origins, can be eliminated. Nevertheless, it is the purpose of this thesis, which is an analysis of these origin stories, to cast a critical eye on the origins motif as it surfaces in the tradition of political thought. In other words, the present thesis is distinguished from the objects of its study in that it is meant to document an important trend in the history of political thought and to better understand it. This study is not offered as a means of extending origins-thinking, nor as an origin story of origins, but as a tool for understanding this political discourse.

The forgoing is an attempt to provide a foundation for the following discussion of origin stories. Within this preliminary discussion of origins, and over the course of this thesis, many of their specific difficulties and shortcomings are exposed. An additional problem with the use of origin stories in politics—and one that we will want to keep in mind as we progress through the stories of Plato, Hobbes and the feminist theorists—is that they do more to derail attempts to find political solutions to concrete problems than to solve these problems. In constantly invoking origins, our energies are redirected from politics, averted from real conflicts and refocused on questions to which there might never be satisfactory answers. Moreover, there is an assumption that, once identified, origins can be instructive. The origin will authorize the solution. The normative dimension of political origin stories comes to the fore in the discussions of Hobbes and the radical feminists, but it arises first in the examination of Plato, where this investigation begins.

II The Birth of Philosophy: Plato's Creation Politics

The process of examining ancient Greek origin stories might easily begin with any of a number of Greek texts or thinkers. Hesiod's *Theogony*, written in the eighth century BCE, gives a poetic and mythical account of the origins of the universe, the anthropomorphic gods and human beings. The quest for beginnings also dominates the fragmented writings of the Ionian or Milesian philosophers, who replaced Hesiod's poetic accounts with physical, proto-scientific ones. The origin stories of Hesiod and of the natural philosophers remain integral to the Western philosophical and mythical heritage. However, this chapter will take Plato as the starting point of a new kind of origin story. Plato is the foundational *political philosopher*, who at one and the same time transcended the natural philosophers and poets with rationality, and synthesized their findings to create a new political and cosmogonical origin story.

Plato's political theory combines the quest for natural origins with a desire for rational political *cosmos* (order). While this double desire for natural and political order is evident in several Platonic dialogues, it emerges clearly in his *Timaeus*, the dialogue in which Plato attempts to reconcile his political theory with the debates of the preceding natural philosophers. Because the *Timaeus* is Plato's central story of origins, it provides a logical focal point for this inquiry. The purpose of this analysis of Plato is to demonstrate the link between rational, scientific explanations of origins, on the one hand, and the political and social assumptions that Plato imports into his theories of origins, on the other. The telling of an

origin myth, no matter how rationally motivated, is never separable from politics, never entirely removed from the political context in which it is told. Thus, in the *Timaeus*, Plato interweaves his description of the universe's origins through his ontology, epistemology and politics. Indeed, one of the incentives for Plato to give this account is to correlate the rational purpose and order that lies behind the natural world with the well-conceived and just *polis*.

This theme of origins, and in particular the theme of political creation, surfaces in other texts in Plato's corpus, albeit in abbreviated form. Most important are the autochthonous origin stories, which appear in the *Republic's* myth of the metals, and in the *Menexenus*. Using both autochthony and cosmogony, Plato wrote in the familiar idiom of ancient Athens in order to defend a universal, naturally-sanctioned, and yet fundamentally gendered, *polis*.

Indeed, another important political subtext to Plato's origin myth is that of gender relations. At the outset we should acknowledge that Plato's arguments on gender offer contemporary theorists a difficult but interesting interpretive challenge. Plato's theories on gender are complex, and at times even ambiguous, which means that rendering a final judgement on his corpus is impossible.¹ Unique among ancient political philosophers, and to some extent in the canon itself, Plato posits a radical equality between the sexes in Book V of the *Republic*, allowing women of the guardian class to become guardians themselves. As a result, there is an

¹ For an excellent discussion of Plato's ambiguity, see Dorothea Wender, "Plato: Misogynist, Paedophile, and Feminist," in John Peradotto and J.P. Sullivan, eds., *Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1984).

ongoing debate as to whether Plato was a feminist or not.² At the same time, an influential interpretation by Allan Bloom suggests that Plato was merely being ironic in suggesting women's equality in Book V.³ My reading of Plato is centered on the *Timeaus*, and therefore it does not engage with this specific debate about the *Republic*. However, it does offer an alternative interpretation to the "Plato as feminist" and Straussian readings. The tendency in the interpretive literature is to analyze Plato's gender arguments primarily against the backdrop of Book V of the *Republic*. I suggest that a reading of the *Timeaus* can offer a different perspective on Plato, and that this dialogue might provide an important counter to the dominant interpretations.⁴

Central to this examination will be, not only Plato's explicit statements about women in the *Timaeus*, but his ontology, epistemology and his

² To debate Plato's feminism seems problematic for several reasons. Such a debate applies an anachronistic usage of "feminist" to ancient Greece; it also relies upon a narrow understanding of feminism in the sense that, whatever Plato's intentions in theory, he did not behave as a feminist might toward historical women. Finally, this debate fails to appreciate the competing strain that runs through Plato's theory: a sometimes overt, at other times subtle, phallogentrism. For a critical commentary on Plato's feminism, see Julia Annas, "Plato's Republic and Feminism," *Philosophy*, 51, 1976. For competing interpretations, see Arlene W. Saxonhouse, *Women in the History of Political Thought: Ancient Greece to Machiavelli* (New York: Praeger, 1985); Arlene Saxonhouse, "Eros and the Female in Greek Political Thought: An Interpretation of Plato's *Symposium*," *Political Theory*, 12, 1984; Giulia Sissa, "The Sexual Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle," in Pauline Schmitt Pantel, ed., *A History of Women. I: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Susan Hawthorne, "Diotima Speaks Through the Body," in Bat-Ami Bar On, ed., *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994); and Gregory Vlastos, "Was Plato a feminist?" *Times Literary Supplement* 4, 485, March 17-23, 1989.

³ See Allan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," in *The Republic of Plato*, trans. with notes and Interpretive Essay by Allan Bloom (New York: Harper Collins, 1991). The competing interpretations of Plato's feminism are addressed briefly in Appendix I.

⁴ Julia Annas reads the *Republic* in conjunction with the *Timaeus*, and finds that the *Timaeus* serves to disrupt any notion of Plato's feminism. See Annas, "Plato's Republic and Feminism."

notions of the body. What emerges is a gendered—or phallogentric—theory in which Plato utilizes reproductive metaphors to describe the origins of the universe at the same time as he establishes a new justification for woman's secondary status in the *polis* and the *oikos*. Plato's employment of reproductive metaphors creates the need to discuss here his ideas about the processes of reproduction, about embryology, and about birth itself. While it is not the purpose of this chapter to uncover Plato's every usage of reproductive metaphors, it will be important to address how his cosmology and ideas about the creation of the *polis* are affected by his thoughts about birth.

I The purpose and structure of the *Timaeus*

Although the *Timaeus* was at one time held in high esteem by early Christian scholars, perhaps for its resonance with Judeo-Christian creation, it receives little attention from twentieth-century political theorists. Those who do analyze it tend to overlook its suggestive representation of birth and of gender relations. It has also gone largely untreated by feminists despite being rife with reproductive as well as feminine and masculine metaphors. While it takes the form of a myth, and is a consolidation of ancient Greek science which now seems outlandish, it nevertheless provides a creative and at times rational account of Plato's ontological and political project. The *Timaeus* bears the mark of an experienced philosopher who, after a lifetime of writing, has carefully chosen his current medium for effect. The product is a metaphorically rich, poetic, and philosophic description of the beginnings of the world through to the creation of human beings. By examining the dialogue

against its own historical and intellectual backdrop, it is possible to move beyond the surface of fantastic science to understand its moral and political significance as a text of origins.

Given the evidence that this is one of Plato's later dialogues, we might legitimately query why Plato would chose to write a cosmogony at this late stage in his philosophic career. There are several probable reasons for this. The first is that, having expounded a detailed and comprehensive political theory, he had yet to respond adequately to his predecessors, the natural philosophers. These are philosophers to whom he is deeply indebted, and on whom he relies in his own theory. However, he does not entirely agree with any one of them, and so the *Timaeus* is his opportunity to both synthesize their ideas and correct those by whom he is most influenced, including Heraclitus, Parmenides and Pythagoras.

One of Plato's frustrations with the natural philosophers is their failure to make the connection between the physical and metaphysical realms. Indeed, another incentive for Plato to develop a cosmogony is to show the rationality in the ordering of the universe as well as in moral, human affairs. Above all Plato wants to demonstrate that there is a rational pattern underlying the physical universe, which is also connected to the ethical and moral affairs of human beings. Here we see the key relationship for Plato between macrocosm and microcosm. Up to this point in his political theory he has demonstrated the relationship between the microcosm of the human soul and the macrocosm of the city; in the *Timaeus*

he takes a further step by revealing the macrocosmic patterns of reality in the universe.⁵

A third reason for Plato's decision to write a cosmogony is the fact that, at this later stage in his life, he deems cosmogony a worthwhile intellectual endeavor. From the *Republic*, the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*, among other dialogues, we are given to understand that the realm of becoming—the physical, material realm—does not merit scientific analysis. If this world is always in a state of flux, it is never the same from one moment to the next. Therefore, it cannot be the *object* of knowledge; it cannot be *known*. Conversely, the patterns of reality that lie in the Forms do merit dialectical study—they can be perceived with human reason, and the highest task of human beings (and hence of the philosopher) is to contemplate them. The *Timaeus*, as W.K.C. Guthrie points out, marks a break with this epistemology at least insofar as the physical world is now considered worthy of study.⁶

The main character, Timaeus, notes that,

A man may sometimes set aside meditations about eternal things, and for recreation, turn to consider the truths of generation, which are probable only; he will thus gain a pleasure not to be repented of, and secure for himself...a wise and moderate pastime.⁷

Certainly absolute truth regarding the physical world is still not possible, as Timaeus has told us that "As being is to becoming, so truth is to belief"

⁵ Cornford, Francis MacDonald, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato translated with a running commentary* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1966), p. 6.

⁶ W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, Vol V: The Later Plato and the Academy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 286.

⁷ Plato, *Timaeus* in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*. ed. with Intro. and Prefatory Notes. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), line 59c-d. *Timaeus* references cited hereafter in the text by line number.

(29c). Nevertheless, the promise of even a *probable account of creation* is celebrated by Socrates as "a perfect and splendid feast of Reason" (27b).

The dialogue does not begin, however, with Timaeus' account of creation.⁸ The *Timaeus* begins instead with a reiteration of some of the main conclusions of the *Republic*, as though Socrates had been explaining his theory of the just city on the day previous to this different group of interlocutors. Critias then recounts an abbreviated tale, giving expression for the first time to the myth of Atlantis. According to this myth, an ancient imperialist society called Atlantis challenged the ancient city of Athens. Athens is able to defeat the Atlantean empire and survive. Following its defeat, tormented by "violent earthquakes and floods," Atlantis "disappeared in the depths of the sea" (25d).

Although Critias' tale of Atlantis is not the mainstay of the dialogue, it is not without political significance either. The ancient Athenian city to which Critias refers bears striking resemblance to Socrates' just city of the *Republic*. The Atlantis story, located at the outset of the dialogue, reminds the reader that Plato's imperative in the creation narrative is not exclusively philosophic; it is also political. Plato's aim is to restore virtue and justice to the Athenian regime, principles which have been lacking

⁸ The narrative of *Timaeus* is structured in accordance with the organization of Plato's incomplete trilogy. *Timaeus* is the first of the two existing dialogues; the *Critias* was interrupted before completion. Most interpreters of Plato place this trilogy chronologically among Plato's final works, his last being the *Laws*. For a summary of the debate on *Timaeus*' placement among Platonic dialogues see Richard Kraut, "Introduction to the study of Plato," in Richard Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 15-19. I am sympathetic with the theory that *Timaeus*, *Critias* and the *Laws* represent a later phase in Plato's writings. However, I also find the dialogues, whether of the late or the middle period to complement one another thematically and where their ontology and epistemology are concerned.

since the creation of Athenian democracy. It is the ancient, pre-democratic Athens which is glorified in the Atlantis tale, described therein as a great sea power, a moral empire, "first in war" and possessing "the fairest constitution of any of which tradition tells" (23c-d). Ancient Athens, by virtue and skill, is able to conquer even the imperialist Atlantis and thus free the enslaved. R.B. Rutherford notes that this must have served as a message to an Athens in decline. While the degenerate and decadent Atlantis is destroyed, Athens survives, and can in fact be "regenerated" if it listens to the lessons of history.⁹

II Setting the context for Timaeus' narrative

Aside from its political purpose, the *Timaeus* serves the purpose of responding to, and adapting the ideas of, the Presocratic philosophers. Given that cosmogonical origin stories are not Plato's forte, "he does not hesitate to hark back to earlier leaders in the field if he can adapt them to his demonstration that the world is born of design and not chance."¹⁰ While Plato was undoubtedly influenced by a number of the Presocratics, only the central figures and those to whom Plato was particularly indebted, Thales of the Ionian School, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Pythagoras will be reviewed here. This assessment of the Presocratics will focus attention on the effect of the natural philosophers on Plato's ontological and epistemological theory. References to gender, masculine and feminine, need also be noted, especially in regard to the Pythagoreans.

⁹ R.B. Rutherford, *The Art of Plato: Ten Essays in Platonic Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 288.

¹⁰ Guthrie, *Vol. V*, p. 280.

The Ionians or Milesians represent the beginnings of natural philosophy in Greece. They are the first to attempt to replace mythical and anthropomorphic thought with scientific ideas about cosmogony. They resided in Miletus during the sixth century BCE. Like the poets, the Milesians sought a causal explanation for the existence of the world, but found the answers more in physical substances than in male and female gods, or a mating of heaven and earth. Thales, the first of the Ionians, isolates water as the source and essence of all things. For Thales, such a conclusion was borne out empirically by the fact that living things have moisture and warmth in them, and that food and semen, for example, are always moist. Death, by contrast, is marked by the body becoming cold and drying up.¹¹ It is also likely that Thales was influenced by Near Eastern mythology, and its belief in the primacy of water, even as he made a conscious break with mythological approaches. The idea that everything comes from water is reflected in the story of Genesis, where we see the mists of the garden of Eden. Of course, this idea is not as fanciful as it sounds: water is a central component of the human body, of the earth's surface, and of air.

Thales is also famous for his belief that all things are interpenetrated by some life-principle—that the world is alive and undergoes spontaneous change. For Thales, as for the other Milesian thinkers, nature is capable of spontaneous change, of evolution. Nature has a generative power; it is alive. Indeed, if we identify two main types of cosmogony, creative and

¹¹ W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, Vol I: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 61.

evolutionary, this Milesean cosmogony is of the evolutionary variety.¹² In other words, it does not identify a rational plan or a god as the source of natural change, but rather locates the cause of change within nature itself. The Ionians' generally held view was that, behind the chaos of change, there must be some permanence and unity.¹³ This, by Guthrie's description, is the Milesians' key innovation as it put them on the path of philosophy: they may not have come to conclusions that were truly scientific and myth-free, but they are characterized by a "critical spirit" that seeks to explain phenomena without reference to Homeric gods.¹⁴

Against this backdrop of the beginnings of the Presocratic tradition, we turn to Heraclitus, a cryptic and obscure philosopher whose ideas greatly influenced Plato. Plato summarizes, and some would say exaggerates, the position of Heraclitus as follows: "all things are in process and nothing stays still, and likening things to the stream of a river he [Heraclitus] says that you would not step twice into the same river."¹⁵ According to Heraclitus, all things are in perpetual strife, and the tension between opposites is never resolved, except in disintegration. Heraclitus' approach of "looking within himself" to find the Logos that is behind everything sets him apart from his fellow Ionians. He is not a natural or cosmogonical thinker in the tradition of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes. It is perhaps for this reason that Plato is drawn to his ideas, in particular to the

¹² Guthrie, *Vol I*, p. 142.

¹³ W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers From Thales to Aristotle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 24.

¹⁴ Guthrie, *Vol. I*, 66.

¹⁵ G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History With a Selection of Texts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 197. 188. See also the English translation of Heraclitus, *On the Universe*, in *Hippocrates, Vol IV*, trans. by W.H.S. Jones (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1931).

idea that there must be a hidden meaning or truth behind the surface of change and discontinuity. For Heraclitus, the senses portray to each person a different reality; they provide a different set of information with which to interpret the world. Plato's innovation on Heraclitus is epistemological, for while he would have been loathe to suggest that nothing *at all* is knowable, he could agree that the instability of the physical world prevented it from being an object of knowledge.¹⁶ Therefore, nothing perceived merely by the senses is truly knowable. And so we have from Heraclitus but one half of the Platonic dualism.

The other half of this complex epistemological and ontological dualism has its source in the ideas of Parmenides. While Parmenides of Elea would have seen his ideas as the antithesis of Heraclitus' philosophy, Plato was able to take something important from them both. Parmenides is a transformational thinker in ancient Greek philosophy in that, once he wrote, his ideas were impossible to ignore. He presented the argument that "the only significant thought or statement is that a thing *is*."¹⁷ From Simplicius we understand Parmenides to be positing the following:

One way is left to be spoken of, that it *is*; and on this way are full many signs that what is *is* uncreated and imperishable, for it is entire, immovable and without end. It was not in the past, nor *shall* it be, since it *is* now, all at once, one, continuous.¹⁸

As Guthrie states, Parmenides' "whole conception of the nature of things is about the attribution of a single metaphysical force to the verb *to be*."¹⁹

¹⁶ Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers*, p. 88.

¹⁷ Paraphrase of Parmenides. Kirk and Raven, p. 272.

¹⁸ Kirk and Raven, p. 273.

¹⁹ Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers*, p. 48.

For Parmenides, a thing either exists or it does not, and we cannot say anything of value, *we cannot say anything at all*, about that which does not exist. "The only significant thoughts or statements concern Being."²⁰ Moreover, and this is important for understanding Plato's creation myth, that which *is* is uncreated. Cosmogony, then, is a paradox. This idea is meant to undermine, or relegate to the status of belief, the evolutionary cosmogonies of the Milesians: "And what need would have driven it on to grow," asks Parmenides, "starting from nothing, at a later time rather than an earlier?...For if it came into being, it is not, nor if it is going to be in the future."²¹ The implication is that change does not occur, that Being is ever-present (and thus timeless), indivisible, and motionless. This is a newly abstract theory according to which reason is all that is necessary to understand Being. Parmenides, trained as a Pythagorean, incorporates the ideas of Unity and Limit from the Table of Opposites but abandons their negative complements.²² The side of the Unlimited, those things that can be perceived with the senses, is not considered to be in the realm of reality. Parmenides' conclusion was counterintuitive to his contemporaries, as it elided the flux and change of nature around them. Of course Plato, by the very fact that he writes a cosmogony at all, escapes Parmenides' abstract and monist conclusion, but he does not dismiss its value out of hand. *Onto*

²⁰ Kirk and Raven, p. 270. As T.H. Irwin describes them, Parmenides' self-evident hypotheses progress as follows: "1. We cannot think (say, know) and think nothing (since thinking nothing is not thinking at all). 2. But what is not (or 'not being') is nothing. 3. Hence we cannot think (say, know) what is not." See "Plato: The intellectual background," in Richard Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 56.

²¹ Kirk and Raven, p. 273.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 277.

Parmenides' permanent Being, Plato inscribes his patterns of reality, the permanent Forms or Ideas.

Leaving the discussion of Pythagoras aside for the moment, we turn now to examine Plato's dualism which is given immediate expression in Timaeus' monologue. In referring to Plato as an ontological and epistemological dualist, I refer not to the idea that he sees two unrelated categories of being, permanently separated and opposed, but to the general and pervasive contrast he draws between Being and becoming, Ideal Forms and material things, mind and body, and as I will show, man and woman.²³ Within this dualistic framework Plato argues that true knowledge comes only with transcendence of the body; the body is a hindrance to the acquisition of knowledge, especially of the Forms. "What is that," asks Timaeus, "which always is and has no becoming, and what is that which is always becoming and never is?" (27d). The dualism pits Being, which can be "apprehended by intelligence and reason" and is always the same, against becoming, which is "conceived by opinion with the help of sensation" and "never really is" (27d-28a). The influences of Heraclitus, with his description of ceaseless flux, and Parmenides, with his state of timeless Being, are evident. Of course, Plato has to deny key features of both Heraclitus and Parmenides. He must deny their monist tendencies, admitting that change and flux do occur in the physical world, while preserving the unity of Being in the realm of the Forms. Where does the world fit into this view? Plato locates the world, as a physical and visible body, in the realm of becoming: it has been generated, created. But, it is

²³ See Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 5 (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 363-354.

created by a cause, and that cause is the "father and maker of the universe" (28d). True, this world cannot be perfect because of its generation and existence in the physical realm. Nevertheless, since the Demiurge made the world, and he is good, the world itself partakes of goodness.

Finally, on the question of intellectual context, Plato's ontology is affected by the ideas of Pythagoras. Perhaps even more than with Heraclitus, the content of Pythagoras' actual beliefs are difficult to trace. This is so primarily because of the contributions made by the intellectual and religious school that developed around Pythagoras and the amount of time by which the school survived their leader. Given the complexity of Pythagorean thought, this discussion will be limited to two of Pythagoras' central and connected doctrines, the ones that most affected Plato's thinking, his Table of Opposites and his mathematical theory. The Table of Opposites is a double list of the characteristics of reality, or of the principles of things, each principle having a complementary opposite. Aristotle provides this list of dualisms: Limited/Unlimited; odd/even; one/plurality; right/left; male/female; resting/moving; straight/curved; light/darkness; good/bad; and square/oblong. Limit is associated with unity, goodness, light and the male, and the Unlimited with plurality, badness, darkness and the female. The Pythagorean cosmogony, in fact, arises from the Table of Opposites and from a gendered and anthropomorphic view of the world. The world is a living creature, generated when "the male principle of Limit" implants "in the midst of the surrounding Unlimited the seed which, by progressive growth, was to

develop into the visible universe."²⁴ The Pythagoreans are ontological dualists who infuse the ideas of Limit and Unlimited with morality, and sexual and reproductive metaphors.

The mathematical theory of the Pythagoreans, which is connected to the Table of Opposites, is also infused with morality. The Pythagoreans detect a numerical base or source behind all things. In Aristotle's account, they subscribe to the view that numbers are "the first things in the whole of nature," and that "almost all other things [are] numerically expressible."²⁵ According to Plutarch, they assign a principle and a gender to all numbers; the even numbers are Unlimited, feminine, described as having a "receptive opening" and a "space." Conversely, the odd are Limited and masculine, which means that they are also "more generative," and that they are "always dominant and never dominated." Further, "odd numbers combined with odd produce a numerous progeny of even numbers because of their omnipresent generative function."²⁶ Indeed, the male is depicted as the more generative, more active in reproduction, and the female is inert and receptive.

What does Plato take from Pythagorean thought? While he does not define justice numerically he does, in the *Timaeus*, argue that most issues or problems can be reduced to a number or geometric shape. And although it would be inaccurate to say that Plato simply adopts the Pythagorean Table of Opposites, as Plato's dualism is more philosophically sophisticated than

²⁴ Kirk and Raven, p. 251.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

²⁶ Plutarch is quoted in Sabina Lovibond, "An Ancient Theory of Gender: Plato and the Pythagorean Table," in Léonie J. Archer, Susan Fischler, and Maria Wyke, eds. *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion in the Night* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 90-1.

this,²⁷ it is certainly true that Plato accepts many of the terms of the Table. In the *Timaeus* he refers to the principles of Limit and the Unlimited, principles which likewise have moral underpinnings. For Plato, as for Pythagoras, the terms of the dualism are typically gendered. In the *Timaeus*, he also invokes—even if he does not actually believe—Pythagorean and ancient Greek ideas about the unequal contribution of males and females to reproduction. That this is the case is evident in his use of reproductive metaphors to describe the existence of the world and the creation of political society.

Genevieve Lloyd has suggested that the simplistic dualism evident in some of Plato's dialogues, especially the *Phaedo*, gives way to a subtler system of dualisms in Plato's later thought. This subtler version is one in which "Reason must contend with non-rational human qualities which are no less properly parts of the soul." This alteration in Plato's thought, according to Lloyd, "allowed a richer and subtler presentation of Reason's relations with the non-rational...than the earlier simple dualism between intellect and body."²⁸ True, the concept of spiritedness, which is the third element of the tripartite soul in Plato's *Republic*, adds a nuance to the earlier binarism. Yet, in the *Timaeus* Plato has not abandoned the binarism of rational/non-rational, or of ideal/material. It is this dualism, and its

²⁷ Judith Genova provides a useful discussion of Platonic dualism at the ontological and metaphysical level, but mistakenly equates his dualism with that of Pythagoras. To see Plato as merely a Pythagorean dualist obscures the innovation he forges that takes him distinctly beyond Presocratic thought. See Judith Genova, "Feminist Dialectics: Plato and Dualism," in Bat-Ami Bar On, ed., *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1994).

²⁸ Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, 2nd. ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 19. See also Cynthia Hampton, "Overcoming Dualism: The Importance of the Intermediate in Plato's *Philebus*," in Bar On, ed., *Engendering Origins*.

hierarchical configuration, that continues to be the underpinning of his epistemology.

Reflecting briefly on the Presocratics, their influence on Plato is evident in his ontology and in his decision to write a cosmogonical origin story in the first place. The Presocratics remain important for their attempts to transcend the mythopoetic cosmogonies, and they undoubtedly viewed their own accounts as infinitely more rational than those of their predecessors. Nevertheless, some twentieth-century commentators urge that we not consider the break between myth and reason—between the poetic and mythical accounts of creation, on the one hand, and rational, scientific accounts, on the other—too profound. Cornford, for one, suggests that the natural philosophers are better seen as continuing a "rationalizing process which had already been long at work in expurgating the grosser elements of myth as these become incredible."²⁹ Plato, in fact, should be held in the same light. He continues this process of expurgating myth from rational accounts, although with a difference. The Presocratics, like Plato, sought a rational explanation for the extant order in the world, an order that displaces disorderliness.³⁰ When Plato amalgamates and corrects his predecessors, he makes a rational leap—he injects a new rationality into the account of moral, political and cosmological affairs—and he inscribes his advance in an entirely new ontological and epistemological system that leaves the formative interpretations of the Presocratics behind.

²⁹ Cornford, F.M., *Principium Sapientiæ: The Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought*, ed. W.K.C. Guthrie (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), p. 154.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

III The origin story

Timaeus reveals that his origin narrative will be a creationist, as opposed to an evolutionary one. The world did not *evolve* from matter, but was *created* from matter, having a beginning, "being visible and tangible and having a body" (28b). If indeed it is created, it must have a cause, some force that brings it into existence. Timaeus describes the creator as a god, "the father and maker of all of this universe" (28c). The creator bases the world, his creation, on the unchanging and perfect models of the Forms. To do otherwise, to use created matter as the model, would preclude the world from being "the fairest of creations," (29a). Plato, of course, wants to deny that the world as we know it is the product of pure chance, one of the grand chaotic, schemeless aspects of the universe. These are the ontological outflows of a Heraclitean and Democritean view: if everything is in strife, if every event is merely random and unpredictable, there can be no certainty of any kind—moral, political or ontological. By asserting a father creator god, who is himself ungenerated and therefore perfect by definition, Plato posits a cause for order and, ultimately, a *telos* for the physical world.

Indeed, the world is created as a result of god bringing order out of chaos. "Finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion out of disorder he brought order" (30a). Out of random motion and preexisting, disordered matter, the intelligent designer imposes a pattern on the universe, using the Forms as his model. Of course, there is a debate about how seriously Plato's assertion of a god should be taken. Warrington, for one, faults interpreters who overlook "the purely mythical character of the Demiurge, crediting him with

attributes proper to the God of Jewish-Christian theology and representing Plato as a monotheist on the threshold of Christianity!"³¹ Guthrie, conversely, insists that Plato's idea of the Demiurge should be read as "philosophy, not myth."³² In a similar vein, another interpreter suggests that Timaeus' arguments are an "attempt to synthesize the explanations of Greek philosophers with the stories of Greek religion."³³ It is certainly reasonable to suggest that Plato was attempting to come to terms with Hesiodic and Homeric gods. One of the distinctions between a Judeo-Christian god and the Greek gods is that the latter were open to interpretation and revision, open to direct criticism by the philosophers, whereas the Judeo-Christian religions believe that god is not open to rebuke or question, much less revision. But just how Plato intended his Demiurge to be interpreted is difficult to ascertain, and it may not be germane to this discussion. The most important point is that, in using a creator god, Plato escapes having to account for why the world transformed the way it did when it did. It permits Plato to attribute to this Being a vast plan or scheme for order. This aspect of Platonism can, indeed, be assimilated directly into a monotheistic Judeo-Christian framework.

Plato's religious description of the author of human existence does not entirely overcome the anthropomorphism of his Greek predecessors. Nor does his description of the created world, to which he assigns a life and a soul. This physical, corporeal being is endowed with "intelligence by the

³¹ John Warrington, "Introduction," to Plato, *Timaeus*, ed. and trans. with Introduction by John Warrington (Dutton, NY: Everyman's Library, 1965), p. viii.

³² Guthrie, *Vol. V*, p. 255.

³³ Norbert M. Samuelson, *Judaism and the Doctrine of Creation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 175.

providence of God" (30b). It is significant that, even in the anthropomorphic description of the world, the soul is prior to the body in chronology and excellence: "God did not make the soul after the body, although we are speaking of them in this order, for when he put them together he would never have allowed that the elder should be ruled by the younger" (34c). This familiar feature of Plato's ontology will be especially important for the discussion of the creation of female human beings and of the Receptacle.

The Demiurge's final act of creation, the semantics of which are important to tracing Plato's theory of reproduction and birth, is to develop a heavenly race of gods, birds for the air, watery species, and pedestrian and land creatures (40a).³⁴ The external Demiurge himself designs the race of gods, saying to them: "Gods, children of gods, who are my works and of whom I am the artificer and father, my creations are indissoluble if so I will." He explains that, as gods, they are composed of strong materials at their birth, and will not be "liable to the fate of death" because the Demiurge has the will to maintain them. It is the task of the race of gods to design the mortal beings who will occupy the air, earth and sea. The fact that these lesser gods create the animals and birds means that these beings will not be immortal. The part of these mortal beings that is *immortal* is of divine origin, and the Demiurge tells them, "of that divine part I will myself sow the seed" (41c). And so he instructs the gods to "beget" the creatures, make them grow, and receive them again in death (41d).

³⁴ Because this is the point in the dialogue at which Plato begins to discuss the creation of human beings, it will be my focus. It should be noted, of course, that this is but one part of the creation story he offers.

Timaeus then describes how god mingles the remains of the soul of the universe and the elements, divides the whole mixture into souls, and distributes them to the stars. From here, although the description is sketchy, it seems as though the animals come forth from the stars (41e).

What is noteworthy about Plato's language is that it reveals a patrogenic view, whereby the male creator god is the sole author of the race of gods. The male god is the *creator* of the gods beneath him; he is empowered to *bring them forth*. Similarly, the new race of gods will go on to beget living creatures. Although there are female gods in this second tier, there is no mention of a fertilization process, or of a combining of two types of seed, or of the female's distinct capacity, even where birth itself is concerned. Plato demonstrates here, for the first time in this dialogue, his interest in utilizing a particular view of reproduction and birth common in ancient Greece. His patrogenic sympathies—his reliance on the ideal of masculine self-reproduction—will resurface in the story of the receptacle, but first to continue with the description of the creation of human beings.

Compatible with the patrogenic view is Plato's story of the all-male race of human beings. Plato proposes that men are born alone on the earth, unaccompanied at first by their female counterparts. These men are given sensations and feelings that must be conquered. Invoking the Platonic ontology of soul before body, Timaeus states that if men look after, and are attentive to, the needs and health of the soul, they will return to a "blessed and congenial existence" (42b). Alternatively, if men misbehave and take inadequate care of their souls, they are reborn as women. This unrighteous man "at second birth would pass into a woman," and "if he did not desist from evil he would continually be changed into a brute" (42c).

Women are a secondary and, clearly, lesser creation; existence as a woman takes the form of a punishment to intemperate men. Women reside on a scale somewhere between men and brute animals. "Human nature was of two kinds," according to Timaeus, "the superior race was of such and such a character, and would be hereafter called man" (42a). The creator has imagined that there are two "kinds" of human beings, but the male is the originary sex, the norm. He not only comes first as a creation but has no need whatsoever for the female. Thus a further dimension of the patrogenic view is male self-sufficiency: men are self-sufficient in life and even in reproduction. Men's souls, at least, are created independently of women, of their mothers, and they are able to regenerate themselves independently as well. Plato is not explicit about how they are born, or reborn. He is explicitly suggesting, however, that women are a secondary creation to men.

The parallels to the Hebrew Bible are striking, as Eve, too, is a secondary creation to Adam. Eve is not a punishment but a helpmeet to Adam, and this differs from Plato's female punishment (although Eve's status as a helpmeet by no means indicates equality). However, the first story of Genesis does identify, just as Timaeus does, woman as a source of shame. After the Fall, that shame comes to Eve as a punishment of pain in childbirth and subordination to Adam. In the *Timaeus*, the very existence of woman is a sign of shame, for if man had not acted intemperately, she would not have been born in the first place. One of the differences between Genesis and the *Timaeus* is that, in the former, there is a struggle over the subordination of woman—Lilith is banished to the Red Sea for her refusal to

submit. In Plato's text, the inferiority of woman is presented as part of the natural ordering of the cosmos; it is not a point of struggle.

How have interpreters of the *Timaeus* dealt with the hierarchical ordering of the sexes? I consider here some of the classic and most influential interpretations. Guthrie, for one, states that neither in the *Phaedo* nor elsewhere "does Plato repeat this insult to women as originating from morally defective souls (90c), which is scarcely compatible with their role in the *Republic* (though that has actually been recalled at the beginning, 18c), or the *Laws*."³⁵ He also argues that Plato obviously accepts that women are present in the beginning because otherwise he would not present human nature as consisting in two "kinds." Guthrie proposes two possible solutions to this conundrum. The first is that Plato might, at this one stage in the dialogue, be making Timaeus' character speak as a Pythagorean. Since the Pythagoreans place women in the negative side of the Table of Opposites, Timaeus too speaks of women as inferior. Guthrie credits Krell as his source for this idea. Briefly, Krell makes the argument in his article "Female Parts in *Timaeus*," that Timaeus is a historical figure, a Pythagorean, who, because of his blatant degradation of "female parts," causes the dialogue to be a "resounding, if instructive, failure."³⁶ In Krell's words,

There is something altogether uncanny about Timaeus' view of women. In my opinion Plato does not share it and takes sufficient steps in his dialogue to make manifest the perversity of the Locrian's view.³⁷

³⁵ Guthrie, *Vol. V*, p. 307.

³⁶ David Farrell Krell, "Female Parts in *Timaeus*," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, New Series, Boston University, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 400.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

Not only is it an enigmatic, and possibly mistaken, assumption that Timaeus was a real historical figure, it is difficult to see in the dialogue any point at which Plato tries to distance himself from the ideas of his own (probably fictitious) main character.³⁸ Timaeus gives voice to Plato's own creation myth, as Guthrie himself suggests. Why would Plato have Timaeus expound his (Plato's) views on the origins of the earth, but insert the Pythagorean view of women? Moreover, why Guthrie accepts Krell's argument on this one point even as he dismisses Krell's larger argument is not altogether clear. The problem in Krell's, and hence Guthrie's, formulation is that it attributes to Plato a positive, proto-feminist view of women. And yet Plato demonstrates in numerous instances in *Timaeus* his acceptance of certain misogynist views prevalent in ancient Greece; moreover, his political theory often establishes the male as the universal sex, as the paradigmatic human being, and as the primary actor in generation. If there *is* similarity between the Pythagorean and Platonic views of women, it is most likely a legitimate sharing, not an appropriation by Plato of the Pythagorean view where it is convenient.

Guthrie's second and related explanation for the "inconsistency" is that "the Orphic and Empedoclean doctrine of the cycle of births" held "a strong

³⁸ It is likely that Krell derives his argument in turn from A.E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1928), pp. 10-11. Taylor, in this 1928 commentary, also posits Timaeus as a real Pythagorean figure. He maintains accordingly that we will not find "any revelation of distinctively Platonic doctrines" in the dialogue. More convincing is Cornford's assessment on this front: "There is no evidence for the historic existence of Timaeus of Locri. If he did exist, we know nothing whatever about him beyond Socrates' description." Therefore, "we may regard his [Timaeus'] doctrine simply as Plato's own." This does not mean, of course, that Plato was not influenced by any number of Presocratics, including the Pythagoreans. See Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, pp. 2-3.

attraction for Plato."³⁹ While it is certainly the case that the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth is of central concern to Plato, it is difficult to discern how this would lead him to make the argument that he does about women coming last in creation. Plato demonstrates his fascination with the cycle of life and death most clearly in the *Phaedo* where he describes the soul's afterlife and the happiness with which a true philosopher should greet death. But this does not explain Plato's gender-infused description of the cycle. In point of fact, to understand how this cycle is gendered for Plato, we need to assert first and foremost that he ties women to the body.⁴⁰ And if women are so identified with the body they are completely incapable of the sort of transcendence that Plato argues is necessary to do philosophy. This is why, in the *Phaedo*, Xanthippe is sent away from the death scene for, as a woman, she can only understand death as the death of the body, whereas Socrates views death as a sort of new beginning, something worth celebrating. Socrates further chastises his male companions for their emotional displays, and reminds them that they must not carry on as women do or they will have to leave. In the *Phaedo*, he imposes a hierarchical view of the sexes onto a cyclical theory of life and death. In *Timaeus*, Plato graphs this same dualistic ontology of soul/body and man/woman onto a cyclical theory of life and death.

Guthrie is not the only Platonic scholar who offers an inconsistent theory of gender relations in *Timaeus*. Francis Cornford argues that "we are not to suppose that there ever existed a generation of men before there

³⁹ Guthrie, *Vol. V*, p. 307.

⁴⁰ For an excellent assessment of how Plato ties women to the body, see Elizabeth Spelman, "Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views," *Feminist Studies* 8, 1982.

were any women or lower animals."⁴¹ Plato, he says, postpones discussion of the differences between male and female until the end of the dialogue because these details are "irrelevant to the whole account of our human nature which fills most of the remaining discourse."⁴² Leaving aside the content of what Plato says about women and wandering wombs at the end of the dialogue, it is a grave error to assume that Plato is discussing human nature in the dialogue, rather than the nature of man specifically. Why, if he is speaking about human beings and their nature, are women singled out and brought into existence as a punishment?⁴³ Furthermore, whether Plato actually believed that men existed before women were created is beside the point, for he nevertheless makes this mythical statement. The question should be, not whether he should be taken seriously, but why he consistently characterizes men as autonomous, self-sufficient and self-reproducing beings. The mythical character of the dialogue does not mitigate these claims in the sense that myth is a reflection of a thinker's preoccupations. Investigating the representation of gender in myth remains an important political task. Moreover, we must investigate the larger political significance of Plato's patrogenic metaphors, i.e. the possible connections between patrogenesis and Plato's political purpose.

⁴¹ Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, pp. 291-2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴³ Taylor warns interpreters not to take this passage as anything but straight humour: "We must not moralize here on the 'inadequate ideal of womanhood' in the ancient world. That women are more timid than men and less scrupulously fair in their dealings may or may not be true, but it is the average man's opinion all the world over as the modern novel and comic paper are enough to prove. As such, the assumption is good enough to build a humorous fairy-tale on." Taylor's interpretation is precisely what this one is meant to correct. See *A Commentary on Timaeus*, p. 635.

Rather than characterizing the *Timaeus* as anomalous on gender relations, as do its influential interpreters, I suggest that this passage of Plato's is essentially consistent with the content of many other of his dialogues.⁴⁴ It must be stressed, of course, that Plato remains a complex political and philosophical figure, and his political theory is open to divergent interpretations. Caution must be exercised, then, in asserting a final interpretation of his gendered metaphors. The task in the next section is to examine the receptacle passage of the *Timaeus* and identify some of its historical and political roots and precedents.

IV The receptacle passage in gendered-political context

The receptacle passage originates with Timaeus announcing a new beginning to the dialogue, explaining that, while two "categories" sufficed in the first part, he now requires a third class of being (48e). The first has always been the intelligible Forms, permanent and unchanging; the second is that which imitated the pattern, and was "generated and visible." The third category is "difficult of explanation and dimly seen"; it is "the receptacle, and in a manner the nurse, of all generation" (49b). This receptacle,

must always be called the same, for, inasmuch as she always receives all things, she never departs from her own nature and never, in any way or at any time, assumes a form like that of any of the things which enter into her; she is the natural recipient of all impressions, and is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them (50b-c).

⁴⁴ This consistency is disrupted somewhat by his inclusion of women in the guardian class. For a short commentary on the *Republic* see Appendix I.

Plato seems to contradict himself, for if the receptacle never adheres to the form of that which enters her, how can she change her appearance "by reason of them"? As well, the analogy that turns the Forms into a father would seem to go against Plato's earlier suggestion that the Forms are a model, on which the Demiurge bases the visible world. The main point he is establishing with this metaphor, however, remains the passivity and inertness of the receptacle. Timaeus employs a reproductive metaphor to explain this obscure concept: the receiving principle, in which generation takes place, can be likened to a mother; the "source or spring" is the father; and "the intermediate nature" which is in process of generation is the child (50d). To further emphasize that the receptacle shall have no form of her own, Timaeus compares her to a liquid that "shall be as inodorous as possible" in order to receive a scent of perfume (50e).

A truly mysterious and elusive concept, the receptacle is sometimes thought to be space, sometimes matter. To house all that is generated, it must occupy a space. Yet, that which is perpetually to receive, the mother and receptacle of all created and visible, "is not to be termed earth or air or fire or water ... but is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible" (51b). She partakes of the intelligible, the highest order of being, but is simultaneously apprehended only by a "kind of spurious reason" (52b). She is a fleeting shadow, hardly real, and incomprehensible. Moreover, we can have, according to Timaeus, only a "dreamlike sense" of her as "we are unable to cast off sleep and determine the truth" about this being or space (52c). Timaeus then provides an

equally obscure account of the generation of the elements using geometric shapes and mathematical formulae.

Plato's use of this patrogenic reproductive metaphor to describe the three categories of being demands more critical analysis than it has been given. All too often, Platonic scholars tend either to ignore the reproductive analogy in the narrative or to dismiss it as myth or science. The dialogue is likely an amalgam of myth and science, but as such it remains political precisely because certain ideas about women's inferiority would have to be present in order to create the conditions under which patrogenesis could be posited. Indeed, to dismiss Plato's comments as merely reflective of the current thinking in embryology removes him from politics, and casts him as politically benign. In fact, Plato is far more complex than this. In utilizing patrogenic metaphors, he plays into a whole mythical and political discourse about woman and the body that presupposes woman's "lack". When we evaluate the embryological literature of Plato's period, it becomes clear that it adheres to a phallogentric world view, quite apart from any empirical evidence. The patrogenic embryological literature takes as its starting point the universality of the male body and male experience, and the derivative nature of the female. Whether Plato actually believed men to be capable of patrogenesis, or whether he believed men to have existed before women on earth is beside the point. More to the point is the fact that Plato finds it politically useful to describe men as autonomous, self-generating beings.

Plato's patrogenic story of creation is developed and entertained against the backdrop of a masculinist political configuration and a phallogentric understanding of reproduction. It is entertained at a time in which women

themselves are almost entirely excluded from participation in many aspects of Athenian public life. Plato's *Timaeus* has the effect, if not the specific intent, of reinforcing this masculinist political configuration, justifying as it does the centrality and universality of the male and the inferiority of the female.

The gendered political backdrop to the *Timaeus* is characterized by the absence of women from political activity in the Athenian city-state. This does not mean women took no interest in politics, as there are references to them influencing and counseling their husbands on matters of state. But men alone, and only free men, were citizens (*politai*) in the true sense. The word used to describe women's relationship to the state was *astai*, which has been translated as 'citizen', but connotes only their ability to "share in the religious, legal and economic order of the Athenian community."⁴⁵ Of course, women who were slaves or metics did not even have that extensive a relationship to the state. In a city state that put such a premium on public identity and participation of its citizens, it is significant that women of all classes were excluded from political activity. Not only did women not speak publicly, women were ideally not even spoken *about* publicly. According to Pericles' famous funeral oration,

If I am to speak of womanly virtues, referring to those of you who will henceforth be in widowhood, I will sum up all in a brief admonition: Great is your glory if you fall not below the standard which nature has set for your sex, and great also is hers, of whom there is the least talk among men whether in praise or in blame.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 128.

⁴⁶ Pericles' speech is known to us through Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Vol. I, trans. Charles Forster Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), II: XLV, p. 341.

In other words, as Aristotle puts it, "A modest silence is a woman's crown."⁴⁷ Indeed, to be spoken about in public signified disrespect for a higher-class woman. With such constraints on their public life, women clearly could not participate in the activity of politics that so much defined the citizen of Athens.

Women's lack of participation in the public realm implies their location in the private, but the question remains as to what the separation between the *oikos* and the public realm connotes in the broad sense. The public realm in ancient Greece was primarily a realm of politics, the *polis*, and every citizen was thought to be, at least in part, publicly-oriented. In the public sphere, citizen-men, making up only a portion of the total Athenian population, conducted the affairs of the state. Opposed to this dimension of life, and sometimes even a threat to it, was the private life of the citizen. Each citizen was entitled to exercise freedom in his choice of how to live his private life, and this freedom was extended to metics and slaves as well.⁴⁸ Private life included the life of the family in the *oikos*, economic affairs, and some religious ceremonies; it also encompassed symposia, as Plato's dialogues often describe gatherings of men engaged in a private philosophical discourse. The public and private lives of male citizens were characterized by a freedom to move from one sphere to the other; indeed, these citizens not only had private lives, but were mandated by social convention to participate publicly in politics. Pericles captures the scorn

⁴⁷ Aristotle's paraphrase of Sophocles. Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker, rev. with Introduction and Notes by R.F. Stalley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1260a24, p. 36.

⁴⁸ Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes*, trans. J.A. Crook (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), p. 81.

saved for private men thusly, "For we alone regard the man who takes no part in public affairs, not as one who minds his own business, but as good for nothing."⁴⁹

The meaning of the public/private dichotomy was obviously quite different for women.⁵⁰ It manifested itself as a protective ideal, which may have only been enforced among the higher classes and in the city, an ideal whereby women were most appropriately located in the *oikos*. The presence of the ideal does not mean that women in fact never physically left the domestic realm, for especially poorer women would have had to travel to work as midwives or washerwomen, and to shop in the market. As well, women saw each other in Greek society and as a result this ideal did not prevent female friendships from developing. Often when women did leave their private quarters, they kept separate from male company and thus maintained the imperative of segregation. Significantly, the division between public and private also prevailed inside the upper-class *oikos*, in which men and women maintained separate living quarters. In the case of other men being present in the house, the women remained segregated so as to prevent any interchange between male company and female occupants.

⁴⁹ Thuc. II: XL, p. 329.

⁵⁰ It is important to note that not all women were located primarily in the private realm. Courtesans and prostitutes are an exception, as they did exist in the public sphere to some extent. And some of Socrates' monologues come from courtesan philosophers, Diotima and Aspasia in particular. Whatever their public roles, these female philosophers never actually appear in Platonic dialogues themselves, nor was philosophic participation similar to men's even a possibility for them. Women could be active in the private realm but their action in the public realm was "firmly rejected." On this latter point see Nancy Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 127.

The public/private divide was instituted as an idea to protect women's honour. This leads us to question why women needed protection at all, and protection from what? Codes of honour such as this are laden with political meaning, and the choice to regard women as in need of a special kind of protection indicates that certain assumptions are being made about women in general, i.e. that they are vulnerable and weak by nature, that their sexuality is untamed and must be controlled, or that they pose a threat to political order. Indeed, all of these themes emerge in the literary and philosophical works of ancient Athens. Plato is one of the few writers who entertains that idea of eliminating the public/private divide, at least in the ruling class, and to this extent one might assume that his theory transcends the concern with women's shame. In point of fact, Plato's elimination of the public/private divide is more likely motivated by the drive for citizen-unity; and it should be noted that women's admission to the guardian class is contingent on their already having fought and won the battle between the lower and higher dimensions of the soul. Women guardians, then, have learned to suppress bodily desire along the lines of Plato's masculine ideal.⁵¹

Nevertheless, it remains significant that at the same time as women were excluded from much of Greek cultural and political life, cultural and political life appears on the surface to be feminocentric, to borrow David Halperin's term. That is, Greek culture abounded with images in plays, poetry, and philosophy of women and reproduction, with stories of female goddesses and female characters. Halperin advises that the presence of

⁵¹ See Appendix 1.

such a feminocentrism is not at all contradictory to the actual absence of women from public life. Rather, the two go together, for Greek men "required the silence of women in public in order to employ this mode of displaced speech," in order that they might speak *for* women.⁵² Moreover, the public absence and silence of *women* permitted men to use "woman", her body, and her "difference" to investigate "the male imaginary, the poetics of male identity and self-definition."⁵³ Similarly, in Plato, images of birth and reproduction appear, not as subjects for investigation in and of themselves, but as tools in the pursuit of philosophic understanding about origins, and about masculine roles in the created universe. In the Platonic corpus, recall that the man, the masculine philosopher, is always the person to whom the monologue is addressed. Therefore, the "questioning and manipulation of what a woman is like, how like a man she is, are aimed above all at the promotion of a particular sort of male virtue."⁵⁴ It is no doubt true that in ancient Greece, as in any context, gender symbolism and discourses are varied and often competing, which means that it is impossible to draw final conclusions about their significance. Having said that, it is likely mistaken to see the emphasis on women within cultural works as a sign that women were highly valued, that women were valued for what they did well, or even that Greek men were weighing the benefits of gender parity.

⁵² David M. Halperin, "Why Is Diotima a Woman? Platonic Erós and the Figuration of Gender," in David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin, eds., *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 291.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁵⁴ Simon Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity: Ancient erotic fiction and the history of sexuality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 142.

Certainly it follows from the gendered separation of the *oikos* and the *polis* that the primary contribution that citizen-women could make to ancient Athens was reproductive. This works in reverse as well, as their reproductive capacities are often used as a justification for why women cannot have public roles. Significantly, even in Sparta, where women gained more political rights than women in Athens, women were still primarily valued for child bearing and rearing.⁵⁵ Women's lives in the *oikos* were generally centered around the maintenance and care of the next generation, whether that care was for their own children, or the children of others. It was permissible, also, for women to be midwives, and there was a network of women who would attend to a woman as she entered childbirth, or confinement.

Through child bearing and rearing, women contributed to the creation of the next generation of Athenian citizens. That is, Athenian law stated that it was through both parents that citizenship was conveyed to the next generation.⁵⁶ That both women and men contribute to the production of citizens would seem to indicate that Athenian law-makers believed women to contribute something important to the reproductive process in addition to the gestation of the child. However, this may not actually be the case, since this law served the political purpose of limiting the numbers of new

⁵⁵ Blundell, p. 157.

⁵⁶ The marriage contract also was necessary to ensure the legitimacy of children. This contract was not between man and woman, but was a oral agreement between father and son-in-law, whereby the son-in-law received the hand of his wife as well as her dowry. Marriage contracts did not establish women as property of their husbands in fourth-century Athens, but did establish a husband's guardianship over his wife, and assign to her the status of a minor. See Claudine Leduc, "Marriage in Ancient Greece," in Pauline Schmitt Pantel, ed., *A History of Women in the West, Vol I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 272-275.

citizens by delegitimizing children brought forth from male-citizen relationships with non-citizen females.

The question of how the Greeks assessed women's contribution to generation is, in the end, not a straightforward one. Halperin cites recent work in Greek embryology as proof "that a major, if not the dominant, theme in ancient thinking on this topic emphasized the contribution which the female makes to conception."⁵⁷ Certainly it is true that a number of sources identify women as contributing something important to the reproductive process beyond gestation, most notable among them are the Hippocratic writers. But there are also some key figures in ancient Greece who posit patrogenesis in one form or another. Moreover, where women's contribution is taken seriously, the male is, at the same time, offered as the biological standard against which the female's contribution is assessed.

Patrogenesis had some currency among playwrights, poets, philosophers, and even, as we have seen, among the Presocratics. The Pythagorean cosmology describes the male as the creator and the female as the passive receptor. Of the playwrights, Aeschylus is most famous for employing a patrogenic theme. In *Eumenides*, the last play of his Oresteian trilogy, Orestes, with the assistance of Apollo, defends his vengeful killing of his own mother on the basis that she had murdered Orestes' father, her husband, Agamemnon. Eumenides, or the Furies, who typically exact revenge on those who commit crimes against their blood relatives, demand punishment of Orestes for shedding "the blood of (his) mother, from

⁵⁷ Halperin, p. 278.

whence he derived his own."⁵⁸ Orestes, however, is acquitted in a trial largely on the basis of Apollo's defense:

The bearer of the so-called offspring is not the mother of it, but only the nurse of the newly-conceived fetus. It is the male who is the author of its being; while she, as a stranger for a stranger, preserves the young plant for those for whom the god has not blighted it in the bud. And I will show you proof of this assertion: one *may* become a father without a mother: there stands by a witness of this in the daughter of Olympian Zeus, who was not even nursed in the darkness of the womb...⁵⁹

In other words, because his mother is not the true parent but only a receptacle, Orestes is justified in killing her to avenge the death of his true parent, Agamemnon. So Aeschylus depicts a battle between two opposed understandings of parenthood; one which values the maternal role as essential, and the other, which denigrates the mother and elevates the importance of the paternal contribution. From Apollo's speech it is evident that the latter vision wins. Orestes asks the Furies whether they even consider him related by blood to his mother.⁶⁰ Despite interjections from the Furies that his mother nursed him with their shared blood,⁶¹ and despite the fact that, in Apollo's terms, his mother "is that body which gave him (Orestes) birth," the father in this case assumes the status of generative parent while the mother is a mere stranger, providing only soil for the young plant to grow.

Apart from Plato, the philosopher who has gained the most notoriety for patrogenesis is Aristotle. *On the Generation of Animals* details Aristotle's

⁵⁸ Aeschylus, *Eumenides* in *Greek Drama*, ed. with Intro. Moses Hadas (Toronto: Bantam, 1982), p. 70.

⁵⁹ *Eumenides*, p. 71.

⁶⁰ *Eumenides*, p. 69.

⁶¹ Which might mean she nourished him with their shared blood while he was in the womb. Or Aeschylus might believe what the Hippocratic writers did: that menstrual blood nourished the fetus. This they based on the observation that menstruation ceased during pregnancy.

thesis on reproduction, including the idea that men contribute the form and women the matter to reproduction. He believed menstrual fluid, as the female variant of sperm or seed, to be the matter from which the child was formed. Aristotle's theory of reproduction needs to be placed in the context of his theory of form and matter. While matter is inseparable from form, and while form does not have an autonomous existence outside its material instantiation, the form of a thing is nevertheless its essence. Although male and female each contribute something to the reproductive process, what they contribute and the importance of their contribution is quite distinct. This is not straight patrogenesis, as we find in Aeschylus, but here the male is still the primary generative parent: "the male is the active partner, the one which originates the movement," according to Aristotle, "and the female *qua* female is the passive one." As he puts it, "the physical part, the body, comes from the female, and the Soul from the male, since the Soul is the essence of a particular body."⁶² Part of woman's deficiency in reproduction stems from her coldness, which in turn means that she "lacks the power to concoct semen" from her menstrual fluid, and it also means that the child gestates very slowly in the mother's womb. That Aristotle had not discovered the existence of the egg is of little consequence to the quality of his theory, for many of his biological differentiations between male and female are not based on empirical observation, but on politics. Most significant is his universalization of male reproductive processes, leading him to conclude that, "A woman is as it were an infertile

⁶² Aristotle, "On the Generation of Animals," excerpted in Mary Briody Mahowald, ed., *Philosophy of Woman: An Anthology of Classic and Current Concepts* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), p. 268.

male; the female, in fact, is female on account of inability of a sort,"⁶³ i.e. woman is defined by her lack of male properties. Indeed, "the female is as it were a deformed male"⁶⁴; the male is the universal, biological standard, the prototype of the human being, compared to which the female can only fail to measure up because of her difference.⁶⁵

The Hippocratic treatises, most likely written by various authors, perhaps none of whom were the historical Hippocrates, generally assert a female seed as contributing the make-up of the child. The treatises make reference to the fact that "growth belongs, not only to the man's secretion, but also to that of the woman."⁶⁶ In addition, however, there is the use of the plant analogy, whereby the author states that "from beginning to end the process of growth in plants and in humans is exactly the same."⁶⁷ According to Helen King, the identification of woman with nurturing soil

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁶⁵ Aristotle has his defenders, however, who attempt to rescue his views on reproduction from the charge of misogyny. Among them is D.M. Balme, who argues that Aristotle understood the mother to contribute "to the formation and development of the fetus in a way that bears some analogy to the male" (p. 21). Leaving aside the phallogocentric manner of formulating his thesis, the argument remains problematic. He suggests that Aristotle considers matter to be in some sense preformed, or at least highly diversified. Menstrual blood, according to this theory, has all of the potential body parts of both sexes, and the male seed brings to the matter (or menstrual blood) activity and motion, it "brings the fetus form and defining character" (p. 23). This is precisely the point, the female contains the raw materials, and the male contributes the vital "soul movements." Even the most extreme patrogenic belief will not deny the mother as contributing *something*, be it gestative nourishment, or matter. Aristotle's is but another variation on patrogenesis, and it is a mistake to equate his theory of reproduction with a benign scientific one. See "Anthropos Anthropon Genna: Human is Generated by Human," in G.R. Dunstan, ed., *The Human Embryo: Aristotle and the Arabic and European Traditions* (Devon: University of Exeter Press, 1990).

⁶⁶ *Regimen I: XXVII*, in *Hippocrates, Vol. IV*, with an English translation by W.H.S. Jones (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1931), p. 265.

⁶⁷ Hippocrates, "On the Nature of the Child," quoted in Helen King, "Making a Man: Becoming Human in Early Greek Medicine," in Dunstan, ed., *The Human Embryo*, p. 16.

is a common one in Greek literature and embryology,⁶⁸ and Plato himself makes such a reference. The idea presented in the Hippocratic writings is that just as the health of the plant depends upon the soil in which it grows, so too does the health of the mother determine the health of the fetus. This is not, in itself, incorrect, provided that the imagery does not transform into that of the male farmer sowing his seed in the inert soil, which is exactly how Aeschylus describes generation. While the Hippocratic treatises are generally positive in their assessment of the female role in reproduction, they remain firmly within a masculinist model in their use of the male as the model human specimen. Normal bodily processes in the female are enumerated at length, cast as different, and ultimately pathologized. Of course, they can only be pathologized on the basis that they do not conform to what is normal for human beings (read: the male).

Timaeus too makes use of the seed in soil analogy toward the conclusion of the dialogue and within the larger context of pathologizing the female body. After reasserting the true role of man—to exercise his intellect, show a love of wisdom, and learn the "harmonies and revolutions of the universe" (90d)—and after reminding his listeners that the punishment for a man who does not follow such a course is rebirth as a woman, Timaeus describes the process of reproduction. The male "organ of generation" has a natural lust, a lust that is masterful and does not obey reason; women have a womb or matrix that is essentially an animal living inside them, anxious to procreate. Lust and a desire for mastery on the part of the male

⁶⁸ King, p. 17.

is considered normal. Alternatively, the womb-animal can behave quite abnormally,

when remaining unfruitful long beyond its proper time, gets discontented and angry, and wandering in every direction through the body, closes up the passages of the breath, and, by obstructing respiration, drives them to extremity, causing all varieties of disease...(91c).

Plato's solution for such illness in women is sexual intercourse and procreation, and in this recommendation he sounds much like the Hippocratic writers who prescribe intercourse and pregnancy for just about every "disease" of the female body.⁶⁹ Hippocratic writers also share this belief that the womb can wander in the woman's body and cause her to suffocate.⁷⁰ The procreation that Timaeus recommends to this suffocating woman and desirous man is akin to "plucking the fruit from the tree." The man "sow[s] in the womb, as in a field, animals unseen by reason of their smallness and without form" (91d). These animals are "separated and matured within," and brought into light, thus completing the generation of animals. Plato, like many of his predecessors, relies here on the analogy of woman as inert soil in which the animal from the male seed is grown and developed. He also seems to be implying that the fetus is entirely formed before making contact with the female. These passages reinforce what Plato has already outlined in the receptacle passage, i.e. that he is preoccupied with images of patrogenesis, but simply relies on a different metaphor for its transmission. Plato's failure to acknowledge here that the

⁶⁹ Hippocrates, "On the Generating Seed and The Nature of the Child," in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, eds., *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A source book in translation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 86.

⁷⁰ Hippocrates, "Diseases of Women 1," in *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A source book in translation*, ed. Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 90.

womb has a unique capacity, distinct from the male's reproductive organs, indicates his larger inability to acknowledge difference of any kind, especially where women are concerned. He can only include women's reproductive organs to the extent that he can describe them as sources of illness and disease. Natural differences, then, between men and women cannot be acknowledged in a neutral fashion, but need to be ordered hierarchically: one natural trait is universalized (the masculine); one trait is pathologized or elided altogether (the feminine).

The *Timaeus* is not the only dialogue in which Plato articulates a patrogenic theory. Indeed, in both the *Menexenus* and the *Republic*, Plato uses a different metaphor for the transmission of this idea: autochthony. Autochthony, an idea deeply embedded in ancient Athenian consciousness, suggests that the origins of the human race and of cities is in the earth itself. Being born from the soil, or having ancestors who claimed to be, allows citizens to declare an original citizenship in that land—a "natural" citizenship. Athenians asserted their autochthony, claiming ultimate title and authentic citizenship, and excluding immigrants, foreigners, and invaders from membership. When Plato turns to the autochthonous metaphor, he does so to assert the authenticity of Athenian citizenship (as in the *Menexenus*) and to justify and elicit consent to a hierarchical, natural ordering of classes (as in the *Republic*). There is, of course, an additional dimension to autochthony in that it elides women's roles in reproduction by focusing on the rise of human beings from the earth.

Briefly, in the *Menexenus*, Socrates recounts a speech that he learned from his teacher Aspasia, the female rhetorician. In the speech, he honours the nobility of men of who were "sprung from good fathers," and

whose ancestors arose from the earth. It has been posited that, since Plato declares that the earth that bore them was female, he is acknowledging women's important contribution.⁷¹ But this thesis is undermined by Plato's subsequent remarks that "*a woman in her conception and generation is but the imitation of the earth, and not the earth of the woman*" (238a, emphasis mine). The similarities to the *Symposium* are striking as Plato denies using the human mother as the source of his metaphor and casts her as an imitator.

The autochthonous myth of the metals found in the *Republic* describes a similarly self-generating masculine city. Socrates tells the citizens of the city—all men—to look upon one another as brethren, born from the same mother earth and nursed by her as well (414e). Those who rule are composed of gold, those who protect the city, silver, and the farmers and artisans have iron and brass in their constitution. When sons are born (and indeed, there is no discussion of female children much less human mothers) their metal content will be assessed to ensure that they will be raised in the appropriate class. To guarantee that only those with gold are raised to be guardians, the creators of the noble lie must convince the subsequent generations that the state will be undermined if anyone but the gold race rules. Socrates consciously invokes autochthony to create an artificial unity in a city of conventional origins. He expresses a need for an "opportune falsehood," and a "noble lie," to persuade the inhabitants of the city to accept the hierarchical specialization and division of classes.

⁷¹ See Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "Myths and the Origins of Cities: Reflections on the Autochthony Theme in Euripides' *Ion*," in J. Peter Euben, ed., *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

Creating such strong class distinctions within the city has the potential of being highly divisive, so Socrates develops the mythical legitimization strategy in the form of a sanction against artisans and farmers ruling, in order that they will consent to this hierarchical arrangement rather than resent it.

Aside from the fact that this is an all-male city, to which Plato adds women of the various metal types later, these men who are born of the earth are decontextualized from actual reproduction. A city that has autochthony built into its self-understandings is a city that is unwilling and unable to comprehend the truth of where human life must inevitably come from. That is, the myth severs their connection to the human cycles of birth, life and death to which they are, in truth, inextricably attached. Using such an origin myth as the foundation of the city precludes from the beginning any appreciation of the centrality of women's roles.

The ultimate effect of patrogenesis is to rob women, not just of a political role, but of a reproductive role as well. Patrogenesis is not just one theory among others that tries to make sense of the mysteries of reproduction. It is of a piece with an important trend in ancient Athens which posits the male as the paradigmatic being of the human species. In this important sense, patrogenesis is infused with phallogocentric politics; it is imbued with prior notions of women's "lack" and is therefore far from a benign scientific theory.

V Plato's patrogenic politics

Plato shares with his contemporaries an affinity for depicting natural phenomena as well as social relationships using a patrogenic metaphor.

Just what Plato finds attractive and useful in this metaphor needs to be considered. It is tempting to surmise that Plato deliberately uses patrogenesis to further the ideological cause of women's seclusion in ancient Athens, but in fact, his use of the metaphor may have more to do with a life that he desires for men, a life of masculine virtue, than with an overt project to subordinate women. Certainly there is a strong relationship between creation stories of the cosmogonical type and birth metaphors—how could this not be the case when cosmogonies are a quest to understand where we came from? But this is a complex connection and one that cannot be easily assessed.

One suggestive theory, advanced by Mary O'Brien and addressed briefly in Chapter One, is that male philosophers and politicians are drawn to origin stories because they are alienated from the material experience of reproduction.⁷² It will be useful to examine this thesis further because of its relevance to Plato in particular. Men's reproductive alienation leads them to appropriate women's experiences of pregnancy and birth for the masculine realm of politics. According to this appropriation theory, male philosophers such as Plato would acknowledge female difference as a source of power and subsequently appropriate that difference and concomitant power. Also implicit in this appropriation thesis is the belief that women in fact have some mysterious creative potency that itself is a natural source of power. Robbie Kahn extends the appropriation thesis by claiming that origin myths "attack" and "dismember" the female body as they draw upon it for metaphors. Kahn asserts that the Western tradition is

⁷² Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

self-subverting, for in "sacking birth for metaphors" this tradition acknowledges "that no descriptions of commensurate power can be derived from male experience."⁷³

Although rhetorically appealing and provocative, the attempts to posit such a causal force behind Plato's patrogenesis, to identify a single reason for Plato's use of patrogenesis, are likely to be incomplete or reductionist. Furthermore, these causal connections are themselves related to, and often serve as the foundation for, particular political visions of feminist politics. Both O'Brien and Kahn imply that there is a deep cultural or philosophic truth about birth and reproduction that patriarchy has repressed when, in fact, there may be no such deep truth or meaning. Birth and reproduction, as biological processes, have only the meaning and significance that we culturally and philosophically attach to them. To argue differently is, I believe, to commit two philosophic errors: the first is biological determinism (women give birth therefore they have a deep, creative power that is absent in men); the second, related to the first, is cultural universalism (positing birth and reproduction as having some pan-cultural meaning when in fact we know that different cultures in different historical periods attach very different significance to these events). The upshot of these criticisms is not that we should relegate birth back to a strictly biological process, wherein it is devoid of meaning, because of course human beings are always engaged in the process of assigning

⁷³ Robbie Pfeufer Kahn, *Bearing Meaning: The Language of Birth* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 4. For further elaboration of the appropriation thesis see Page duBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), esp. Chapter 8.

meaning to the events we participate in. In this sense, human birth and reproduction have never been exclusively biological events.⁷⁴ The point here is that the appropriation thesis, as a means to explain Plato, is itself political and may lead feminist theory into an unnecessary quagmire.

As an alternative to appropriation, I suggest that it may be more productive to think of Plato's use of patrogenesis in *Timaeus* as a theoretical fabrication. On this theory, Plato's use of birth and reproduction are entirely creative, and reflect no deep truth about the processes themselves. To be certain, he borrows the ideas of pregnancy and birth from woman. But patrogenesis reflects Plato's *wholly fabricated image of pregnancy and birth* rather than a patriarchal inversion of reality. This fabrication thesis is distinct from appropriation in a subtle but nonetheless vital way. Plato's patrogenesis is not appropriation from women precisely because appropriation requires that he acknowledge women's unique reproductive ability.⁷⁵ In the context of this dialogue at least, Plato underestimates and undervalues women's contribution. In this sense, Plato's reproductive metaphor appears to have little to do with his actual assessment of women, but rather has a lot to do with a masculine politics, even a masculine fantasy.

⁷⁴ Feminist theorists have made this point forcefully. Mary O'Brien is foremost among them in *The Politics of Reproduction*. Virginia Held as well makes the case that to locate birth in the solely physical realm severs it from a truly human experience, and confines it to the status of animalistic processes. See Virginia Held, "Preconceptions of Birth and Death," *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

⁷⁵ The critique of appropriation has its origins in Halperin (1990), who argues that Plato is unable to recognize the contribution of woman to reproduction in the *Symposium*. It is in response to Halperin's point that I began to conceptualize Plato's reproductive metaphor as fantasy and fabrication.

Just exactly why Plato appeals to patrogenesis may be impossible to uncover. Plato's image of reproduction, as I have already suggested, is not the product of his own reproductive alienation. However, his masculine fantasy about reproduction may nonetheless be the result of a *perceived reproductive alienation*, which may in turn lead him to inflate and glorify the male role at the expense of the female. At the very least we can say that the images of reproduction that he does present, his characterization of reproduction as a masculine and awe-inspiring process, is his own contrivance. Plato is not robbing creative potency from woman as part of some biologically-inspired compensatory act but rather he is *fabricating the very idea of creative potency*.

Consider Plato's *Symposium*, the dialogue on Eros in which Plato puts the metaphors of pregnancy and birth to work for his epistemology. In the *Symposium*, Plato diminishes in significance women's pregnancy and birth experiences. Even in the discussion of the physical aspects of giving birth, men as well as women are depicted as pregnant and giving birth to human beings. Then, at the highest and most perfect level of Eros, *men alone* are pregnant and give birth to ideas in Beauty, the truly immortal progeny which so outshines its prototype. Plato can only simultaneously disparage all that is bodily and borrow birth for the masculine philosopher by transposing birth from the physical realm (where he thinks it is) to the metaphysical realm. In the *Symposium*, Plato demonstrates both his *abhorrence* as well as his *fantasy-like image* of what birth and pregnancy are. In one sense, nothing is more base than human reproduction. Yet, at the same time, no bodily process holds as much theoretical appeal for Plato. The image of birth that he creates is a wholly fabricated, glorified one

which he manipulates with such finesse that, in the end, the material experience of birth appears as a mere imitation of the birth of metaphysical ideas in *Beauty*. This philosophical maneuver is not strictly an appropriation because, again, appropriation implies recognition of *what women can do*. It is this recognition that Plato does not give. Instead he projects or transposes this image of a powerful, awe-inspiring process onto woman and simultaneously annexes it for the male for his philosophical journey of knowledge acquisition.

Patrogenesis in the *Timaeus* participates in a somewhat different Platonic reproductive fantasy. The image of the power of pregnancy and birth recedes, leaving behind only male gods, male human beings, and of course, the paternal, life-giving Forms as the originary and generative beings in the universe. Plato does equip the maternal receptacle with gestative and birthing ability, but robs those two roles of any creative or intellectual dimensions. The receptacle is not powerful but is instead passive, dimly seen, neither space nor matter. She is mysterious and different from the paternal Forms, but not endowed with unique power comparable to the Forms. Moreover, since women are a secondary creation, and almost incidental to reproduction in this formulation, patrogenesis makes woman irrelevant, both politically and in terms of reproduction. Like the fantasy of pregnancy and birth in the *Symposium*, this cosmogonical fantasy depicts the incredible power of life-generation, the fabricated image of creative potency. The *Timaeus* is different from the *Symposium* in that the reproductive image has lost most of its feminine dimensions, and the great creative potency stems from the male act of seed generation. Here Plato is not "sacking birth for metaphors"; rather, he

taps into patrogenic embryology to depict an all-powerful process of male seed-generation. That the Greeks did not possess an advanced science of embryology in no way exculpates them for their theory of patrogenesis, as a lack of full knowledge would not necessarily lead them to conclude that women were incidental to reproduction.⁷⁶

In the *Symposium* as in the *Timaeus*, the male role is enhanced: in the former, males are empowered with gestational and birthing ability; in the latter, the female-associated aspects of reproduction are downplayed while the act of insemination is glorified. In both cases, male creative potency is fabricated, drawing on the perceived power of the female role in reproduction and subsequently transposing it to the male. Ontologically this projection of a male-empowered image of reproduction onto his cosmogony suggests Plato's uncomfortable philosophic relationship to the body, and in particular the female body. Plato demonstrates in this as in other dialogues his strong philosophical preference for the soul and the metaphysical as opposed to the body and the physical. The *Timaeus* affirms this soul/body dichotomy at every turn, as men are punished for improper care of the soul by being reborn as women. This is Plato's warning to philosophic men of Athens: he is restating the importance of conforming to a particular virtuous code that abstains from bodily desire, pleasure and trivial emotion, regularly called 'womanish'. Women, for Plato, are inextricably linked to the body, unable to escape its base processes and trappings. As for the receptacle, her status as material or ideal is

⁷⁶ As Mary Saller points out, even after women's contribution was scientifically proven, there was a reluctance to abandon patrogenesis. See Mary J. Saller, "Short Communication: Some Fallacies in Embryology Through the Ages," in Dunstan, ed., *The Human Embryo*, p. 224.

ambiguous. She is neither completely. The paternal Forms, on the other hand, are entirely ideal by definition; they are empowered to beget with little female or bodily assistance. The *Timaeus* achieves parthenogenesis in the realm of ideas. And insofar as phallocentrism is the universalization of the male and the relegation of the female to the status of perpetual analogue, patrogenesis is its ultimate act.

What remains to be considered, beyond the phallocentric implications of patrogenesis, is the political value of reproductive metaphors for Plato. What *is* the value of a reproductive metaphor? The political value of reproduction as a metaphor in the *Timaeus* stems partly from its status as a "natural" event. Nature has many uses in political theory, including its ability to justify a preconceived political solution. Plato repeatedly invokes the *natural* ordering of reality as the *authoritative* ordering of reality. The philosopher, in understanding the Forms, apprehends the best, most natural pattern on which the actual *polis* should be based. Plato's cosmogony, his detection of order in the cosmos, is designed to reveal the correspondence between the *polis* and the cosmos. Such a correspondence legitimizes his political arrangement. Part and parcel of this legitimation exercise is the use of the natural metaphor of generation or reproduction. The political effect of the *Timaeus* is that it eliminates the need for public, political discussion of the best *polis*. If the true *polis* is patterned on the cosmos then it needs only to be revealed. In this sense, the theory that Plato is an anti-political thinker has merit, as he reveals his preference for a preconceived political solution over politics itself.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ For elaboration of this point see Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Toronto: Little, Brown and

At the same time, Plato's use of a natural metaphor, his reliance on the idea that the *polis* has a natural ordering based on the patterns of the universe itself, serves him well in his battle against Athenian sophists. For the sophists, there are no absolute values or morals, no natural forms of justice. Truth itself is subjective; thus, one political arrangement is as legitimate and defensible as the next. Sophistic teachings not only legitimate democracy as a political configuration, they educate Athenian citizens on how to enhance their performance in a democratic forum. Obviously this poses an enormous challenge for Plato, who wishes to enshrine a very specific political framework in Athens and who views democracy as the epitome of chaos and disunity in the *polis*. Patrogenesis evokes the birth of order for Plato. It assists his case against those who would advance democracy at the expense of what Plato argues is a natural political order.

Of course Plato chooses, not just any natural, reproductive metaphor for his purposes, but a patrogenic metaphor. This metaphor, I have argued, is one of male-empowerment through the fantasy of male creative potency. It is this incredible potency of the male creator that gives Plato's cosmogony its force. Male potency as depicted through the reproductive metaphor serves another purpose for Plato as well: it augments his project to reshape and redefine masculinity.⁷⁸ Throughout the dialogue are

Co., 1960), pp. 32-44; and Gregory Vlastos, ed., *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Vol. II (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971).

⁷⁸ One of the best discussions of Platonic ideals of masculinity is found in Halperin's "Why Is Diotima a Woman?" Wendy Brown also addresses Plato's attempts to redefine Athenian masculinity; she argues that Plato removes the agonistic, wealth-seeking drive from masculinity, and replaces it with conventionally feminine traits. Plato, she suggests, attempts "to relocate knowledge, knowing, and philosophy to a sphere less soaked by masculinist political power than the one it currently inhabits"

references to the primacy of men in creation, to their autonomy, and to their self-sufficiency. Plato envisions men's philosophic task to be nothing short of the highest comprehension of the order and workings of the universe itself. On an immediate political level, Plato urges in the *Republic* as elsewhere that young men take up the architectonic task of regenerating the *polis* in its predemocratic configuration.⁷⁹ He implores men to resist the excesses and temptations of democratic Athens, to rebuff the pursuit of wealth and the superficial practice of rhetoric.

Such challenges require a heightened, finely tuned sort of masculinity, different from that accepted in ancient Athens. This idealized masculinity, according to Plato, is epitomized in carefully controlled, wise and virtuous philosophic behaviour. It is reflected in his mind over body imperative, and thus integrated into his ontology. In this assessment, patrogenesis comprises an essential feature of this transformed masculine ideal. Only with the glorified power of self-reproduction—a power far above and beyond woman's capability—will Athenian men be able to rise to the philosophic and political challenges that Plato has articulated for them.

(p. 162). Whatever alteration Plato is making to masculinity, he also reaffirms what Brown calls the "traditional masculine virtues of the Greeks—temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice" (p. 162). Moreover, as she points out, his project neither demonstrates a concern for gender justice nor undertakes a "defense of the feminine", as Arlene Saxonhouse contends (p. 161). Rather, "Plato's subversion of conventional assumptions about gender is deployed to disturb a larger web of assumptions about political life and philosophic endeavor" (p. 163). So, too, I argue, is Plato's use of reproductive metaphors in the *Timaeus* about redefining Athenian masculinity and reshaping the notion of politics. Plato is able to use femininity, by feminizing philosophy or empowering men with procreative potency, to accomplish his political ends. See Wendy Brown, "Supposing Truth Were A Woman...": Plato's Subversion of Masculine Discourse," in Nancy Tuana, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994).

⁷⁹ For a discussion of Plato's architectonic vision, see Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chapter 2.

VI Conclusion

In examining Plato's creation story of the *Timaeus* as well as his autochthonous themes, this chapter has attempted to come to terms with Plato's purpose in using the origin story in his political theory. It is evident that there were, for Plato, compelling philosophical and political reasons for turning to the origins discourse. The origins discourse allowed him to use the language and ideas of the Presocratics as well as to respond to their important ideas. Furthermore, this discourse opened up a unique opportunity for Plato to recreate the city of Athens in its natural, predemocratic form. Of course using this language of nature also leads Plato to enter into a highly gendered, patrogenic political language. His intent may be mythical, but the effects of his theory are no less political, no less significant, for being mythical. Myth serves the important political function of rendering conventional human relationships natural and beyond question, and Plato does not hesitate to summon myth for this purpose when it suits him.

The tendency to use fanciful narratives for convenient political ends can be seen in the thought of Thomas Hobbes as well.

III Hobbes and the Discourse on Origins

Turning attention to the early modern period, and to the thinker often identified as the first modern, the focus on political origin stories must inevitably be drawn away from cosmogony in the broad sense and toward the practical politics of constitutional theory. That Thomas Hobbes was not a cosmogonist, that he did not ask in his political philosophy questions about the origins of the universe and humanity in no way indicates a lesser concern with origins. Hobbes's concern was with the origins of power and politics, with the origins of political society. This is an interest that Plato and Hobbes share, hence Plato's use of autochthonous metaphors. Although Hobbes's political theory is motivated by the study of the best possible constitutional arrangement for seventeenth-century England, it is nonetheless influenced by his deep commitment to the mechanistic, scientific world view. He still shares in the origins impulse, that drive to break down in a logical sequence the theoretical beginnings of any given phenomenon, such as political society. His origins impulse is evident in his development of the state of nature and the social contract, the two components of his origin story, to explain the origins and workings of the civil state.¹

Given that Hobbes is typically cast as a rational, scientific thinker, we need to account for the motivation and impetus behind his origin narrative. In other words, there needs to be some explanation as to why Hobbes finds the seemingly fanciful exercise of hypothesizing origins

¹ For a recent treatment of Hobbes on the subject of origins see Matthew H. Kramer, *Hobbes and the Paradoxes of Political Origins* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

persuasive in the first place. Guided by this question, this chapter traces the political and scientific influences on Hobbes. What we find is that Hobbes's contemporaries themselves are immersed in origins-thinking, and so for Hobbes to provide a sustained and consistent argument against the dominant constitutional theories of his epoch he must enter the origins discourse. By placing his narrative of origins in this political-constitutional context, it is possible to demonstrate how the various theories of his era influence his own account, and the degree to which Hobbes is able to appropriate and transform elements of opposing theories for his own purposes.

Examination of the impetus underlying Hobbes's use of an origin story must necessarily involve examination of the role that mechanistic science plays in his theory. Although the story of origins may appear fanciful to modern readers, the device of the state of nature arises out of Hobbes's fascination with geometric principles and mechanistic science and with their application to the problems of politics. His origin story is part of his attempt to build a rational politics on the firmest scientific foundation possible. The state of nature permits Hobbes to examine the basic "units" of the state, while the Leviathan is the rational, reassembled product of Hobbes's efforts. The social contract, which comprises the second component of Hobbes's origin narrative, embodies the rights and obligations of subjects and sovereign.

However, the scientific dimension is not the whole story. By the time Hobbes writes the *Leviathan* he is aware that the problems of politics are becoming more complex and require corresponding innovations. He sees that political success is contingent on people being convinced of the logic

of his arguments. And so, for this reason, Hobbes began to frame his overall constitutional arguments in more deliberate, more convincing language. His origin story, integral to his theory from the beginning, actually increases in importance because of its instrumental value as a device of persuasion. In the rhetorically-enhanced origin story of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes shows himself to be a strategic politician, summoning the most powerful language for his purposes, including religious language.

I The political-constitutional origins discourse

To understand the purpose of Hobbes's origin story it is necessary to come to terms with the political-constitutional environment in which he was immersed. To a large extent, Hobbes's period is one in which political thinkers are entirely preoccupied with narratives of origins as a means to justify their preferred political programs. It is important to recognize, however, that despite the ongoing polemical debates in the seventeenth-century about the validity and plausibility of specific origin stories, the ultimate concern is with political outcomes, for this is a highly-charged and unsettled period in which the wrong origin story could be seen as a threat to the ordered balance of the regime. Hobbes is embroiled in this political debate, but his origins-approach differs in significant ways from that of his contemporaries. This introductory section examines these differences, as well as the ways in which Hobbes makes strategic use of key aspects of other origin narratives in order ultimately to subvert them.

To set the scene, Hobbes begins his origin story with a state of nature device, a story of an anarchic and presocial state which is ultimately

transcended by a social contract. While the social contract signifies the origin of civil society, a peaceful and orderly state governed by the sovereign authority, it would not have the same meaning without the venture into the fictitious state of nature. Present in his political theory from the beginning—but more elaborately detailed in the *Leviathan* than in previous works—the state of nature narrative lays the groundwork for the kind of social contract Hobbes proposes. A markedly different effect is achieved by John Rawls, for example, who, although a social contract theorist, does not tell an origin story. Rawls' veil of ignorance and original position are more hypothetical scenarios than they are narratives of origins. Hobbes's social contract is hypothetical in one sense, but his origin story has a narrative quality that distinguishes it from conventional political theorizing, even as he tells us there was never a state of nature.

Hobbes's origin story is about conventional human associations, and this marks a contrast with the Platonic origin story. Hobbes characterizes his presocial state as devoid of justice and morality, for justice and morality are not essential or intrinsic features of human nature. There is no true or fundamental notion of justice to be uncovered. Overt conventionalism of this sort would be anathema to Plato, for whom there is not only a deep tension between nature and convention but an ultimate Form of Justice to be discovered through contemplation. Therefore, in contrast with his ancient predecessor, Hobbes appeals not to nature to construct his human association but to a practical, scientific strategy. All of this is not to say, however, that Hobbes demonstrates no commitment to a moral order, for the social contract depends upon the existence of the eternal laws of nature which lead state-of-nature inhabitants to create peace. Peace and order are

indisputable, normative goods for Hobbes. In the end, this fact brings Hobbes closer to Plato than Hobbes's commitment to conventionalism might suggest.

Despite the apparent metaphysical difference between Hobbes's contract and Plato's cosmogony, residing in both theories is an ontological commitment to establishing order at whatever cost. The cost in both cases, of course, is democracy and even politics itself. In Plato's case, as I have discussed, we have a thinker deeply suspicious of the chaos associated with democratic contestation. Democracy is Plato's political reality; thus his political philosophy is directed at undermining it, and at returning to a glorified, pre-democratic Athens. Of course, in Hobbes's England, democracy is not even discussed as a serious constitutional option. Nevertheless, as we will see, populism of a sort, and a demand for more control by the people or their representatives in Parliament, is present. Hobbes repeatedly blames this chaotic, populist approach, among other things, for the constitutional disorder and Civil War. Like Plato, Hobbes desires the creation of order and civility above all else—he is even willing to support Cromwell in the Engagement Controversy because he alone has the power to deliver order to the regime.

No wonder, then, that Plato and Hobbes both turn to an origin narrative: what better way to create order anew than to hearken back to an originary place and time? Yet the two theorists use origins very differently and their differences get to the heart of Hobbes's criticism of the seventeenth-century origins discourse as well. In Plato's case, both the autochthonous origin story and his cosmogony reveal what glory has been lost in departing the more natural political configuration of aristocracy. His

attempt to bring the lessons of the mythical Atlantis to bear on the democratic *polis* is case in point that the origins of Athens, and the origins of the universe, are normative for Plato. The golden age has passed, but is summoned to the present by Plato's use of origin narratives.

But Hobbes's origin story does not prescribe any *particular* political solution. The state of nature shows what could happen if civil peace is not maintained, and the social contract demonstrates by contrast the peace that would be possible if people behaved as if they had created society under these hypothetical terms. Hobbes's origin narrative is used as both a caution about how circumstances might look if order is not established and as a justification for his political-constitutional theory. As a foil, a circumstance to be avoided, the state of nature is effective: it is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short."² It is a state of brutality, wherein all have a right to all things, but in which there can be none of the markers of "commodious living," property or security. There is a lack of just or moral codes to hinder peoples' pursuit of everything; additionally, people possess the right of nature which mandates their self-protection above all else. Where there is no common power, there is no justice, only a state of war: "Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man."³

² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Richard Tuck, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Part I: Chapter 13, 89 (abbreviated hereafter as I: 13, 89.)

³ *Lev* I: 13, 88. Hobbes makes a nostalgic example of ancient Greece, the "golden age" of great "simplicity" in which subjects obeyed authority and did not entertain the "folly" of "measuring what was just by the sayings and judgments of private men." By contrast there is nothing nostalgic about the state of nature. Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen (De Homine and De Cive)*, Bernard Gert, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), p. 97 (abbreviated hereafter as *De Cive*.)

That the state of nature is not prescriptive distinguishes it, not only from Plato, but from the predominant approach in origins-thinking in seventeenth-century England. Almost all of the early seventeenth-century English writers used what Gordon Schochet labels a genetic strategy, that is they believed that the beginnings of a phenomenon give insight into its present formation.⁴ Patriarchalists relied on both the originary power of Adam and the grant of power from God to rulers to justify divine right theory and absolute monarchy. Consent theorists believed that an original popular sovereignty determined the right of subjects to resist or limit monarchic power. The Levellers, to take one example, believed there had been an original contract which should be renewed through their *Agreements of the People*. Those who proffered the idea that England had been ruled under an ancient constitution based their view that power should be shared by king, lords and commons on the belief that this reflected the ancient balance of the commonwealth. The origins of power, and the original political configuration of England, was understood to be all-significant to determining how things should be currently.

In a very limited sense Hobbes, too, is a genetic theorist. He also places a great deal of emphasis on how things began. And often when his critics take issue with his theory, they take issue with its foundations as well. Sir Robert Filmer expresses bewilderment at Hobbes's use of natural right and consent theory to sanction the royalist side, but he also sees dangerous

⁴ G.J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), pp. 21, 229.

implications in Hobbes origins narrative, not the least of which was the justification for Cromwell's rule. Responding to *De Cive* and *Leviathan* Filmer writes:

I consent with him about the rights of exercising government, but I cannot agree to his means of acquiring it. It may seem strange I should praise his building and yet mislike his foundation, but so it is. His *jus naturae* [right of nature] and his *regnum institutum* [kingdom by institution] will not down with me, they appear full of contradiction and impossibilities.⁵

Filmer's reaction to Hobbes typifies genetic thinking in seventeenth-century England. The conclusion is worthless if the method is wrong; the derivation of the source of power is almost as important as the constitutional theory itself.

The upshot of all of this is that, in order to critique his opponents' political-constitutional theories, Hobbes must enter the origins discourse as well. He does so on two levels. First, he strategically counters the *content* of other theorists' origin narratives, poking holes in each theory from consent to patriarchalism. Indeed, Hobbes goes to great lengths to undermine the other arguments, appropriating aspects of each of them, but agreeing with not one of them completely.⁶ Second, he calls into question the entire strategy or method of extrapolating political conclusions from origin stories. It is this latter point that renders Hobbes's status as a genetic thinker questionable. Certainly "how things began"

⁵ Sir Robert Filmer, "Observations *Concerning* the Originall of Government, Upon Mr Hobs *Leviathan*, Mr Milton against *Salmasius*, H. Grotius *De Jure Belli*," in Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, Johann P. Sommerville, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 184-5.

⁶ Quentin Skinner brings out this point in his discussion of Hobbes theory of political liberty. See "Thomas Hobbes's Antiliberal Theory of Liberty," in Bernard Yack, ed., *Liberalism Without Illusions: Essays on Liberal Theory and the Political Vision of Judith Shklar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 160-164.

impacts on "how things should be at this time," but the progress from beginnings to conclusions is not linear for Hobbes as it is for his opponents. The state of nature is not the foundation for the political rule he favours; the social contract, arising from the dictates of the laws of nature, provides the foundation for the Leviathan.

At this point in the mid-seventeenth century, the separation of political-constitutional theories is a relatively new phenomenon. According to Ann Hughes, early in the seventeenth century it was perfectly likely that members of the elite might simultaneously believe in each of the constitutional theories.⁷ In other words, contrary to Johann Sommerville's presentation of separable and distinct strains of constitutional theory,⁸ consent theory, the idea of an ancient constitution, and divine right theory coexisted in people's minds and were not autonomous strains of constitutional thinking. At some point, however, this amalgam of ideas could not continue in its disarticulated form, and writers felt compelled to defend one genetic argument to support one constitutional theory. When Hobbes enters the constitutional fray, he does so under the assumption that all parties involved are responsible for the Civil War that ensued. In *De Corpore* Hobbes attributes the causes of war to the fact "that men know not the causes neither of war nor peace."⁹ In his political theory, as I have noted, there exist elements of consent theory,

⁷ Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1991). See also Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603-1642* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1992), esp. Chapters 5 and 6.

⁸ J.P. Sommerville, *Politics and Ideology in England 1603-1640* (New York: Longman, 1986).

⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore*, in Thomas Hobbes, *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, J.C.A. Gaskin, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 190.

absolutism, and even patriarchalism, but Hobbes is highly critical of each theory for different reasons. Hobbes's accusatory statements about the civil war are a sign of the breakdown in the admittedly tentative consensus on constitutional theory. That this is the case becomes apparent as we examine Hobbes's disputes with the competing strains of constitutional theory.

Hobbes's real political sympathies lie with absolutist theory of the kind advanced by James VI and I (and subsequently Charles I).¹⁰ Although a supporter of the royalist cause, he remains very critical of the arguments royalist supporters choose to defend their cause, especially that of divine right. James, as has been widely recognized, popularized divine right theory in England. Divine right theory entailed the belief that God mandated the monarch's rule directly; the monarch derived power directly from God. Moreover, for divine right theorists, the origin of rule determined the current type of rule. Not necessarily absolutist in character, divine right theory in James' interpretation was essentially absolutist.¹¹ Nevertheless, and this is also important to understanding the

¹⁰ To suggest that Hobbes advanced an absolutist theory which was similar in effect to that of James is not to imply that there were no distinctions between the two thinkers' interpretations of absolutism, as I will discuss. Moreover, James and Filmer were differentiated by the fact that, while Filmer affirmed absolute royal power, James tempered his divine right theory with the acknowledgment that his powers "were by no means unlimited." However, as Michael Zuckert explains, that admission was primarily theoretical and had little practical effect. See Michael Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 32-33.

¹¹ At least, it was absolutist to the extent that term is useful in describing James' own self-understanding. Glenn Burgess has cautioned against the too-simplistic division of political theories in seventeenth-century England into "absolutist" and "constitutionalist". He questions whether such a dichotomous categorization "would have made sense to the past." At the very least I argue that the ultimate effect of James' rule remained absolutist. See Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution.*, p. 113.

absolutism that Hobbes recommends, a preference for divine right absolutism in no way indicated that a monarch should rule exclusively for his or her own benefit and advantage. "Even extreme divine right thinking," Michael Zuckert explains, "labeled king as protector of subjects' persons, lives and estates."¹² Hobbes also defends absolute rule for the peace and benefit of the commonweal, as opposed to rule in the interest of the monarch or any other individual. The danger for Charles I arose in part from the fact that, after the 1640s, his subjects, and especially Parliament, no longer believed him to be ruling in their interest. If James I popularized rule by divine right in England, his son pushed divine right absolutism to its limits.¹³

Theoretically, the seeds of disagreement between Hobbes and the two monarchs, James I and Charles I, lay in the idea of a divine sponsor of monarchic rule. In other words, Hobbes took issue with the royalist origin story. Again we see that it was possible to agree in principle with the type of rule but disagree with its genetic foundation. To Hobbes, the original source of even absolute monarchic power had to be the people themselves. The distinction between James and Hobbes is an important one, as we will see that Hobbes does promote the idea that the sovereign is a mortal God, a

¹² Zuckert, *Natural Rights*, p. 31.

¹³ John Morrill argues that Charles enjoyed surprising support in the 1640s despite his "assault on political liberties and religious values." By some "spectacular miscalculation" on his part, Charles converted a relatively stable polity, and a stable monarchy, into a recipe for resistance. Charles fell back on a "naked authoritarianism" when constitutional methods failed to achieve his purpose; this authoritarianism was most evident in his "imprisonment of opponents without showing cause" and his imposition of a new Prayerbook on the Scottish churches without their consent. This is not to say, of course, that Charles' actions were the sole cause of the English Civil War. See *The Nature of the English Revolution: Essays* (New York: Longman, 1993), pp. 6-9, 36.

parallel power to the immortal God.¹⁴ But this does not indicate that the monarch derives power directly *from God*. From Hobbes's perspective, the danger in making such an argument was evident in the power it accorded clerics to interpret the Bible and influence the rule of the commonwealth: clerical power must be understood as subordinate to the secular power of the sovereign. Any clerical interference with absolute rule had the potential to seriously subvert the order of the regime.¹⁵ Moreover, he feared the anarchic and dramatic response that divine right inspired in groups like the Levellers, who opposed both the origin story and the implications of divine right.

Hobbes differs from James in other ways as well, particularly in his vision of political community and the body politic. James is an Aristotelian of sorts in that he identifies the political community as natural; his political theory is rife with familial, patriarchal imagery, and culminates in the metaphor of the King as the head and the subjects the body of the body politic. Also taken with bodily imagery, Hobbes employs the body politic for different purposes. In his frontispiece to the *Leviathan*, subjects fill the body of the sovereign, but its purpose is not to show the "naturalness" of rule. Hobbes's body politic reveals the subjects' inclusion in the body of the sovereign. By consenting with one another to transfer their political right to the sovereign, subjects thereby endorse, consent to, and ultimately authorize each of his actions. Like James' body politic, Hobbes's metaphor justifies absolutism, and with a twist. Hobbes removes

¹⁴ *Lev*, II: 17, 120.

¹⁵ See Johann Sommerville, "Lofty science and local politics," in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 258-266.

any ground for subjects to disagree with their sovereign's actions: his actions are theirs. The body politic is shown to be conventional rather than natural as Hobbes uses popular analogies to achieve his enigmatic goals.

Hobbes also takes issue with, and was particularly inventive in his efforts to undermine, the patriarchalist conclusions of the Royalists. Just as he enters the origins discourse in an effort to undermine existing constitutional theories, he enters the debate about the family to critique the genetic foundation of patriarchal political theory. His innovations on the family and gender relations comprise the subject of Chapter Four. At this point it will suffice to say that, from Hobbes's perspective, although Royalist and patriarchalist writers were right about the kind of rule the sovereign exercises, they were entirely incorrect about the source of the sovereign's power. The distinction was a matter of crucial political significance to Hobbes.

As for other constitutional origin theories circulating in the Civil War era, Hobbes has even less tolerance for them. Among the most seditious of genetic constitutional theories circulating in the Civil War era, according to Hobbes, is the widely-held belief in England's ancient constitution. He credits the ancient constitution and the accompanying notion of a division of power in the realm for the Civil War:

If there had not first been an opinion received of the greatest part of England, that these [political] powers were divided between the King, and the Lords, and the House of Commons, the people had never been divided, and fallen into this Civill Warre.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Lev*, II: 18, 127.

Theorists of the ancient constitution, in Alan Ryan's description, believed that "England had a traditional structure: it was an organic community to be governed according to familiar principles," i.e. according to custom.¹⁷ As an origin story of seventeenth-century England, the ancient constitution paradoxically claimed that the English tradition had no identifiable beginning, but rather arose out of the common traditions and understandings of the nation.¹⁸ Indeed, to acknowledge an origin would be to envision a time before the ancient constitution.¹⁹ Advocates of the ancient constitution saw no reason to "stray outside English history in looking for the foundations of government."²⁰ This idea that England had long been ruled by an ancient constitution was used as a defence of Parliamentary power against unlimited royal prerogative. It functioned as such because of its core idea that the King, Parliament, and people were the original three parties in the English constitution.²¹ Advocates of an ancient constitution sought to restore the ancient balance between King and Parliament.

The opposition Hobbes demonstrated to the theory of the ancient constitution highlights his break with genetic theorizing in politics. To believe in the existence of an ancient constitution was to believe "that the past and present existed in an evolutionary continuum," and therefore that the past could offer moral lessons to the present.²² Hobbes not only

¹⁷ Alan Ryan, "Hobbes's political philosophy," in Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, p. 222.

¹⁸ Zuckert, *Natural Rights*, pp. 51-55.

¹⁹ Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution*, pp. 4-5.

²⁰ Ryan, "Hobbes's political philosophy," p. 222.

²¹ Zuckert, *Natural Rights*, p. 54.

²² Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution*, p. 11.

disagrees with the effect of the theory—that power ought to be divided between estates of the realm—but with the belief that customary and habitual patterns should dictate the current order of things (hence his regular assertions that his political theory represents a dramatic break with all that has come before it). As he states in the *Leviathan*,

Ignorance of the causes, and originall constitution of Right, Equity, Law, and Justice, disposeth a man to make Custome and Example the rule of his actions; in such manner, as to think that Unjust which it hath been the custome to punish; and that Just, of the impunity and approbation whereof they can produce an Example, or... a Precedent.²³

The inquiry into causes, according to Hobbes, arises from the conviction that "knowledge of them, maketh men the better able to order the present to their best advantage."²⁴ The problem for Hobbes is that political inquiry often goes no further than the discovery of precedent when, in fact, precedent or previous practice reveals nothing about the true causes or nature of the commonwealth.²⁵ And "for though in all places of the world, men should lay the foundation of their houses on the sand," writes Hobbes, "it could not be thence inferred, that so it ought to be."²⁶

Given Hobbes's disdain for the origin story of the ancient constitution, it is little wonder that he had a visceral response to the use of ancient constitutional language by Royalists. Royalist writers found a means to co-opt the language of balancing estates of the realm when it became apparent that they had no alternative. From Hobbes's perspective, it was one thing for Parliamentary sympathizers to invoke the balance of an ancient constitution, as they often did, but that Charles I and his royal

²³ *Lev*, I: 11, 73.

²⁴ *Lev*, I: 11, 74.

²⁵ *Lev*, II: 20, 145.

²⁶ *Lev*, II: 20, 145.

defenders themselves used the very same metaphor was beyond reason. Charles I's writers resorted to the theory of the ancient constitution in their defence against Parliament's *Nineteen Propositions* that argued Parliamentary sovereignty. Once the language of Parliamentary sovereignty was invoked in *The Nineteen Propositions*, the royal writers reverted to the idea of a mixed monarchy in order to restore power to the monarch that Parliament implicitly usurped in its tract. The ancient constitution was an idea that royalists had previously denounced on the basis that it granted an excess of power to Parliament and did not respect the King's prerogative. However, in *His Majesty's Answer to the Nineteen Propositions*, Charles I's advisors used the very idea that they had railed against. Hobbes, though a royalist himself, could not endorse such a justification for royal prerogative as it divided power that should in fact be unified and concentrated in one body. Royalists failed to understand, according to Hobbes, that in endorsing the idea of mixed monarchy as a defence of royal prerogative they were sowing the seeds of war. Part of Hobbes's quarrel with the ancient constitution is based in his belief that power is indivisible; his rejection of the framework of the ancient constitution is a sign that for Hobbes, origins are not prescriptive, and that the framework itself had lost its viability as a constitutional theory in the Civil War period.

The origins of England's constitution, according to Hobbes, rests in popular consent. That Hobbes advocates a consensual genetic theory of the constitution nevertheless places him at a considerable distance from typical consent theorists of seventeenth-century England and their origins discourse. Other consent theorists in that era posit the popular origins of

political authority for the express purpose of justifying resistance to the king or, at the very least, limiting his powers. One of the premises of consent theory—which Hobbes shares—is that hierarchies in society are not the result of nature, as Aristotelians and patriarchalists would have it. At the same time, consent theorists are not modern democrats. As Sommerville reminds us, "their point in arguing that power had originally resided in the people was to show that the authority of kings was limited, not that the people should govern."²⁷ Indeed, consent theory held with other constitutional theories the assertion that the masses were not fit to rule themselves; and it was not until the late 1640s that the idea of abandoning monarchy as an institution was even entertained. And even without monarchy, England did not have a democracy; it had the arbitrary rule of Parliament.

Perhaps the most popular proponents of consent theory during this period—although they were by no means a unified or coherent group—were the Levellers. A brief look at Leveller politics illuminates both the very different approach that Hobbes adopts, but also the insidious method Hobbes devises to undermine their populist politics. In their attempts to influence Cromwell and Parliament on the future of the English nation, the Levellers endorsed a two-pronged consent theory: the first, to describe the political origins of legitimate government, and the second, to allow for the renewal of that initial consent through the franchise. Consent, then, provides the initial foundation for rule and its ongoing legitimation; or alternatively, in the case of tyranny, consent can be withheld and the

²⁷ Sommerville, *Politics and Ideology*, p. 62.

government resisted. The extent of the Leveller's democratic initiative is the source of twentieth-century dispute.²⁸ Without rehearsing that tangential debate, we can at least assert that their intervention into English politics represents a break from the constitutional debates that had taken the ancient constitution as their framework. The debate would no longer center around where the balance of power should lie between Parliament and the King. The Levellers move away from mixed monarchy and advance the democratic element of the realm as the "only legitimate element" in the constitution.²⁹ Most importantly, the Levellers represent a new freedom in mind set that could only have occurred at this particular point in time: "As the most fixed and daunting structures of the external world—monarchy, Lords, Church—crumbled," writes John Morrill, "so the internal pillars of thought crumbled. Men were freed to think hitherto unthinkable thoughts."³⁰

The *Agreements of the People* are the Leveller examples of social contracts between individuals, contracts that establish a voluntary, civil association governed by mutual consent. Fundamentally the Levellers asserted that consent must be present in order for any government to be considered legitimate. "Every man that is to live under a government," asserts Colonel Rainborough in the famous exchange, "ought first by his

²⁸ See C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). For discussion of Macpherson's thesis, see Keith Thomas, "The Levellers and the Franchise," in G.E. Aylmer, ed. *The Interregnum: The Quest for Settlement 1646-1660* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972).

²⁹ David Wootton, "Leveller Democracy and the Puritan Revolution," in J.H. Burns, ed. with the assistance of Mark Goldie, *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 428.

³⁰ Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution*, p. 19. And not only men but also women were freed to think hitherto unthinkable thoughts; this is the topic of discussion for the following chapter.

own consent to put himself under that government."³¹ In a similar spirit, John Wildman questions "Whether any person can justly be bound by law, who doth not give his consent that such persons shall make laws for him."³² On the one hand, such statements should not be romanticized and turned into the unlimited democratic advocacy that they are not. On the other hand, such statements do reveal a distinctly levelling approach to politics. Mark the contrast with earlier defences of the royal prerogative, as manifest in *Bate's Case*: "the wisdom and the providence of the king is not to be disputed by the subject."³³ Certainly the Levellers were not the first in the century to proffer a consent theory; Henry Parker had done the same in arguing for Parliamentary sovereignty. As Alan Craig Houston explains, the Levellers and Parker "agreed that consent could not give rise to obligations that were self-destructive or to governments that violated the public interest."³⁴ For the Levellers, however, it was not only royal prerogative that needed curtailing, it was also the authoritarian tendencies of the House of Commons.

If the Levellers were not unique in positing an original popular democracy, they did take consent theory beyond a one-time designation of power from the people to their rulers. The ancient contract is only half the story, and the *Agreements of the People* are meant to renew and update the old contract. Significantly, the Levellers based their voluntary civil

³¹ A.S.P. Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647-49) from the Clarke Manuscripts* (Vermont: Everyman's Library, 1992), p. 53.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³³ Chief Baron Fleming, "Bate's Case" (1606), in J.P. Kenyon, ed., *The Stuart Constitution 1603-1688: Documents and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³⁴ Alan Craig Houston, "A Way of Settlement: The Levellers, Monopolies and the Public Interest," *History of Political Thought*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Autumn 1993, p. 413.

association on the free church and its voluntary religious association governed by consent. To Woodhouse, the Leveller *Agreements* represent "the apotheosis of the covenant idea and its complete and triumphant translation into the civil sphere."³⁵ Ideas of natural freedom and 'native' or natural rights of individuals, so integral to Leveller thought, are closely associated with beliefs in the sanctity of the individual's conscience in matters of faith. Conscience becomes a private matter in Leveller and other Puritan thought, and the ability of individuals to determine for themselves the substance of religious belief and the meaning of Scripture begins to take the form of a right.

Hobbes's quarrel with consent theory stems not from their conception of origins, for he accepts the idea of an original popular democracy of sorts and a social contract in his own theory. He takes issue, rather, with Leveller doctrine, with their justification of the resistance of subjects and their suggestion that limitations should be placed on the power of the sovereign. In Hobbes's view, one's obligation to the sovereign subsists only as long as he is fulfilling his role of protecting his subjects. Hobbes, ultimately, employs consent theory to justify absolute, indivisible and irrevocable power; he makes the act of consent a one-time event, never to be rescinded unless the current sovereign fails to provide the requisite protection. But he also makes consent an act that takes place between the people themselves and not between subjects and their ruler. That he does so has tremendous significance because it shows Hobbes's ability to harness the most innovative and potentially radical aspects of consent theory for

³⁵ Woodhouse, "Introduction," *Puritanism and Liberty*, p. 76.

his own anti-democratic purpose. Consent is for Hobbes only an origin story; it is not a genetic theory and not the justification for resistance or sedition as it was for the Levellers. Hobbes was as opposed to, and as afraid of, popular sovereignty in England as any of the divine right and patriarchalist thinkers.³⁶

It is noteworthy that the Levellers inspired fear in the ruling elites more than they actually influenced events during the late 1640s.³⁷ Nevertheless, Hobbes and many of his contemporaries detected anarchic consequences in their arguments. Hobbes also viewed the arguments made by Parliament that subjects ought to have property rights against their King with suspicion. For Hobbes, property rights are an important feature of civil society, but they only existed because individuals in the state of nature had transferred their right to the sovereign to ensure peace, stability and commodious living. In his view, then, Charles' decision to levy taxes without the consent of Parliament, nonetheless obliged subjects to comply precisely because property rights would not exist at all if it were not for the King. In the end, that Hobbes made such an argument about property, that he did not assert inviolable property rights for individuals, demonstrates his distance from even proto-liberal thinking on property. It also reveals the enigmatic, and anti-liberal, character of his consensual origin story.

Although enigmatic, Hobbes's origin story serves its intended purpose, which is to reveal the fallacious assumptions of the existing origins

³⁶ It was precisely to show the downfalls of popular sovereignty that he originally translated Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

³⁷ Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution*, p. 19.

discourse. What seems fanciful to the modern reader of origin stories was for Hobbes and his contemporaries a matter of crucial political significance precisely because knowing the origins of the political community was thought to be the key to settling the dispute over how it should currently be organized. More often than not, however, Hobbes's contemporaries begin with a political plan for the nation's constitution—whether that plan is absolutist or advocates only a limited monarchy—and then read their plan backwards into an origin story. The origin story may vary according to circumstance. For example, the royalist use of mixed monarchy and the ancient balance of the constitution in response to *The Nineteen Propositions* proves that thinkers are sometimes more concerned with justifying some political end than with the substance of the origin story. If the goal of the royalist writers was to retain as much royal prerogative as could be defended, then the strategy would change according to one's opponents.

We must conclude, then, that the origin narratives developed by these thinkers are first and foremost part of a justificatory strategy. From Hobbes's perspective, however, the origin narratives advanced simply could not prescribe a particular political arrangement. In Hobbes's case, as we have seen, he participates in the origins discourse, not only to reveal the problematical assumptions embedded in opposing constitutional theories, but also to prove that origins are not prescriptive, that political solutions cannot be devised from past precedent. While the state of nature justifies and serves as the foundation for absolute government, it is a state to be avoided rather than recreated. It does not conform to the genetic approach. The state of nature is, however, broadly reflective of Hobbes

analytical philosophic method, according to which he needs to understand the causes of a phenomenon in order to understand the whole.

II Hobbes's Scientific Origins-Impulse

Given Hobbes's opposition to genetic theorizing, we might question why he chooses to use an origin device at all. Part of the answer to this question can be found in Hobbes's definition of philosophy. For as much as Hobbes is led to the discourse on origins by his political-constitutional environment, his origins impulse is also the product of his philosophic method. Indeed, for Hobbes, first causes—the causes of the generation of a thing—comprise essential knowledge about that thing. His relationship to mechanistic science is well-documented; the purpose of revisiting that relationship here is to establish the fact that origins-theorizing is entirely consistent with Hobbes's conversion to mechanistic scientific philosophy. This impetus to discover and posit first principles, and to derive conclusions based on first principles, he extends from his study of motion and endeavor to the study of human behaviour.

De Corpore, written and published in English translation in 1656, is an ideal place to begin analyzing the scientific aspects of Hobbes's origins approach. In the first chapter, Hobbes defines philosophy as the knowledge of "effects or appearances, as we acquire by true ratiocination from the knowledge we have first of their causes or generation."³⁸ The logic of this method Hobbes explains in terms of geometry. If we are told that the figure before us that appears to be a circle was drawn in such a

³⁸ *De Corpore*, I, 186.

manner as to ensure a constant radius from the centrepoint, we would be confident in concluding that the figure is a circle. Conversely, "by knowing what figure is set before us, we may come by ratiocination to some generation of the same." So if it is a circle, we know it was drawn with a consistent radius from the centrepoint. Philosophy takes as its subject the things about which we can achieve some knowledge regarding their generation. By this definition, Hobbes explains, philosophy cannot undertake the study of the Divine, for we can never know its origins. God is explained as not only eternal but ingenerable by Hobbes.³⁹ Unlike theology, civil and moral philosophy are entirely open to such investigation. Given this general definition of philosophy, it is not surprising that civil philosophy investigates the origins of the commonwealth in order to better understand it. It is the search for true causes that the contemporary origins discourse lacks, in Hobbes's view. Hobbes applies the logic of his scientific, philosophic methodology to his new science of politics. As his definition of philosophy shows, Hobbes detects a correspondence between a phenomenon as it presently exists and its origins.

He expounds his philosophic method with a different metaphor in *De Cive*:

For as in a watch, or some such small engine, the matter, figure, and motion of the wheels cannot well be known, except it be taken insunder and viewed in parts; so to make a more curious search into the rights of states and duties of subjects, it is necessary, I say, not to take them insunder, but yet that they be so considered as if they were dissolved.⁴⁰

³⁹ *De Corpore*, I: 191.

⁴⁰ *De Cive*, "Author's Preface," pp. 98-99.

Hobbes means to begin "with the smallest and presumably least-contested bits of usable information, which are then logically combined into more complex formulas."⁴¹ In the case of the commonwealth, "I took my beginning from the very matter of civil government," writes Hobbes, "and thence proceeded to its generation and form."⁴² Through this theoretical process of taking apart the commonwealth and speculating on its component parts at its origin, Hobbes ensures that the newly constructed state will be more secure and stable. The firmer the foundations, the more lasting and true the building.

The same logic applies to language and speech: Hobbes is often labeled a nominalist because of his belief that truth is a function of language. Assessing the truth of a statement involves assessing whether the words used correspond to their agreed-upon definitions, hence the lengthy textual passages devoted to the proper definition of commonly used words.⁴³ Language has no value, and only obfuscates matters, if its basic units are not properly understood by all who use them.⁴⁴ Underlying Hobbes's fixation on definition is his conviction that to understand the whole, i.e. language and speech, we must understand its basic components, words. Truth, for Hobbes, "consisteth in the right ordering of names," and therefore,

a man that seeketh precise truth, had need to remember what every name he uses stands for; and to place it accordingly; or else he will

⁴¹ Christine Di Stefano, *Configurations of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 78.

⁴² *De Cive*, "Author's Preface," p. 98.

⁴³ See *Leviathan*, especially Book I.

⁴⁴ For all the benefits of speech, Hobbes lists corresponding abuses of speech, including the use of metaphor and the "inconstancy of the signification of their words." *Lev*, I: 4, 25.

find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twiggs; the more he struggles, the more belimed.⁴⁵

In fact, one of the sources of disorder in the state of nature about which Hobbes is most concerned is the relativism in people's use of language.⁴⁶ The use of words like justice or religion to signify all number of different things produces political and religious chaos. Nominalism, then, and the thorough treatment and redefinition of all contentious words, is Hobbes's solution to linguistic chaos; and, as such, it conforms with his general philosophic methodology. In his origin story, Hobbes enumerates and then defines the basic human passions as well as key political concepts such as justice as part of his rebuilding effort. Once the civil commonwealth is established, the sovereign is given the power to define words and even to be the sole interpreter of scripture, all toward the end of reducing linguistic and religious chaos.

The centrality of first causes to Hobbes's political philosophy is not accidental, but is rather reflective of his general interest in the causes of motion. Following in the intellectual path of his contemporaries like Galileo and Descartes, Hobbes adopts the framework of the new mechanistic science, which is itself an intervention in the long-standing debate on the origination of motion. Mechanics is the study of motion, of the forces that affect physical bodies which are already in motion or at rest. Of course the study of mechanics is not unique to the seventeenth century, but the conclusions of the seventeenth-century scientists represent a significant

⁴⁵ *Lev*, I: 4, 28.

⁴⁶ Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), pp. 253-254.

break with the then prevailing Aristotelian and Scholastic theories. Consider, for example, Hobbes's statement of the cause of motion:

motion cannot be understood to have any other cause besides motion; nor has the variety of those things we perceive by sense, as of *colours, sounds, savours, &c.* any other cause than motion...⁴⁷

Not only do objects have no essence, according to Hobbes, but their motion has no cause except other motion. All of the phenomena that had previously been treated as mysterious—and as reflecting an essential quality of the given object—are now explained by reference to motion itself. Motion for Aristotle, and hence for his Scholastic followers, began with a Prime Mover; it had a telos, and only ever occurred for some purpose. Once that purpose was achieved, motion ceased.⁴⁸ For Hobbes, a philosophical monist, all that exists is matter; all matter is composed of particles in motion or at rest; and the apparent characteristics (what Aristotle termed essences) of bodies "are merely sensations excited by bodies in motion impinging on the nerves."⁴⁹

With the insights of Copernicus and later Galileo and Descartes, geometry becomes the model through which motion is studied; and geometry is used to examine both the motion of celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies.⁵⁰ Galileo's discovery is that neither motion nor rest requires a cause: if no friction were present, a body could continue to move indefinitely in a circle without some force acting upon it. Inertia dictates

⁴⁷ *De Corpore*, VI, 197. Italics in original.

⁴⁸ Thomas A. Spragens, Jr., *The Politics of Motion: The World of Thomas Hobbes*, forward by Antony Flew (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), p. 58.

⁴⁹ Richard S. Westfall, *The Construction of Modern Science: Mechanisms and Mechanics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

that only a *change* in the status of motion requires a cause, and that cause is mechanical, not teleological. The states of motion and rest, furthermore, say nothing about the essence or nature of a body; "motion is merely a state in which a body finds itself," and the body is indifferent to that motion.⁵¹ Everything, then, has a simple, mechanical explanation; there is no need to resort to metaphysics or religion to explain the cause or purpose of motion. For Hobbes, everything is caused by physical motion, even the actions and thoughts of human beings. Inertia has such significance for Hobbes that he wastes no time in *Leviathan* before expressing his belief in it.⁵² Man himself is simple matter in motion, nothing more, nothing less.

Because Hobbes explains events with reference to motion, and considers all existing things to be matter, his philosophy, as one theorist describes it, "transforms the categories of traditional metaphysics into categories of physics."⁵³ In particular, Hobbes's theory of inertia in *Leviathan* does the political work of undermining those who adhere to a superstitious worldview, who claim to see and feel the presence of spirits, ghosts and witches, and who allow such visions to affect their perceptions of political reality. In turning to inertia to explain sensations, Hobbes effectively casts doubt on those so seduced by other-worldliness. Moreover, when man is understood to have no essence or telos, but only to be exhibiting random inertial behaviour, the idea that society is inevitable or natural is put to rest. If political society forms, it is entirely due to convention and consent, to an act of individual wills.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵² *Lev*, I: 2, 15.

⁵³ Yves Charles Zarka, "First Philosophy and the foundation of knowledge," in Soreli, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, p. 73.

Hobbes's development of the state of nature and social contract are the result of his resolute-compositive method, in which the state is broken down into its basic units and subsequently reassembled on firmer foundations.⁵⁴ However, it remains important to point out that Hobbes's theory of inertia, used to depict the state in which people move like particles in random motion governed by nothing but the physical law of inertia, cannot entirely account for people's behaviour. Hobbes laments the fact that, rather than acting in their own self-interest, and thus following peace, people often do not. The state of nature permits Hobbes to explain people's basic nature, but it cannot be the model for political society; the immutable and eternal laws of nature alone make civil society and peace possible. Hobbes requires a social contract, which involves the subjects themselves but not their authorized sovereign, from which to derive the rights and obligations of subjects and sovereign.

Hobbes's two-part origin narrative, then, conforms to, but cannot be entirely explained by, the scientific method he endorsed. At the very least we can say that his use of an origin story is neither genetic nor entirely fanciful but is, in fact, in keeping with his tendency to look for first causes, and to examine basic components to understand the nature of a thing itself.

III Rhetorical appeals in the state of nature

When Hobbes writes the *Leviathan*, he is responding to the eruption of political and religious chaos in England; he is frustrated by the apparent

⁵⁴ See J.W.N. Watkins, *Hobbes's System of Ideas: A Study in the Political Significance of Philosophical Theories* (London: Hutchinson, 1965).

irrationality and superstition of his contemporaries, on the one hand, and their inability to comprehend the true causes of war and peace in a commonwealth on the other. While he continues to adhere to his analytic approach even in the later text *De Corpore*, on matters of politics Hobbes detects an increasing complexity, and the need for new approaches and new methods, to convince his audience. Indeed, a growing literature recognizes Hobbes's increased use of rhetoric, especially in the *Leviathan*.⁵⁵

Hobbes's turn to rhetoric can be seen as an attempt to reach a wider audience with his later works.⁵⁶ As he writes later in *Behemoth*, "the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people."⁵⁷ Hobbes accepts that people must be convinced of the power and authority of the sovereign in order for that power to exist and survive. If people cannot calculate, and act according to, their own self-interest, Hobbes must intervene and convince them to do so. Here an origin narrative has a distinctive advantage over straightforward political theorizing: the power of persuasion. Therefore, he carefully selects the kind of narrative that will have maximum effect on his audience. It must be rhetorically-convincing and speak to them in their own political and

⁵⁵ Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Victoria Silver, "Hobbes on rhetoric," in Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*. Note the difference between a contract theorist such as John Rawls and Hobbes: Rawls uses origins hypothetically, but does not spin a narrative to enhance the device. Hobbes's hypothetical device of origins, on the other hand, is situated in the context of a narrative that has the power to increase its plausibility.

⁵⁶ On this point, see Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, Chapter 3.

⁵⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth or The Long Parliament*, Ferdinand Tönnies, ed., with an Introduction by Stephen Holmes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 16.

religious idiom to be persuasive. That Hobbes began to question the efficacy of elucidating straight scientific truth in his texts, that he saw the need to persuade his readership of the logic of his theory⁵⁸, suggests that his origin story became more important to his political theory as his career progressed.

While Hobbes could have made his argument for indivisible and irrevocable sovereign authority without first tracing the hypothetical creation of civil society from the state of nature, the story of the state of nature is *invaluable* to the flow and plausibility of his argument. In Sheldon Wolin's view, the state of nature is Hobbes's "supreme literary achievement;" it is "a condition which had the same universal significance and dramatic intensity for the Hobbesian myth as man's fall from grace has for the Christian myth."⁵⁹ In fact, for a theorist who abhorred "insignificant speech" and metaphor, and who admired the "austerity of geometry," Hobbes's *Leviathan* is an unusually imaginative work.⁶⁰ Integral to his theory from the beginning, the story of the state of nature becomes more elaborate and rhetorically convincing as we move through Hobbes's texts chronologically. To illustrate briefly, "Of the state of men without civil society"⁶¹ forms the first chapter of *De Cive*, published in 1642. This initial chapter details Hobbes's theory of presocial man, and contains most of the fundamental elements of the argument offered nine

⁵⁸ See Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, pp. 131-3.

⁵⁹ Sheldon S. Wolin, *Hobbes and the Epic Tradition of Political Theory* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1970), p. 24.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶¹ Although Hobbes does not limit his ideas of the natural state to one chapter in *De Cive* or *Leviathan*, I will take the chapter specified in each as indicative of his ideas of the subject for the purpose of comparison.

years later in *Leviathan*. However, one of the key differences between the two texts is stylistic. *De Cive* has a definitional style, conveying Hobbes's theories of natural equality, freedom, and mutual fear in straightforward terms. The chapter consists in one "proof" after another, beginning with Hobbes's lengthy proof that the ancient Greeks misunderstood the reasons for the creation of society.

In subtle contrast to *De Cive*, *Leviathan* is a descriptive text. It has a narrative quality that is absent in the more definition-oriented *De Cive*. To take a brief example, in *De Cive* Hobbes provides a less descriptive account of the condition of war; those nations inflicted with war were,

few, fierce, short-lived, poor, nasty, and deprived of all that pleasure and beauty of life, which peace and society are wont to bring with them.⁶²

In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes devotes considerably more space to outlining the hazards and pitfalls of the natural state. Not only is it famously "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short," it is also devoid of industry, commodious building and "Culture of the Earth." There is:

no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death.⁶³

By the time Hobbes writes the *Leviathan*, his account of the state of nature is elaborate and persuasive, not unlike the creation story of Genesis. Hobbes appears to have brought his realization of the import of rhetorical speech to bear on his story of the state of nature.

The increased use of rhetoric, including metaphor and analogy, is also evident in the addition of two stories to the *Leviathan* narrative of the

⁶² *De Cive*, Ch. I: 118.

⁶³ *Lev*, I: 13, 89.

natural state that were not present in *De Cive*. In *Leviathan's* "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind, as concerning their Felicity, and Misery," are two stories whose purpose is solely to convince and persuade the reader. The first is Hobbes's elaboration on men's tendency to "invade, and destroy one another." It is here that Hobbes asks his reader to consider his own actions if they doubt his conclusions. When "he armes himselfe" to travel, or when he "locks his doores" upon going to sleep at night, Hobbes queries, "Does he not there as much accuse mankind of his actions, as I do by my words?"⁶⁴ Here Hobbes speaks to his audience in terms that will resonate with their own experience, and force them to examine the motivations behind their own actions.

The other story that Hobbes mentions only briefly in *De Cive* but elaborates upon in the *Leviathan* is that of American Aboriginal peoples. Hobbes mentions the "brutish manner" of life of the "savage people in many places of America" to enhance his state of nature argument. Aboriginals provide Hobbes with his only "living example" of people in a state of nature. James Tully has shown that Hobbes and Locke effectively advanced the intellectual cause of European imperialism in America by writing of Aboriginals as though they lived in a state of nature. According to Tully's argument, if Aboriginals could be said to have no property conventions, no laws, and no "state" by European standards, they could not be thought to own the land on which they were living. The appropriation of their land, then, was not articulated as a moral quandary but rather was

⁶⁴ *Lev*, I: 13, 89. This story appears briefly in the "Author's Preface to the Reader" in *De Cive*.

justified away by the very idea of the state of nature.⁶⁵ I suggest as well that the American Aborigines are an effective point of contrast for Hobbes: these "savage people" illustrate by opposition the kind of civility and order that Hobbes envisions for England. With respect to origin stories, the example of the American "savages" summons images of the wild—a Garden of Eden gone wrong. Hobbes implicitly ranks Aborigines in the Americas on a lower level of modernity, where modernity is measured in exclusively Eurocentric terms.⁶⁶ The use of this reference in Hobbes's origin narrative sharpens its effect, making the dangers of the state of nature more apparent to his readership.

Quite apart from its content, Hobbes's use of a creation story would have struck a resonant chord among his readers in the context of seventeenth century England—a society in which religion played such a constitutive part that it would be an anachronism to describe it as "religious."⁶⁷ This is an epoch in which the Bible was a widely-read text, having been translated from Latin into English during the Reformation. The Bible was "central to all intellectual as well as moral life,"⁶⁸ and Biblical language and metaphor were in common currency. One strain of constitutional thinkers, of which Filmer is the most representative, derived the King's absolute power from Adam in the origin story of Genesis. Filmer was not alone in his use of Genesis: political mythology of the Civil War period abounded with interpretation of, and debate on, the significance of the Garden, Adam and

⁶⁵ James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an age of diversity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 73.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁶⁷ Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (Toronto: Penguin, 1993), p. 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Eve.⁶⁹ Therefore, while Hobbes's contemporaries disagreed with the political content of his theory, they would not have found his method, nor his several hundred biblical references, as "innovative" or unusual as does his twentieth-century audience.⁷⁰

The Garden of Eden is a useful point of reference for understanding Hobbes's origin story. There is more to the similarity between Genesis and the state of nature than the fact that they are both persuasive myths in the twentieth century. Clearly, on one level, the state of nature and Eden are entirely dissimilar—the former being a condition of war, as I have mentioned, and the latter being an idyllic paradise. The Garden of Eden is normative for its creators, whereas the state of nature is evidently a state to be avoided at all costs. Nevertheless, on another level, the two origin stories display a functional similarity, including their shared attempts to provide justifications (or at least a foundation) for what is to follow—*theologically and/or politically*—on the basis of particular ontological assumptions.

The similarities between Genesis and Hobbes's origin story begin with their common and obvious etiologic intentions. While the Christian creation myth describes the origins of the earth, and of man and woman,⁷¹ and corresponds more closely to Plato's cosmogony, the *Leviathan* describes

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201-203.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷¹ There are two different creation stories in Genesis: Genesis 1, which describes the creation of the earth, and of man and woman made in the image of God; and Genesis 2, which portrays the creation of Adam as from the dust, and Eve as from Adam's rib. These two together form the Judeo-Christian, or the Hebraic, creation story. Christians also take the Book of John as their creation story, primarily because it is in the New Testament, and also describes beginnings (In the beginning was the Word...). For the purposes of this chapter, I will take the Christian creation myth to be synonymous with the Hebraic.

the pre-social state of man and the origins of civil society and authority. At the time it was written, Genesis may have been intended as a historically accurate depiction of origins, whereas Hobbes's story is more of a thought experiment. Nevertheless, just as all authors of origin stories effectively separate themselves from their epoch, from the morass of its political and religious complications, Hobbes and the writers of Genesis alike clear an intellectual space within which they can posit the true nature of things. Of course, any such exercise is laden with ontological assumptions. Even the attempt to cut through history and politics in this way suggests an ontological commitment to order as the highest good. The authors of Genesis 1, during the sixth century BCE, were concerned with preserving the monotheistic tradition of the Israelite nation.⁷² The result is the initial chapter of Genesis which establishes God as the author of order. In Genesis 2,⁷³ even after Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden, order is not lost, but is continually sought after, promised and re-established through successive covenants. The covenants in the Hebrew Bible signify the re-establishment of order. Similarly, in Hobbes, a high value is placed on establishing order, but in his case that order is the escape from the original state. Again, as in the Bible, it is the covenant, the social contract, that brings order to political affairs. The previous section outlines the kind of constitutional disorder that Hobbes is working against, and which he takes to be a perpetual threat to the English nation. As the moral arbiter on earth, the Leviathan rules absolutely, ensures the observance of contracts

⁷² David Adams Leeming with Margaret Adams Leeming, *Encyclopedia of Creation Myths* (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 1994), p. 113.

⁷³ Genesis 2 is thought to have been written five hundred years earlier, around 950 B.C.E.

(and hence justice), and maintains order. The disruption of this order, we are told, would effectively reintroduce this same "condition of political nothingness" which was the creative impetus for this dramatic vision. In the *Leviathan*, order is achieved at the expense of politics, at the expense of any dissent from authority.

Another common function of these two origin stories is the legitimation of a particular view of human nature. As we have discussed, Genesis makes specific, if ambiguous, ontological claims. In *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, Elaine Pagels discusses the myriad ways in which Genesis has been deployed in Christian thought to reconcile the problems of sin, procreation, marriage, the relationship between man and woman, and to justify conceptions of human nature more generally.⁷⁴ Certainly, Genesis invests Adam with the right and power to name what is around him, and suggests the centrality of human beings in the material world.⁷⁵ What is less certain, and highly contentious, is Genesis' statement regarding human nature. Does eating the fruit of the forbidden tree prove humanity's licentiousness, the natural curiosity and quest for knowledge, or the subversive force of the female? There are also the problems of human alienation and separation from the divine, which are among the complex and challenging aspects of human life that Karen Armstrong sees reflected in Genesis. She contends that, in fact, this separation is present in the narrative of Genesis long before the Fall.⁷⁶ What is important to

⁷⁴ Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage, 1988), p. 9.

⁷⁵ J.R. Porter, "Creation," in Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford, 1993), p. 140.

⁷⁶ Karen Armstrong, *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), pp. 21-24.

recognize, as Christopher Hill points out, is that almost any theory can be read into the Bible, that "there are few ideas in whose support a Biblical text cannot be found."⁷⁷ Given the potential for "reading in", perhaps the most that can be concluded is that Genesis reveals the complexity of human life to the reader.

It is similarly difficult to interpret definitively Hobbes's theory of human nature.⁷⁸ Hobbes examines human nature in much the same way as he examines the civil state: by reducing it to its basic elements. According to this approach, human beings can be best comprehended by stripping them of their socially acquired characteristics, by abstracting them from the complexity of social life. Yet the degree of abstraction that Hobbes has achieved is contestable, as his depiction of human behaviour appears to mirror the conflictual conditions of the Civil War. Moreover, the very suggestion that human beings *can* be stripped of their socially acquired characteristics and examined as "natural" is problematic. Despite the overwhelming consensus that he depicts in a transparent fashion the rational, egoistic, self-centered man of modernity and liberalism, Hobbes's understanding of human nature is actually more difficult to discern. True, Hobbes transports scientific theories into his political theory, describing men in perpetual motion, primarily self-interested and seeking to amass power and prevail in the competition that is life. Moreover, his autochthonous description of men in the state of nature as having "sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity,

⁷⁷ Hill, *The English Bible*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Roger Trigg claims that Hobbes does not have a theory of human nature *per se*, that his nominalism and antiessentialism preclude his designating one. Roger Trigg, *Ideas of Human Nature: An Historical Introduction* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1988).

without any kind of engagement to each other,"⁷⁹ epitomizes a reductionist theory of human development. It has been taken for granted that a theorist who characterizes the life of natural man as "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" must have a profoundly negative view of human nature.

However negative his depiction of the state of nature, it is not clear that Hobbes believes man to be inherently wicked. Hobbes also enumerates the positive attributes of men, including their capacity for benevolence and charity. The fear in the state of nature comes, not from the fact that all men are wicked, but from the fact that some men are. "Though the wicked were fewer than the righteous, yet because we cannot distinguish them, there is a necessity of suspecting, heeding, anticipating, subjugating, (and) self-defending."⁸⁰ While it is true that "of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some *Good to himselfe*",⁸¹ this theory does not indicate that man "cannot be concerned with anything else."⁸² Man's greatest fault is his tendency to fall subject to his own senses and passions, and to miscalculate his own self-interest.⁸³ Conflict arises because men perceive their best interests differently, hence the benefit of an arbiter.

⁷⁹ *De Cive*, Ch. VIII, p. 205. This forms the basis of Di Stefano's critique of Hobbesian ontology, an ontology which she describes as inherently masculinist because of its denial of the mother-child relationship. Carole Pateman critiques this view in her essay "'God Hath Ordained to Man a Helper': Hobbes, Patriarchy and Conjugal Right," in Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman, eds., *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991).

⁸⁰ *De Cive*, "Author's Preface," p. 100.

⁸¹ *Lev*, I: 14, 93.

⁸² As Bernard Gert explains, "[n]othing in Hobbes's political theory requires that men not have friends for whom they are willing to make some sacrifice." See Gert, "Introduction," in *De Cive*, p. 8.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 6

Hobbes's view of humanity may not be optimistic, but he did at least think "human nature was malleable, that one could train, educate, and discipline people into good citizens."⁸⁴ To be Fallen in the Biblical sense, in Hobbes's theory, is not necessarily to be corrupt—it is to have lost immortality. In his reference to Christian creation, Hobbes states that when Adam ate the fruit from the "tree of cognizance of Good and Evill...his punishment was a privation of the estate of Eternall life, wherein God had at first created him."⁸⁵ Eternal life would not be secured again until the Second Kingdom of God was established on earth. Hobbes's narrow reading of the Fall has implications for his assessment of the nature of woman, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

Hobbes's ability to harness religious language and metaphor, popular debate and literature, for his own purposes is evident. The *Leviathan* is a text that reveals great rhetorical flourish and ingenuity, as will be further evident in the subsequent examination of Hobbes's use of the Amazons to augment his case against patriarchalism. The examples of the Amazons, the American Aborigines, the dangerous state of nature, and so on, highlight his creativity, a feature of his thinking that is often underplayed in the categorization of Hobbes as a rationally-oriented, scientific thinker.

IV Conclusion

The purpose here has been to analyze Hobbes's origins-impulse, to determine the sources of his attraction to the device of origin stories. In the end, the origin story proves useful to Hobbes for political, scientific,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸⁵ *Lev.* III: 35, 280.

and creative reasons. It permits him to engage in, and dismantle, the contemporary political-constitutional debates; it reflects his drive to discover first causes and to understand the whole in terms of its parts; and it serves as a valuable device of political persuasion in the face of a charged and unstable political climate.

In the chapter that follows, I turn to discuss the gendered implications of Hobbes's political theory. We will see that, although Hobbes is not favourably received among feminist political theorists, his record on this front is again more complex than the surface might reveal. In addition to his provocative innovations on gender, I suggest that Hobbes's theory has important political implications—for origins theorists in general and for feminist origins theorists in particular. Hobbes's significant insight on the origins discourse is his recognition that political solutions cannot be found in the narratives of mythical, historical, or customary beginnings. More often than not, origins are used to come to terms with the present. The search for origins usually involves the creation of narratives that embody our present political concerns, narratives that can do more to limit our understanding of political problems and solutions than to aid them. In spite of his recognition of the limitations of origins, Hobbes, too, is guilty of creating this kind of narrative in the state of nature. The lesson that Hobbes offers, finally, lies more in his critique of genetic theory than in his actual origin story.

IV Hobbes and Gender Disorder: the Case for Original Maternal Dominion

Having explored the philosophic impetus behind Hobbes's origin story in *Leviathan*, the purpose of this chapter to examine more closely the content of that story with an eye to gender relations. Indeed, a discussion of Hobbes's seventeenth-century historical context requires more than the description of the various competing constitutional and scientific theories provided in the previous chapter. The dynamics of gender comprise the missing key to understanding Hobbes's theory of the family and thus are invaluable to understanding his critique of patriarchal political theory. Hobbes's origin narrative has been subject to a number of feminist treatments, the most prominent of which is that of Carole Pateman.¹ As well, Nancy Hirschmann, Diana Coole, and Christine Di Stefano,² have analyzed Hobbes either in an attempt to understand contract theory itself, or in the case of Di Stefano, in order to assess his treatment of the mother-child relation. The predominant feminist approach is to critique Hobbes on

¹ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). See also her "God Hath Ordained to Man a Helper": Hobbes, Patriarchy and Conjugal Right," in Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman, eds., *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991).

² Nancy J. Hirschmann, *Rethinking Obligation: A Feminist Method for Political Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Diana Coole, "Women, gender and contract: feminist interpretations," in David Boucher and Paul Kelly, eds., *The Social Contract from Hobbes to Rawls* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Christine Di Stefano, *Configurations of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Karen Green compares Hobbes to Christine de Pisan in *The Woman of Reason: Feminism, Humanism and Political Thought* (New York: Continuum, 1995). Ingrid Makus's recent analysis of Hobbes raises some important criticisms of other feminist treatments. Her focus is familial relationships; she does not, however, read Hobbes historically. See *Women, Politics, and Reproduction: The Liberal Legacy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

the basis that he leaves women out of the social contract. The conclusion is that he reaffirms modern (conjugal) patriarchy, even as he attempts to undermine political patriarchalism.³

In so far as the ultimate *effect* of Hobbes's social contract is concerned, this basic judgment by feminist analysis is correct. Hobbes does affirm the separation of public and private spheres for example, wherein women disappear into the latter and are excluded from the defining event of civil society: the formation of the social contract. However, it is my contention that there is more to Hobbes than his exclusion of women from the social contract, and that by examining Hobbes against the backdrop of the dominant gender ideology in seventeenth-century England we can achieve a clearer sense of the import and significance of what he does say about gender.

Ultimately, what emerges through this analysis is a very different picture of Hobbes than feminists have typically presented. In his state of nature argument, Hobbes develops an enigmatic and politically contentious theory of the nature of gender relations. His depiction of women as independent contractors in the state of nature, contractors even with the children they bear, stands in radical opposition to prevailing understandings of gender and motherhood in seventeenth-century England. His vision contrasts even with the women who battled for religious freedom during the Interregnum, those who challenged gender hierarchies on issues of faith and conscience but left the political theory of patriarchalism essentially untouched. Before relegating women to the

³ This is Pateman's conclusion.

private realm, Hobbes effectively disrupts gender norms, opening a space in which gender relations are dramatically—if briefly—reconceived. It should be stated at the outset that Hobbes does not undertake the study of the family for its own sake, but is interested in families and hence gender relations only insofar as they reveal something important about the nature of political relationships.

In what follows, then, I bracket existing feminist interpretations of Hobbes and approach his project from a historical angle. This historically-sensitive feminist approach evokes a different set of questions and issues which can then be used to interpret Hobbes's work, questions and issues that do not arise when we take his exclusion of women from the social contract as our starting point.

I Gendered power in seventeenth-century England

This section provides a sketch of the workings of gender ideology in the intellectual climate of seventeenth-century England. Particular attention is focused on the theorists of patriarchy, James VI and I and Sir Robert Filmer, precisely because Hobbes's usage of gender is intended to undermine patriarchy as a political theory. It is not my purpose to provide a thorough overview of seventeenth-century gender relations.⁴ My purpose is to provide a general sense of women's "status" and position in the seventeenth century, and to discuss the gender ideology

⁴ There is a sizable literature on gender relations in early modern England. A few of the most recent works are: Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1740: A Social History* (London: Phoenix, 1994); Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); and David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997).

instrumental to patriarchalism, toward the ultimate goal of better understanding Hobbes.

In any discussion of early modern English gender relations the term patriarchy is bound to surface. Patriarchy is the accepted term to describe the hierarchical system of power that placed husbands and fathers at the head of families and that gave men the more dominant public, political role in society. It was not just wives who were subordinate in the patriarchal configuration; the whole family was understood as being under the rule of the dominant male, as father or husband. In the English patriarchal system, a division was evident between the private realm of the household, a realm that included servants, children and wives and which was ruled by the male, and the public realm, in which some men played an active part. This division, about which more will be said in the next chapter, was justified on the basis of what was considered appropriate work and activity for each sex. Drawing heavily on classical and Biblical tradition, theorists of this period tend to characterize women as inferior in strength and reason, and therefore unsuited for most activity in the outside world.⁵ Given this public/private divide, women's work was often the residual work that always needs doing, but which generally merits little comment in the historical literature.⁶ In other words, women's work was the work of the household; it was informal; and it only ever took them out of their own household to work in someone else's.⁷ Widowhood was the one status that

⁵ For an extensive discussion on this topic, see Margaret R. Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early-Modern Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), Chapter 2, "The Basis of Subjection."

⁶ Laurence, *Women in England*, p. 109.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

might allot women authority in the family as well as a position in the public trades. For example, there are records of widows running their husbands' workshops and taking on apprentices in the early part of the seventeenth century.⁸ Men's work, in contrast to that of women, tended to be classified as a trade or skill, was performed between regulated hours, and frequently permitted men greater time for leisure.

In addition to constraining women's labour opportunities to the household, patriarchal power relations precluded women from having a voice in Parliament and thus from the creation of law. A woman was represented in the law as a subordinate to a particular man, whether that man was her husband, father or even brother. Put simply, as a wife or daughter, a woman was "included" in her male counterpart; she required no voice of her own to express consent; and she had no avenue through which she could express any independent will. Legal consent was required of women in only one public interaction: marriage. Indeed, a woman's consent was as crucial as that of her husband-to-be to the legitimacy of the marriage contract.⁹

Marriage, as David Cressy asserts in his exhaustive study of birth, marriage and death during this period, can be understood as perhaps "the major defining moment of [a woman's] life, determining her social, domestic, and reproductive future."¹⁰ As such, all women were expected to marry and bear children. Of course, marriage meant different things for men and women, although for both it initiated a new, all-significant phase

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁹ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, p. 256.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

of their lives. For a man, Cressy argues, entering into marriage "meant autonomy, mastery, responsibility, and the prospect of fathering a lineage."¹¹ Marriage for women meant something close to the opposite; at the very least it meant dependence and subjection. Cressy suggests that women, too, gained patriarchal authority in the household, "commanding those beneath her through a mediated extension of patriarchal power." While they no doubt wielded some power in the household—certainly no one thought a woman of the house was subordinate to her servants—women *qua* wives were subordinate. Hierarchy is the essence of patriarchal gender relations, and this fact needs to be kept at the forefront of any discussion of patriarchy and marriage. Also central to this discussion is the fact that women's subordinate status in reality was intricately related to ideas that were entertained about their abilities and their shortcomings. Women were considered more frail and at the same time, more prone to bodily lusts and desires, such that they must be rigorously protected from temptation, and from themselves. The appropriate behaviour for women, and indeed for both sexes, outside and within marriage, emerged as a preoccupation for early modern moral and political writers.¹² At least among the gentry, who were already driven to maintain a strict honour code, monogamous marriage became nothing less than the lynchpin and symbol of the established order.¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² One extensive marriage guide is William Gouge's *Of domestical duties*. Portions of Gouge's 1622 text are reprinted in Kate Aughterson, ed., *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook. Constructions of Femininity in England* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹³ See Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, p. 101; D.E. Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern in Early Modern England," in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds., *Order and*

The aim of this brief overview has been to describe patriarchal gender relations of this period and to discuss the operation of a gendered public/private dichotomy. The intent is not to suggest that women never entered the public realm nor that they were forbidden to do so. In fact there were many public roles for women; for example, it was mandatory that women attend church. Among other things, women also carried out the female-dominated practice of "churching," which was a *public* act of thanks as well as a purification ritual that followed the weeks of "lying in" after childbirth.¹⁴ In sum, however, these roles should be understood as culturally-sanctioned exceptions to a broad norm that limited women's activities to the sphere of the household. Public acts by women that did not have cultural acceptance were considered a challenge to the patriarchal order. Specifically, public speech or protest on religious and political affairs were thought to pose a particular challenge, as we will see.

To properly discuss the workings of gender in seventeenth-century England we need also to account for the ways in which gender became a powerful tool in the discourses about politics and the constitution. If patriarchy refers to the *social relation* between men and women, and between men and the subordinate inhabitants of the household, we require a different term that will describe the emergence of a gendered public

Disorder in Early Modern England (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 116.

¹⁴ Of course churching follows a period of seclusion for the new mother, seclusion that might be interpreted negatively. However, Anthony Fletcher, following Natalie Zemon Davis, has suggested that lying in represents an inversion of power relations, as women "withdrew from their husbands two of the fruits of marriage which he most prized: her domestic labour and her sexual services." Moreover, during this period she was attended by and enjoyed only the company of her own sex. See *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, p. 187.

discourse. To this end, I draw on the concept of gendered power, a term used by Mary Beth Norton to describe the system of seventeenth-century power relations in Anglo-America.¹⁵ Having to do with more than male political rule in Anglo-America, a system of gendered power is indicated as well by the gendered terminology commonly used to understand power relations in and outside the household, in religion and in politics. To suggest that social relations are characterized by a system of gendered power is to call attention first to the fact that social relations are permeated by power. In addition, gendered power refers to the ways in which the contest for power, and the discourse about the best constitution, are infused with gendered metaphors, analogies and language, language that has resonance only because of the unequal power relations that actually exist socially and politically. Among the constitutional discourses, patriarchalism is the most overt in employing gendered language and metaphor as a central pillar around which the rest of the theory unfolds. Patriarchalism as a constitutional theory can be understood as one of several possible *expressions* of gendered power; it is the political theory, most commonly associated with James VI and I and Sir Robert Filmer, which understands political right to originate in fathers, and which analogizes (or, in Filmer's case, equates¹⁶) the power of the King and the father.

¹⁵ Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), p. 6.

¹⁶ Although Filmer and James differ in their interpretation of how the family models the commonwealth, they both rely on the family as a *model* for understanding political relationships. For the purposes of this chapter, then, I will refer to both of them as analogical thinkers. Hobbes, too, participates in this kind of the thinking, although he may be closer to Filmer's view than to James'.

Seventeenth-century England is characterized by its system of gendered power, which means that language about gender and the family works its way into the fabric of political and constitutional discourses. Gender was a key prism through which many other issues were debated and discussed. Gendered power can be detected not only in the works of men, but women, too, make use of gendered language for their own purposes. Consider the example of the Baptist pamphleteer, Elizabeth Poole, and her comparison of the English nation during the Interregnum to a diseased female body, "*a woman crooked, sick, weak and imperfect in body,*" whom she (Poole) has the ability to cure with her "gift of faith."¹⁷ Offering political advice, Poole may have deliberately sought the feminine analogy as a more permissible one through which to convey her message, i.e. if the nation *is* a female body, Poole may be seen to have privileged access to "her." In her vision presented to the Army she goes on to suggest that a husband is the head of his wife's body, and also that the King is "your Father and Husband, which you were to obey in the Lord."¹⁸ Here we see the familiar head-body hierarchy, used to capture the hierarchical ordering of God, Kings, men and women—a hierarchy which we also saw in Hobbes's frontispiece, wherein the King is the head and his subjects comprise his body.

Poole's *An Alarum of War* makes use of another common technique of this period, that is the confusion or inversion of gender roles. If the Lord

¹⁷ Elizabeth Poole, *A Vision: wherein is manifested the disease and cure of the Kingdom being the summe of what was lately delivered to the Council of War* (London, 1648), p. 1. Italics in original. Other than the substitution of "s" for "f" no changes will be made to quotations from primary material.

¹⁸ Poole, *A Vision*, p. 3.

is husband to the members of the Army, the implication is that the Army is comprised of wives. She states as much when she implores the Army not to hurt the King's person: "now you were his Wife as offended by him...Lift not your hand against him."¹⁹ The confusion of gender language in this case is meant to underscore the duty Poole believes the Army owes the King and God—how better to discuss duty than to analogize the Army to wives? Poole's choice of comparison is derived from the simple fact that the hierarchies that characterize familial and gender relations provide the richest source of analogies for any discussion of power, duty, and obligation. Again, the analogies are effective because of widespread acceptance of natural hierarchies and order in the family and between the sexes.

The use of familial and gendered images did not originate with Stuart rule, as Elizabeth too had used and popularized them. Given the existing patriarchal social order, the very fact and congruence of Elizabeth's gender and her sovereignty were in tension; but Elizabeth manipulated this tension successfully with carefully chosen metaphors. On the one hand, Elizabeth asserted the weakness of her female body, while on the other hand she declared that her heart and will are male.²⁰ While casting aside demands that she marry, Elizabeth generated contradictory images of herself as Virgin Queen, as well as the mother and sometimes wife to the English nation, so as to command authority, respect, and to show her

¹⁹ Elizabeth Poole, *An Alarum of War, Given to the Army, and to their High Court of Justice (so called) by the wille of God*, 1649, pp. 8-9.

²⁰ Lena Cowen Orlin, "The Fictional Families of Elizabeth I," in Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan, eds., *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 86.

loyalty to the nation.²¹ The use of these metaphors, and their ultimate success, in no way negated, however, the widespread insecurity that lay "right under the surface throughout her reign," an insecurity that rose to the surface in the English nation "whenever events raise the least concern about national security."²² Despite Elizabeth's popularity and success as a ruler, the general concept of female rule, and the specific reality of Elizabeth's rule, remain the subject of intense debate and speculation in political theory and public discourse alike.

As an aside, it is significant, and attests to the odd confusion and inversion of gender in seventeenth-century discourse, that once James I takes the throne, it is Elizabeth who is remembered as the more authoritative and hence masculine ruler, while the new Stuart rule is admonished for its lack of "masculine, Protestant vigor."²³ Such judgments were part and parcel of the battle against the destructive force of Catholicism in England, and thus the more sympathy James appeared to extend to anything remotely associated with Catholicism, the more anxiety stirred in the population. It was not so much James as his primary advisor, Buckingham, who was identified as a threat because of his familial relationship to Catholics.²⁴ Catholicism and femininity are perceived to be a dangerous mixture wherever they cohere; the witch hunts, to take a prominent example, are predicated in part on the belief (held by James himself) that the accused were sympathetic to the seditious religion.

²¹ Orlin, "The Fictional Families," pp. 91-93.

²² Ilona Bell, "Elizabeth I—Always Her Own Free Woman," in Levin and Sullivan, eds., *Political Rhetoric*, p. 74.

²³ David Underdown, *A Freeborn People: Politics and the Nation in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 29.

²⁴ Underdown, *A Freeborn People*, p. 33

With the concepts of patriarchy, gendered power, and patriarchalism defined, it is vital to state that, regardless of their applicability to seventeenth-century England, gender relations themselves were not resolved or rigid during this period. In fact, the opposite is true as we can also characterize the early part of the century as one of gender turmoil and disruption. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the residual effects of a female monarch, contradictory though they were, together with the presence of women like Elizabeth Poole giving political advice to the nation's leaders, produced a public sense of gender disorder. The 1640s in particular witnessed an unusually high rate of public religious activity on the part of women, activity which also led to political acts such as the petitioning of Parliament. The frequent use of gendered language to discuss the constitutional and social crisis of seventeenth-century England is both a reflection of that gender disorder and a response to it. The *actual threat* posed by this disorder is difficult to assess, but it is the *perception of a threat* that incites such a wide reaction.

Accompanying this gender disorder, and partly a symptom of it, is a wave of what Mark Breitenberg has called anxious masculinity. This is a somewhat contradictory term which describes the inevitable tensions that arise in "any social system whose premise is the unequal distribution of power and authority."²⁵ Anxious masculinity is, in Breitenberg's own estimation, a redundant term because masculinity is inherently unstable and anxious. He argues that masculine anxiety functions in early modern England both to "reveal the fissures and contradictions of patriarchal

²⁵ Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in early modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

systems," and to enable the reproduction of patriarchy itself.²⁶ In other words, masculine anxiety is an *effect* of patriarchy and the *driving force* behind its self-reproduction.

A useful concept for comprehending the system of gendered power in Hobbes's period, anxious masculinity serves as a reminder that, despite the entrenchment of male privilege, and often because of it, power relations are fraught with tension and instability. Indeed, in early modern England, there exists a heightened awareness of, and concern about, the potential for gender disorder. As a result, we commonly witness in the writings of male theorists during this period a defensive attempt to reconsolidate "natural" gender and familial relations along Biblical and Aristotelian lines. In some writings, this defensive strategy assumes a more aggressive and misogynistic form: women who do not remain within the confines of the accepted gender order are singled out and targeted as Catholic sympathizers, as lustful, manly, or practitioners of the subversive art of witchcraft.²⁷ Overt misogyny does not set the tone, however. Far more common are expressions of anxiety, confusion, and fear regarding the perceived challenge to the patriarchal order.

As patriarchalists, James I and Filmer exhibit signs of an anxious masculinity, working gender hierarchy into the core of their respective

²⁶ Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, p. 2. Both Fletcher and Underdown treat the subject of masculine or patriarchal anxiety. See Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, Chapter 1; and Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold."

²⁷ An important example of a popular early modern tract that exhibits an overt misogyny is Joseph Swetnam's *The arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and inconstant women*. Published in 1615, Swetnam's attack on women had ten printings before 1634. See Rosemary Masek, "Women in an Age of Transition: 1485-1714," in Barbara Kanner, ed., *The Women of England: From Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present. Interpretive Bibliographic Essays* (Hamden, Conn: Archon, 1979), pp. 147-8.

political theories. The examples of James and Filmer provide us with a sense, albeit limited, of how gender functions in the seventeenth-century intellectual climate. I have selected these examples because they demonstrate how markedly Hobbes's theory differs. In the previous chapter I compared the political views of Hobbes and James VI and I, to find that while they share political solutions (absolute power), they differ in their justificatory strategies for that solution (consent vs. Divine Right, respectively). James is a useful counterpoint to Hobbes on the issue of gender relations as well, precisely because the two are in basic agreement about the way England should be ruled. Likewise, Sir Robert Filmer provides a useful point of comparison, as he, like James, advocates political patriarchy, the very theory that Hobbes's argument on the family is meant to defeat. Keeping in mind Hobbes's ultimate exclusion of women from the social contract, I suggest that Hobbes exhibits far fewer symptoms of anxious masculinity than many of his contemporaries with whom he would have been in basic political agreement; in particular, what is absent from his work is any sort of defensive attack aimed to shore up patriarchal social relations.

It is not an exaggeration to assert that, of all of the public figures and political theorists of early modern England, James proffered and acted upon some of the most misogynistic ideas and beliefs. He is among those who devote considerable attention to the duties and obligations assumed in marriage. On the subject of wives, James adheres to a combination of Biblical and Aristotelian views, as he writes in his popular treatise *Basilicon Doron* of the "godly and vertuous wife," being "*Flesh of your*

*flesh, and bone of your bone, as Adam saide of Henuah [Eve]."*²⁸ Just as women must maintain their bodily purity prior to marriage, so too does James recommend that husbands be chaste, and refrain from adultery once married. He urges his son, to whom the tract is written, to remember the three purposes of marriage: it is an outlet for sexual desire; it permits the procreation of (legitimate) children; and it exists so "that man should by his Wife, get a helper like himselfe." Employing all the familiar analogies, James commends to his son a hierarchical but loving relationship with his wife:

command her as her Lord, cherish her as your helper, rule her as your pupill, and please her in all things reasonable; but teach her not to be curious in things that belong her not: Ye are the head, shee is your body.²⁹

James borrows the Aristotelian division of public from private when he advises that a woman is "neuer to meddle with the Politicke gouernment of the Commonweale, but holde her at the Oeconomicke rule of the house: and yet all to be subject to your direction."³⁰ James' passage on marriage, then, reflects accepted wisdom, combining the Christian notion of companionate, patriarchal marriage and the strict ideological division of roles limiting women's activity to the household because of her status as the "frailest sexe." At the same time, James is a noted patriarchalist. On one level then, the type of rule exercised in public and private is similar and so public and private themselves are similar. On a different level, however, the spheres

²⁸ King James VI and I, *Basilicon Doron* in King James VI and I, *Political Writings*, Johann P. Sommerville, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 38.

²⁹ *Basilicon Doron*, p. 42.

³⁰ *Basilicon Doron*, p. 42.

of public and private are divided along gender lines and never the twain shall meet.

If this were the extent of James' views on women, he would not stand in any sharp relief from his contemporaries. However, while still in Scotland, James VI participated zealously in a campaign against the practice of witchcraft, especially between the years of 1590-1597.³¹ During a visit to Denmark he developed a great fascination with the witchcraft trials, and he later procured confessions in his own country. In 1597 he wrote a tract on the subject entitled *Daemonologie*.³² His particular contribution to the English witchcraft frenzy is the idea that witches had made a demonic pact, that they were not themselves agents of magic but were "mere vessels of an exclusively masculine malevolence."³³ Here it is important to point out that witchcraft accusations were made predominantly but not exclusively against women; but witchcraft should not be understood as something that women practiced consciously as much as it was a charge leveled against those who were thought to be subverting the local social order.³⁴ In this sense, then, how James constructed the idea of the witch is central to his treatment of women who he thought were guilty of witchcraft. Moreover, his construction of the witch is inextricably linked to his own dichotomous ideas of "good" and "bad" women. Deborah Willis explores the possibility

³¹ Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 124. See also Laurence, *Women in England*, p. 218. Scotland conducted a far greater number of witchcraft executions than did England, and James' zealous campaign is thought to be partly responsible for the higher Scottish numbers.

³² Reprinted in G.B. Harrison, ed., *Elizabethan and Jacobean Quartos* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966).

³³ Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, p. 147.

³⁴ See Willis, "Introduction," *Malevolent Nurture*; Laurence, *Women in England*, p. 224.

that James' relatively brief but passionate obsession with the witch may be tied to his uneasy relationship with both his real mother, Queen Mary, and his "motherly advisor," Queen Elizabeth, both of whom at one point or another undermined, or were obstacles to, his autonomous rule.³⁵ In this view, the practice of witch hunting permitted him an opportunity to assert his own masculine dominance in Scotland, whereas after he takes up the English crown he no longer requires the witch to fulfill this function.

Turning to Hobbes's political works, even a cursory comparison reveals sharp distinctions between Hobbes and James on gender. It is immediately evident that Hobbes invests no amount of energy comparable to James in delineating either the roles and duties of wives, or in articulating the proper prosecution of witches. While he obviously does discuss the family, most significantly in the state of nature, but also briefly in the context of discussing what is public and private in civil society, he does not enumerate a list of how a wife is to be thought of in relation to her husband. The most provocative statement Hobbes makes on the question of women is not a patriarchal one but the opposite: it is an assertion of women's ability to decide whether to contract, or not, to have sole dominion over children. This comment will be examined in greater detail in Section II.

As for comments on witches, we might expect Hobbes, being versed in James' work, and no less a product of the early modern fervour over witches, to take up this topic with the same vigour. In fact, he does not, though he does associate witches with enthusiasm, and the "insignificant

³⁵ Willis, "James among the Witch-Hunters," *Malevolent Nurture*, Chapter 4.

Speeches of Mad-men, supposed to be possessed with a divine Spirit." He expresses obvious skepticism regarding the validity of witches' claims, calling witchcraft a "pretended conference with the dead," or Necromancy.³⁶ Nevertheless, Hobbes supports the punishment of witches, not because of some deep misogyny of the kind attributable to James, but because of the threat witches pose to the social and political order.

For as for Witches, I think not that their witchcraft is any reall power; but that yet that they are justly punished, for the false believe they have, that they can do such mischiefe, joyned with their purpose to do it if they can: their trade being nearer to a new Religion, than to a Craft or Science.³⁷

It would appear then, that Hobbes objects to witches for the same reason he objects to religious enthusiasts: for their potential to stimulate disorder among those who are too uneducated to know any better. It is primarily the "rude" or uneducated, in his view, who are unable to differentiate "Dreams, and other strong Fancies, from Vision and Sense", and who believe that fairies, ghosts and witches exist. Of course we should not underestimate Hobbes's disdain for religious enthusiasts, but it is noteworthy that his disdain is not connected to any palpable misogyny but rather to his persistent drive to create an orderly Commonwealth apart from any subversive religious forces.

Sir Robert Filmer is another important contemporary with whom Hobbes shares basic ideas on the nature of political rule. Filmer believed

³⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Richard Tuck, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Part I: Chapter 12, 81 (abbreviated hereafter as *Lev* I: 12, 81). From Margaret Cavendish's writing it is known that Hobbes devoted at least some time to the consideration of witchcraft, as he is reported by her to have spent time discussing the subject with her husband, William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, in Paris. Thomas Hobbes, *The Correspondence, Vol. II: 1660-1679*, Noel Malcolm, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), p. 811.

³⁷ *Lev*, I: 2, 18.

the rule of the Commonwealth should be indivisible, and was as skeptical as Hobbes about the idea of power shared between the monarch and Parliament. Moreover, Filmer believed the King's power to be absolute and beyond judgment; for this reason he rebuffed the very thought of subjects' rights and liberties claimed in the *Petition of Right*. Any liberties possessed are "the liberties of grace from the king, and not the liberties of nature to the people." As a patriarchal political theorist, however, Filmer relies on a similitude between Adam's God-given power, which is inherited by Kings, and the power of fathers over families. It is here, in the choice of similitude and the derivation of rule, that the divergence between Filmer and Hobbes is pronounced.

There are two related issues that bear examination in Filmer, the first being his reliance on the story of Genesis to ground his theory of politics. According to Filmer, Genesis tells the true story about the derivation of political and familial power in seventeenth-century England. If "God gave to Adam not only the dominion over the woman and the children that should issue from them, but also over all the creatures on it" then it was clear to Filmer that political power could not be held except "by donation, assignation or permission from him."³⁸ Although Filmer stretches the use of the story of Genesis to its extreme limits, he is not alone in reading the ancillary status of woman from the Fall; indeed, this was a commonplace in early modern England.³⁹

³⁸ Sir Robert Filmer, "Observations Concerning the Originall of Government, Upon Mr Hobs Lev," in Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, Johann P. Sommerville, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 184-95.

³⁹ Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection*, p. 29

Filmer's theory of patriarchalism eliminates any possibility of natural right, attributed by Hobbes and later Locke to human beings in the state of nature. In fact, Filmer expresses grave concern over the potentially subversive force of political consent. Consent and contract have no more place in the Commonwealth, according to Filmer, than they do in the relations between men and women in the family. The mere suggestion of consent breeds in Filmer a kind of masculine anxiety. He writes,

but where there is equality by nature, there can be no superior power; there every infant at the hour it is born in, hath an interest with the greatest and wisest man in the world...not to speak of women, especially virgins, who by birth have as much natural freedom as any other, and therefore ought not to lose their liberty without their own consent.⁴⁰

Given this patriarchal assertion, one might reasonably be led to wonder about the relevance of the marriage contract, i.e. why, if women are by nature subordinate to men as a result of God's grant to Adam and his subsequent grant to all husbands and fathers, is the marriage contract even necessary? But this is not Filmer's concern; in fact, what we see in Filmer is a defensive strategy designed to protect the privilege and right of fathers and Kings in the face of their anarchic challengers.

The second and related issue that requires discussion in Filmer's thought is patrogenesis. While in the above instance he implies that any issue is the shared product of Adam and Eve, elsewhere he states that "God at the creation gave sovereignty to the man over the woman, as being the nobler and principal agent in generation."⁴¹ Similarly, he believes that "all men came by succession and generation from one man. We must not

⁴⁰ Sir Robert Filmer, "The Anarchy of a Limited or Mixed Monarchy," in Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Political Works of Sir Robert Filmer*, Peter Laslett, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), p. 287.

⁴¹ Filmer, *Patriarcha*, Sommerville, ed., p. 192.

deny the truth of the history of the creation."⁴² Adam came first, and from him the woman was made. From the discussion of Plato, it is evident that patrogenesis is never benign, that it serves a political end even if it is couched as scientific belief. Whether or not Filmer actually believed that men patrogenically created all other human beings or not is not the central issue; the central issue is that he propagates this idea because it augments very effectively his patriarchalist political theory.

Despite their shared premises, Hobbes and Filmer fundamentally disagree about the source of power in the Commonwealth and in the family. Hobbes nowhere implies a belief in patrogenesis of the kind advocated by Filmer, primarily because he does not read political right as having emerged from Adam's power in the Garden of Eden. Hobbes's argument about the family and gender relations is a direct outgrowth of his overall attack on patriarchalism. The origin of that constitutional attack lies in Hobbes's concern that the argument for Divine Right advanced the power of the clergy beyond what was safe for the commonwealth. Indeed, Hobbes's desire to limit the power of bishops in fear of their subversive potential in part accounts for his theory that the sovereign should have unlimited powers of biblical interpretation as well as the belief that power cannot be shared. Patriarchalists, by promoting the theory of Divine Right, further destabilize the order of the regime. By undermining the basis of their origin story, Hobbes hopes to undermine their political argument as a whole. At this point, it will be worthwhile to review and

⁴² Filmer, *Patriarcha*, Sommerville, ed., p. 187-8.

analyze Hobbes's attack, so as to clarify exactly what he does say as regards the family and the first political right.

II Gender relations in the natural state: the critique of patriarchalism

In his use of an origin story, and the development of its content, Hobbes is highly strategic. He carefully selects examples that will have rhetorical appeal. These statements apply no less to his reconfiguration of the family and gender relations; the origin story abounds with the common analogies of family and state, and with images of powerful queens and Amazons. Hobbes's ingenuity, that which distinguishes him from other political theorists and writers of the period, is found in the *substance* of what he says about the family, queens and Amazons. Hobbes's highly contentious reconfiguration of gender should be understood as centrally important to the justification of his political theory, for it is this argument that allows him to combat the theory that all political power is derived from Adam, and that both fatherly and Kingly rule are natural and God-given. Moreover, this particular effort to undermine patriarchalist political theory is found, not only in *Leviathan*, but in the earlier *Elements of Law*, and *De Cive*. In the end, Hobbes posits the *consensual* nature of familial and political relations, and in the process presents a provocative account of original political right.

Hobbes fights his battle with patriarchalism in his state of nature, and it is here that we see his intriguing statements about women. Hobbes's quarrel with political patriarchalism is not based on a rejection of the analogy between family and political rule. In fact, he agrees with

patriarchalists that the family can be a useful model for understanding the origin of the state and its relations with its subjects. At points he appears to accept Filmer's equation of familial and political rule; for example in the *Leviathan* he suggests that cities and kingdoms "are but greater Families."⁴³ Hobbes participates in this analogical thinking that so dominates seventeenth-century political theory, but he depicts the family very differently from his contemporaries. Recall that the content of origin stories tends to follow, and be determined by, a preconceived political solution. In this way, Filmer's desire to prove the origination of political power in Adam is intertwined with his need for a justification of natural fatherly and kingly rule in England. In Filmer's case, the origin narrative prescribes that desired political end wherein the King is understood as a father and the father a king. Hobbes's argument has an extra twist, in that his story is meant to justify a political solution, but not to prescribe it directly from the state of nature. Nevertheless, insofar as his desired end is to conclude that sovereign power is derived from consent, Hobbes develops a model of the family that will match and serve as an appropriate justification for that end.

What is Hobbes's analogy for the state? It is a consensually-created family, one that looks much different from the companionate-patriarchal arrangement recommended by James, and different again from the paternal dominion advocated by Filmer. As if to set the stage for his case, Hobbes asserts that,

whereas some have attributed the Dominion to the Man onely, as being of the more excellent Sex; they misreckon in it. For there is not

⁴³ *Lev*, II: 17, 118.

always that difference of strength, or prudence between the man and woman, as that the right can be determined without War.⁴⁴

Certainly, this is not an explicit statement of the equality of men and women, but it accomplishes two important things for Hobbes. First, it disrupts the conventional view that women are the lesser sex as dictated by nature. Second, it implies that the power relationship of dominance and submission between men and women is one that must be decided by battle, again bearing the marks of a convention rather than nature.

Building on this preliminary assertion of a rough equality of men and women, Hobbes claims that primary authority over children lies with the mother if she chooses it. Going against the prevalent belief that parental authority resides in the father or that it should be shared by both parents, Hobbes claims that "If there be no Contract, the Dominion is in the Mother."⁴⁵ The state of nature, as Hobbes envisions it, is a state without laws of matrimony; there exist only the law of nature and the "naturall inclination of the Sexes one to another, and to their children."⁴⁶ Significantly, without matrimonial laws, there can be no certain knowledge of paternity, "unless it be declared by the Mother." Therefore, it is most logical that the mother is the first to have the opportunity to "rule" the child, i.e. raise and have dominion over it. As Hobbes explains in *De Cive*, "among men no less than other creatures, the birth follows the belly."⁴⁷ Since no person can obey two masters, and authority is indivisible, women could not choose to rule the family jointly with men.

⁴⁴ *Lev*, II: 20, 139.

⁴⁵ *Lev*, II: 20, 140.

⁴⁶ *Lev*, II: 20, 140.

⁴⁷ *De Cive*, Ch. IX, 213.

Hobbes's clear statement of "original maternal dominion" is significant for its recognition of the simple fact of biological maternity. When considered in light of Filmer's patrogenic theory of patriarchal dominion, it is evident that Hobbes does not import patrogenic or Biblical theories of the Fall of woman into his political origin story. Rather, he fully recognizes the limitations on paternal certainty and this leads him to question automatic paternal dominion. When Hobbes does invoke Genesis, it is to assert that God created one man and one woman—a defence of heterosexual monogamy, not patrogenesis. Even the reference to woman as Adam's helpmeet in *Leviathan* does not preclude Hobbes's more radical statements on maternal dominion. As previously discussed, Hobbes reads the Fall of humanity in Genesis in a limited manner; he expressly leaves out of the story of the Fall Eve's punishment, her "sin", and her subordination to Adam. As a result, the state of nature does not bear the marks of a defeated woman. This is significant because it leaves the door open for Hobbes to make his case about equality and consent—using the examples of powerful women—without contradiction.

What is also interesting in the analogy is Hobbes's understanding of the nature of the parent-child relation. In order to undermine patriarchalism, Hobbes claims that parental authority arises from consent, not from nature. This enigmatic assertion does not necessarily counteract his first statement that "birth follows the belly": the original right to claim parental authority lies with the mother because of her immediate physical relationship to the child, but the actual bond itself, if it is formed at all, is conventional. It is entirely possible that the mother may choose not to nourish it, but rather "expose it," or "adventure him to fortune." In the

event that the mother does expose the child, the dominion over it falls to whomever does care for it. In either case, whether the mother or the father nurtures the child, it owes its complete obedience, because its life, to that person.⁴⁸ As Hobbes writes, "every man is supposed to promise obedience, to him, in whose power it is to save, or destroy him."⁴⁹ This relationship of dominion and obedience remains, however, one of at least *tacit consent*, the implication being that Hobbes understands the difficulty in achieving consent from an infant. In the end, however, his purpose is to demonstrate that parental power, like political rule over a commonwealth, is conventional and not natural.

To shore up his case for conventionalism against patriarchalism, Hobbes reverts to using historical and mythological examples of women who possessed such power. Here again we see Hobbes's deliberate rhetorical strategy at work. He uses the provocative myth of the Amazons—the women who selectively decided if, and under what conditions, they would mother a child, and who took up arms to fight for their own political predominance over nations of men—to cast doubt on the natural rule of men over women and children. Custom, writes Hobbes in *De Cive*, does not dictate against such a war, "for women, namely Amazons, have in former

⁴⁸ Gordon J. Schochet suggests that Hobbes relies on the law of gratitude, without naming it as such, to show the obligation that is owed to those who spare us our lives. He contends that Hobbes's argument about mothers "reveals a kind of conceptual embarrassment. Mothers did give birth in the state of nature, but Hobbes insisted upon rooting the consequences of this undeniably natural phenomenon in convention." It seems to me that Hobbes is being strategic and, in fact, makes a convincing argument: while birth may be a *natural* event, motherhood is a *social* relationship. Schochet's argument is explained in "Intending (Political) Obligation: Hobbes and the Voluntary Basis of Society," in Mary Deitz, ed., *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), p. 64.

⁴⁹ *Lev*, II: 20, 140.

times waged war against their adversaries, and disposed of their children at their own wills."⁵⁰ The mythological example of the Amazons is meant to prove the point that women and men are on a roughly equal plane; they are equally likely to predominate in a battle against one another. The Amazons corroborate Hobbes's theory that women can, and in many places do, have sole authority over children. As he argues in *Leviathan*:

the Amazons Contracted with the Men of the neighbouring Countries, to whom they had recourse for issue, that the issue Male should be sent back, but the Female remain with themselves: so that the dominion of the Females was in the Mother.⁵¹

Amazonian motherhood is understood here as a contractual (and thus social) relation. Hobbes may have had the Amazons in mind when he opened the possibility that women may choose not to nourish and mother their infant, as the mythical tribe was infamous for abandonment.

In his particular deployment of the Amazons, Hobbes once again goes against the grain of his English and European contemporaries. It is true that Amazon mythology enjoyed renewed popularity in literary and political discourse during the Elizabethan and Stuart eras;⁵² therefore, we should not be surprised by Hobbes's reference to them. Political theorists and writers alike debated the truth and practicality of the idea of an all-female community. Amazonian characters also appeared in drama; admired for their beauty, they were thought to be the embodiment of valor. However, Hobbes's contemporaries did not find in the Amazons a positive example for female authority as he did. In fact, Amazonian treatment of

⁵⁰ *De Cive*, Ch. IX, 213.

⁵¹ *Lev*, II: 20, 140.

⁵² For an overview, see Celeste Turner Wright, "The Amazons in Elizabethan Literature," *Studies in Philology*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, July 1940.

children, including their recourse to infanticide and the refusal to suckle male children, was held in particular contempt. Also regarded as unnatural was the idea that women would take up arms or rule politically.

For the most part, the myth of the Amazons did the same cultural and political work in early modern England as it did in ancient Greece: it demonstrated the superior quality of more natural kinds of rule, i.e. patriarchy. Some contemporary examples illustrate the point. To Francis Bacon, the Amazons are an example of the "preposterous government" of women, a government that contravenes nature.⁵³ In a similar vein, *A Parliament of Ladies*, a satirical tract that appeared in 1647, illustrates the scorn reserved for women who attempt to overturn the natural gender order. Its author (thought to be Henry Neville) recounts the story of a group of women who, upon hearing that the Parliament has passed a law permitting each man to have two wives, organize their own Parliament in a parlour. As an incitement to action, one of the ladies queries: "Where be those magnanimous and Masculine Spirited Matrons? those valiant Viragoes? those lusty Ladies: those daring *Amazonian* Damsels," who are reputed to have turned princes into puppets, philosophers into fools and their husbands into "henchmen." The conclusion of the women's

⁵³ Quote from Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, p. 75. Spinoza also has a suggestive passage devoted to the Amazons: His desire is to determine, in a total of one page, whether or not women are naturally inferior to men. His conclusion is that, because women never do rule with or over men, they should be understood as inferior. Moreover, he writes, men's passions and lusts for women would destroy the potential for peace if they were to rule jointly. Convention appears to be normative for Spinoza. "The Amazons, who are said by legend to have ruled in days gone by, are no exception" to the rule that men and women cannot share power harmoniously, "for they would not allow men to stay in their native land, but used to rear females only and to kill the males they had borne." See Benedict De Spinoza, *The Political Works*, A.G. Wernham, ed. (Toronto: Oxford, 1958), pp. 443-5.

Parliament is that the law should be reversed, allowing them two or three husbands who, incidentally, they should be able to torment and vex at will.⁵⁴ A *Parliament of the Ladies* appeared at a time in which women were petitioning Parliament and demanding a voice. The transgressions of the gender order are ridiculed as lust in disguise, and the women themselves are characterized as manly and Amazonian.

The similarly satirical and tremendously popular *Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-Woman* also makes an interesting study, both for its allusion to the masculine Amazons and for its treatment of gender inversions. This short pamphlet was published as a commentary on James' criticisms of those who were inverting gender code by cross-dressing. Masculine are those women who "have cast off the ornaments of your sexes to put on the garments of Shame," harlots who have "buried silence to revive slander."⁵⁵ Women who speak too much, or who (appear to) fail to abide by the society's sexual standards are admonished for creating a mockery of the gender order.⁵⁶ Such women are "man in body by attire...man in action by pursuing revenge, man in wearing weapons...and, in brief, so much man in all

⁵⁴ "The chiefe Heads of the Ladies Lawes" in *Parliament of Ladies; With their Lawes newly enacted*, 1647.

⁵⁵ *Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman*, in Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, eds., *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 266.

⁵⁶ The author scorns Lady Francis Howard, who in 1613 began an affair with one of the members of the King's court. She sought and received an annulment to her marriage and afterwards married the earl of Somerset, with whom she had been having the affair. It came to light sometime later that the man who had tried to intervene and stop the affair, Sir Thomas Overbury, was in fact murdered in the Tower of London by Lady Frances. Her accomplice in the murder, a woman also, was sent to the Gallows, but James commuted Lady Frances' death sentence. See editor's annotations, f.n. 12, in *Hic Mulier*, p. 267.

things that they are neither men nor women, but just good for nothing."⁵⁷ The Amazons epitomize the masculine woman, and they rule not by God's sanction, as in the case of Elizabeth, but tyrannically, against nature, and in pursuit of a "licentious liberty."⁵⁸

In a subsequent pamphlet, *Hæc Vir: Or The Womanish Man*, the man-woman, Hic Mulier, and the womanish-man, Hæc Vir, engage in a mock dialogue about their "hermaphroditic" identities. (Hermaphrodite is used regularly to refer to individuals who take on the behaviour or dress of the opposite sex.) Hic Mulier is made to defend her choice to dress and behave like a man. She does this by claiming that women only became manly in response to men who had begun to dress and behave in effeminate ways first, robbing women of their distinctiveness. According to the laws of nature, of nations, and of religions, Hic Mulier states, "it is necessary that there be a distinct and special difference between Man and Woman, both in their habit and behaviors." Affirming the tradition of oppositional gender roles—and yet in a strange way admitting to the artificiality of gender distinctions—the two characters agree to restore order and resume their natural gender roles and identities. "Henceforth we will live nobly like ourselves," they agree, "ever sober, ever discreet, ever worthy: true men and true women."⁵⁹ In this tract, as in the others, Amazonian rule and mannish-women represent the complete and unnatural inversion of the proper hierarchy between men and women. The restoration of order

⁵⁷ *Hic Mulier*, pp. 269-70

⁵⁸ The author invokes the Amazons in his quotation from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

⁵⁹ *Hæc Vir: Or, The Womanish-Man*, also reprinted in Henderson and McManus, eds., *Half Humankind*, p. 289.

necessitates the return to an Aristotelian and Biblical understanding of gender opposition.

The very things that his predecessors and contemporaries found ridiculous, even monstrous, in the Amazons, Hobbes uses for the purposes of proving the logic of his argument.⁶⁰ This goes against what we might expect from Hobbes. Recall that he, more than most, is a writer concerned with the preservation of order at all costs. Indeed, through his political solution, he sacrifices all public debate and discussion; he sacrifices all populist implications of his consent theory and opts instead for absolutism; and finally he sacrifices politics itself to public order in the state. Given his evident preoccupation with maintaining order, Hobbes is a likely candidate for a kind of masculine anxiety regarding any confusion of gender roles. Instead, he participates in this confusion, *prudently marshaling* rather than *mocking* the Amazons. In this sustained argument about the Amazons, Hobbes creates a space in his political theory for an alternative conception of women, thereby disrupting conventional views.

⁶⁰ Some feminists have explained Hobbes's use of the Amazons differently. In *The Woman of Reason*, Karen Green, following an argument she attributes to Pateman, suggests that Hobbes's reference to the Amazons reveals his awareness, and retelling of, the myth of the overthrow of mother-right (p. 50). This is, I think, quite far off the mark. Hobbes's purpose in raising the spectre of the Amazons is the opposite of what Green theorizes. His words in *De Cive* state the argument best; after referring to the Amazons, he asserts, "And at this day, in divers places women are invested with the principal authority..." (Chapter IX, 213). The point is to affirm the continued *possibility* that women can hold maternal dominion, not that they have forever lost it in a mythical battle.

Ingrid Makus, in *Women, Politics and Reproduction*, recognizes that Hobbes took seriously "the Amazons as a historical example of women having dominion over children and acting as heads of households" (p. 29). And yet she reads Hobbes's message to be that the Amazons are mere exceptions to the general rule that men are the founders of Commonwealths, not women. This is how Hobbes's contemporaries use the Amazons. While Hobbes does fall back on the latter assertion about the founders of the commonwealth, his use of the Amazons, in my view, is meant to show not that maternal dominion is rare, but that it is possible. The distinction is important.

The other image of powerful women which Hobbes summons to consolidate his point about maternal dominion is the female monarch. It is logical that he would theorize about female monarchy given the recent rule of Queen Elizabeth, but again the image he presents is enigmatic. It is important to consider, before turning to Hobbes's comments, the widespread ambivalence about female rule—even that of the Virgin Queen. A direct challenge to Elizabeth's rule came in the form of John Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, published in 1558. Although intended to berate the Catholic and female monarchy of Elizabeth's sister, Mary I of England, as well as that of Mary Queen of Scots and her mother Mary of Guise, its publication coincided with Elizabeth's ascension. Knox later found himself in the awkward position of having to justify Elizabeth's rule, in spite of his stated fear that the whole world had been transformed into Amazons; he did so by claiming that Elizabeth was an *exception* to the general impropriety of women's rule because she was ordained by God himself.⁶¹

Although the severity of Knox's argument against female rule is not widely representative, but rather constitutes an extreme, the path he takes to defend Elizabeth as an exceptional woman is exactly that which is taken by most of her defenders.⁶² This is important, for Elizabeth is "never a mere woman"⁶³ in public discourse, but is always understood to be above the mark of most women. The implication is that the excellence of her rule

⁶¹ This justification did nothing to return him to the favour of Elizabeth. See Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection*, pp. 74–75, fn. 41. Sections of Knox's tract have been reprinted in Aughterson, ed., *Renaissance Women*.

⁶² Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection*, p. 55.

⁶³ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, p. 79.

and authority does not disrupt the established practice of male primogeniture. In fact, female monarchy could be defended within that very practice as a reflection of God's will. A key problem—to which Hobbes formulates an unusual response—remained, and that was the proper hierarchy within the monarch's marriage. The woman *qua* monarch ruled over every man in the Commonwealth, but was she subject *qua* wife within her marriage? Elizabeth's supporters worried that any husband she took might usurp her authority precisely because of his conjugal authority over her. A common solution to this problem was to differentiate conjugal and regal-political power. This would mean that even if a queen ruled a state, and ostensibly every male within it, she was still subject to her husband in marriage.⁶⁴ In this way, neither the sovereignty of the monarch nor that of the husband in marriage was compromised.

While his contemporaries struggle to find a justification for the legitimacy of female rule in the rare *exception* in which there exists no male heir, and while they search for a means to keep patriarchal authority in marriage intact, Hobbes goes characteristically against the grain by *generalizing* the case of female rule to discuss parental authority.⁶⁵ If a Queen marries one of her subjects, "the Child is subject to the Mother; because the Father also is her subject."⁶⁶ Hobbes's statement is a two-pronged attack on patriarchalism: not only does the husband lose his

⁶⁴ Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection*, pp. 57-59.

⁶⁵ It is not that Hobbes disagrees with the practice of male primogeniture, for despite the consent theory which he elaborates, he acknowledges that nations are commonly ruled by hereditary monarchs. Children of the current monarch are preferred in the order of succession, and men are preferred over women, for the former "are naturally fitter than women, for actions of labour and danger." *Lev*, II: 19, 137.

⁶⁶ *Lev*, II: 20, 140.

conjugal authority over the Queen in this case, but the child that they conceive is in the Queen's dominion, not his. The reverse applies, of course, if the father happens to be the monarch. For Hobbes, conjugal power and parental power are intricately related: if one partner in the union is subject to the other, then their issue is also subject to the higher power. To give the monarch power over the commonwealth, but her husband power over her, would be to divide authority, thereby destabilizing the regime. Hobbes's maxim in this and all cases is, *obey the one to whom you have consented and thus transferred your political right.*

There are two essential and interrelated components to Hobbes's familial argument as I have presented it. The first is the theory of *original maternal dominion*, in which mothers are proposed to have the first opportunity for political right over the child. This political right is not automatic, as a woman may choose not to protect and parent the child. Motherhood is based on consent, and this forms the second component of the argument. *Consent* is, in point of fact, the basis for *all parental authority* over children. The question to be considered is why Hobbes would use both of the components of this argument. Is the suggestion that parental dominion is consensual not sufficient to undermine patriarchalism's belief in the God-given grant of political power to Kings and fathers? Why does Hobbes posit original maternal dominion as well?

It is possible that once Hobbes transformed what others had thought were naturally-mandated hierarchical familial relations into consenting ones, he recognized that it would make no logical sense for children always to consent to *paternal* rule and never to *maternal* rule. Arbitrary paternal rule would be especially unlikely when, as Hobbes puts it, "birth follows

the belly." If the mother is the first adult with whom the child has an immediate physical relationship, then the mother-child relation should be understood as the first political right. Hobbes's suggestion to this effect has the increased likelihood of disarming his opponents who could not conceive of anything but patriarchal authority in the family. This is surely the point: to disrupt patriarchal authority in the family and hence in the political realm as well. Positing maternal dominion is the final step to *rationalizing every human relationship*, making every relationship the product of artifice not nature. By Hobbes's logic, if even the most "natural" relation between mother and child is now understood as conventional, then surely it is evident that, by extension, the relationship between subjects and their sovereign is conventional.

III Hobbes and gender disorder

Up to this point, this chapter has contrasted Hobbes's presentation of the family and that which is presented by his contemporaries. My argument has been that Hobbes consistently fails to conform to the dominant rhetoric about gender confusion, Amazons, masculine women, and witches. Rather than exhibiting signs of defensive and anxious masculinity, Hobbes creates spaces in his political theory that reflect the prevailing gender disorder. As we have seen, Hobbes uses opportunistically ideas about gender turmoil and women's contractual abilities to make a more thoroughgoing and devastating argument against patriarchalism. In this final section, I consider Hobbes's attack on patriarchalism in relation to the women activists of the Civil War and Interregnum. It is, of course, the women activists who contribute to the generation of the gender disorder, and a

better understanding of their acts and arguments gives us the tools with which to assess the significance of Hobbes's argument against patriarchy. An overview of the women activists reveals how Hobbes appears at times to play into, and at others times to surpass, their claims. Indeed, the comparison of Hobbes to the women activists yields a surprising result: his argument, although driven by opportunism, constitutes a more directly political critique of the political theory of patriarchy than women themselves are formulating.

To say that Hobbes's epoch is one of gender disorder is to say that, despite the existence of a prevalent ideology dictating a hierarchical and oppositional gender code, the actual activities of people do not conform perfectly to this ideology. Certainly in all historical periods it remains important to distinguish between thought and practice as such, lest the ideology *about* women convince us—in the absence of evidence—that women abided by these strictures. In this particular historical period, this distinction takes on additional importance as there is an increasing gap between what is thought about women and what women themselves are actually doing. Particularly during the Civil War and Interregnum, women engaged in religious debates, preaching, prophesying, speaking and writing according to their consciences. Such acts were deliberately public, although they were not all directed toward the same goal. Not all religious women acted to free women from the constraints of subordination, and very few engaged in what would be defined as overtly political activity. Nevertheless, their activity disrupted the code of customary behaviour expected of women in a historical period still devoted to Aristotelian and Biblical notions of male-female hierarchy. In short, these women initiated

a phase of gender disorder. The purpose here is to try to make some sense of this contradictory phase.

In initiating gender disorder women bring into the public realm their specific problems and concerns about religion and politics in the English nation. Women's writing on all subjects rose markedly during the period of the Interregnum and Civil War, beginning in the 1640s, largely because of the breakdown in censorship. During the 1640s and 1650s, women's publications constitute 1.2 per cent of all publications—still a small percentage—but this marks a substantial increase over the pre-war percentage of 0.5.⁶⁷ By far the bulk of their activity, however, is focused on religious issues as opposed to questions of politics or women's subordination in general. This is not to deny that the issues are, in practice, conflated whenever women enter the public, spiritual realm to speak. In an important sense, the very acts of preaching, prophesying, and publicly interpreting scripture allow women "the only taste of public authority they would ever know,"⁶⁸ and constitute a challenge to the patriarchal order. This question of the political significance of women's activity is one to which I will return later.

Religious women, or at least those women who chose to speak publicly rather than continue their private religious practices, exploited an opening within the Christian concept of conscience to advance their public cause. Conscience, insofar as it was thought to be a human being's

⁶⁷ Patricia Crawford, "The Challenges to Patriarchalism: How did the Revolution affect Women?" in John Morrill, ed., *Revolution and Restoration: England in the 1650s* (London: Collins and Brown, 1992), p. 124.

⁶⁸ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 5.

inner moral guide to, and judge of, outward behaviour, was universal and therefore ungendered.⁶⁹ Whatever their perceived deficiencies in other areas, women were expected to follow their consciences and choose their behaviour accordingly. Precisely because individual conscience was understood as the key to personal salvation, almost any act could be justified on the basis that conscience prescribed it. Acts of conscience by women took many different forms, ranging from the writing of religious tracts, to fasting, to the dramatic demonstration by Lady Eleanor Davies in which she poured hot tar and wheat paste on the altar of a church.⁷⁰ When we combine the universality of the concept of conscience with the fact that many women studied the Bible and held strong moral convictions about the practice of religious faith,⁷¹ the immense potential for women's public religious disorder is born.

Many of the women who challenged the patriarchal religious order were members of the newly emerging but as yet unconsolidated Protestant sects. They were, among other things, Quakers, Baptists, Independents and Fifth Monarchist millenarians. Indeed, women predominated in the

⁶⁹ Although the concept in the abstract was ungendered, the discourse about conscience, and the ability to use conscience as a justification for one's actions, was indeed gendered. See Patricia Crawford, "Public Duty, Conscience, and Women in Early Modern England," in John Morrill, Paul Slack, and Daniel Woolf, eds., *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays Presented to G.E. Aylmer* (Toronto: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁷⁰ Lady Eleanor Davies was among the most provocative and radical of the female prophesiers; she had predicted the execution of Charles I, an act which earned her imprisonment at the Gatehouse. Nor did her imprisonment put an end to her religious zeal; upon her release she reportedly seated herself on the episcopal throne and sprinkled the famous mixture on the cathedral hangings. For this she was sent to Bedlam (where she predicted a fire and one occurred), and then to the Tower. See Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), pp. 157-160; and Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 98.

⁷¹ Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 90-1.

voluntary congregations of the sects, which they joined by their own free consent—sometimes against the will of their husbands—and in which they enjoyed voting privileges.⁷² Those who preached had audiences of men and women both, and some saw themselves as ministers rather than mere prophets.⁷³ Other women claimed to have been visited by God, or to have had prophetic visions, visions that left them no choice but to communicate to others their Godly message. Mary Cary, a Fifth Monarchist millenarian, defends the act of female prophesy on the basis that she has not chosen, but is compelled by God, to speak. She has no more control over her behaviour, she writes, than a pencil "when no hand guides it"; God alone is responsible, "for I am a very weak, and unworthy instrument, and have not done this work by any strength of my own."⁷⁴

In a similar vein, Elizabeth Poole presented herself to the Army Council as a conduit of God's word and "Thy fellow sufferer in the Kingdome of the patience of Christ."⁷⁵ She warned the Army of the treachery that would follow should they commit regicide and implored the members not to betray their trust by giving power over to the people. "You justly blame the King

⁷² According to Patricia Crawford's research, women may have outnumbered men in the sects by two to one. Their status as members remained ambiguous, however. Women's consent to the church covenant was required, but their names in some cases are listed separately on the church register, and Crawford notes that many of the congregations had debates about whether women should swear the covenant in the first place. See *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (New York: Routledge, 1996), Chapter 7, "Separatist churches and sexual politics."

⁷³ Which is not to say that the churches themselves necessarily saw women as ministers. See Mack, *Visionary Women*, 91. Indeed, there was resistance to women preaching, as Katherine Chidley engaged in an extended debate with Thomas Edwards on, among other issues, this subject. See Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena*, Reprinted in Aughterson, ed., *Renaissance Woman*. See also *A Discoverie of Six women preachers, in Middlesex, Kent, Cambridgshire, and Salisbury*, 1641.

⁷⁴ Mary (Rande) Cary, *Little Horns Doom and Downfall*, "To the Reader," 1651.

⁷⁵ Poole, *An Alarum of War*, "The Postscript."

for betraying his trust, and the Parliament for betraying theirs," she writes, "This is the great thing I have to say to you, Betray not you your trust."⁷⁶ In the end, her moderate political message did not receive much support within the Army, but there is no question that she was perceived as a legitimate "prophetess" whose message was taken seriously.⁷⁷ Indeed, in order to appear before the Army to express her religious vision, she would have to have received the support of Cromwell and Ireton.⁷⁸ Poole is an example of a religious visionary who was able to use her religiosity to catapult her into the political sphere.

It was not unusual for English women to have political causes alongside their religious ones. Leveller women remain the most prominent political women of the Interregnum and Civil War period; Elizabeth Lilburne, Katherine Chidley, and Mary Overton, and others, shared with the Leveller movement political beliefs that fell to the political left of many of their contemporaries. Because the Levellers accepted the spiritual equality of women and men, they showed a higher tolerance for women's participation in political activity than might normally have been accepted. Leveller women drew up and presented a number of petitions to Parliament, and prior to 1649, these petitions had been accepted, as their tenor reflected the political sentiments of the majority of Parliament. However, in 1649 they petitioned Parliament only to be rejected and told to return to their

⁷⁶ Poole, *A Vision*, p. 3.

⁷⁷ The Army council discussed her vision at length and called her back to appear before them again; Henry Ireton questioned Poole extensively about the nature of her revelations. See Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel*, p. 253; Rachel Trubowitz, "Female Preachers and Male Wives: Gender and Authority in Civil War England," *Prose Studies* 14 (1991), pp. 92-111.

⁷⁸ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, p. 137.

household duties.⁷⁹ The petition's authors claimed to be "so over-whelmed in affliction" that they could not remain faithful to "the custom of our Sex" which was to keep silent on public matters.⁸⁰ Their petition was rejected—despite its submissive tone—because it argued for the release of Leveller men, John Lilburn, William Walwyn, Richard Overton, and others, all of whom had been imprisoned. After being sent away from Parliament, the women returned not a month later to present a second petition; they demanded that the first be addressed properly and declared that they would not be satisfied "except you free [the prisoners] from under their present extrajudicial imprisonment and...give them full Reparations for their forceable Attachment."⁸¹

When the situation demanded it, Leveller women could employ strong language, that of rights and liberties, to defend their cause. In their follow-up petition of 1649, for instance, they ask:

Have we not an equal interest with the men of this Nation, in those liberties and securities, contained in the Petition of Right, and other the good Laws of the Land? are any of our lives, limbs, liberties or goods to be taken from us more than from Men, but by due processe of Law and conviction of twelve sworn men of the Neighbourhood?⁸²

And further,

Can you imagine us to be so sottish or stupid, as to not perceive, or not to be sensible when dayly those strong defences of our Peace and

⁷⁹ Laurence, *Women in England*, pp. 243-4.

⁸⁰ *To the Supream authority of this Nation, the commons assembled in Parliament: The humble Petition of divers wel-affected Women* (London, 1649).

⁸¹ *To the Supreme Authority of England. The Commons Assembled in Parliament*, May 5, 1649.

⁸² *To the Supreme Authority of England*. It may be the strength of the language that has led some historians to assume that women's petitions were, in fact, written by men and only delivered by women. However, desperate times require desperate measures; given the careful negotiation of submission and authority found in the petitions it is likely that women themselves were their authors.

wellfare are broken down, and trod under-foot by force and arbitrary power.⁸³

Consistently, the petitions based women's right to petition and be heard on the presumed spiritual equality of women. The outspoken Leveller Katherine Chidley, who was the likely author of a 1653 petition, derived women's "undoubted right of petitioning" directly from God, who "is ever willing and ready to receive the Petitions of all, making no difference of persons."⁸⁴ Chidley had already registered her religious dissent from the Church of England when she refused to be churched and when she wrote a pamphlet justifying the Independents' separation from the national church.⁸⁵ She argued openly against clergy and male church members in a way that was considered beyond the pale for a woman.⁸⁶

Women's protests and petitions, like their public demonstration of religious visions, created a powerful effect in public discourse. It was precisely these kinds of public acts, these attempts to voice their concerns, that stimulated masculine anxiety. As women transgressed the rigid ideological boundaries that encouraged their silence, men's worst fears about women and the upset of the gender order were realized. To be clear, masculine anxiety did not arise only in the mid-century, rather it has a history that endures through the Tudor and Stuart reigns. Nevertheless, the gender disorder that transpires during the Civil War and Interregnum

⁸³ *To the Supreme Authority of England.*

⁸⁴ John Lilburn, *Unto every individual Member of Parliament: The humble Representation of divers afflicted women-Petitioners to the Parliament, on behalf of Mr. John Lilburn*, July 29, 1653.

⁸⁵ Chidley's activism was met with mockery from her male counterparts, who wrote a rhyme denouncing her religious politics as displaced lustfulness: "Oh Kate, O Kate, thou art unclean I heare, A man doth lye betweene thy sheetes, I feare." For a discussion, see Crawford, *Women and Religion*, p. 129.

⁸⁶ Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 87; Crawford, *Women and Religion*, p. 132.

evidences women's agency and hence incites masculine anxiety. Every time women do speak, "every incident of verbal assertiveness," represents the very real threat of "the dissolution of the patriarchal order."⁸⁷ Given early modern England's views on the sanctity of the patriarchal family, given that the family is the symbol of order and stability, how can women's attempts to speak outside the constraints of the patriarchal family represent anything else but social upheaval and potential collapse?

And yet perception is not reality, and those who feared social collapse need not have. This is not to say there was no gender disorder—there was—but its magnitude was not nearly so great as the defenders of order imagined.⁸⁸ When women did enter the public sphere, whether it was to convey a Godly message or to petition Parliament, their purpose was never to demand radical, sweeping change. Their very presence in the public debate signaled disorder to many, but women's demands themselves were moderate. Women's petitions and pamphlets tended to temper the radicalism of their demands with deference and humility. *A True Copie of the Petition of the Gentlewomen, and the Tradesmens-wives* illustrates the point well. "We are imboldned to present our humble Petition," the authors declare, "not out of any felte conceit, or pride of heart, as seeking to equal ourselves with Men, either in Authority or wisdome: But according to our places to discharge that duty we owe to God, and the cause of the Church."⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, pp. 12-14.

⁸⁸ Nor was the disorder of the Civil War period generally as great as had been imagined. John Morrill and John Walter, "Order and Disorder in the English Revolution," in John Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution* (New York: Longman, 1993). On the moderateness of women's claims see Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 105.

⁸⁹ *A True Copie of the Petition of the Gentlewomen, and the Tradesmens-wives in and about the City of London* (London, 1641). Italics added.

True, women claimed to be "sharers in the common Calamities that accompany both Church and Common-wealth," but at the same time they placate their audience and reaffirm their inferior position.⁹⁰

In short, the driving force behind women's increased public activism in the 1640s and 1650s is rarely politics *per se*, nor is it the emancipation of their sex. Of course, it is important to remember that there was no clear separation between religion and politics in seventeenth-century England, so to some extent women's religious concerns had obvious political implications. However, the driving force for women's activism is religion, or in some cases economic privation, rather than strict affairs of state. Certainly, women were led by their consciences to defy authority if it was necessary and to this extent they challenged patriarchy. But as Patricia Crawford has written, "women did not set out to defy fathers, husbands or ministers," rather they were driven by the "the intensity of their search for individual salvation, and their strong assurance of the authenticity of their own experiences."⁹¹ They sought salvation not emancipation. The submissive stance taken by the women who present themselves as mere vessels for God's word,⁹² or of the women who admit to the impropriety of their petitioning Parliament, illustrates the dichotomous nature of female religious and political activity during this period. Although the acts themselves mount a challenge to the gender order, the content of the

⁹⁰ This is a matter of debate among feminist historians. Ann Marie McEntee reads greater radicalism into the women's petitions in "'The [Un]Civill-Sisterhood of Oranges and Lemons': Female Petitioners and Demonstrators, 1642-53," *Prose Studies*, 14 (1991), 92-111. Diane Purkiss cautions about the real interpretive challenge involved in reading the early moderns for signs and indications of feminist sentiment. *Women, Texts, and Histories, 1575-1760* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁹¹ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, p. 142.

⁹² Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 106.

arguments they present is often ambiguous and occasionally even disempowering. Moreover, the radicalism of women like Chidley was never matched by the Leveller movement itself; nor did her radicalism lead her, or other Leveller women, to demand the extension of the franchise to women. More often than not, Leveller women were led to petition Parliament to proclaim the injustice against, and demand the release of, the imprisoned male leadership. In all of their acts women did not challenge the very root of gendered power, the overarching political theory that regimented their silence and passivity: patriarchalism. In reality, then, the gender order continued to rest on firm foundations, despite the appearance and perception of utter gender anarchy.

Hobbes, being attuned to the many threats to order in the Commonwealth, was undoubtedly aware of these religious and political activists, though he does not directly respond to their many pamphlets and public displays. In an unusual way, however, Hobbes invites and contributes to, rather than works against, this phenomenon of gender disorder. In effect, Hobbes's origin story crystallizes the gender disorder. His political theory generates spaces for a different conceptualization of women than currently existed. To be sure, Hobbes seals over these spaces once the social contract is implemented, but his creation of these spaces remains nonetheless politically significant. Indeed, these fissures in Hobbes's political theory permit the reconfiguration of gender—from patriarchalism to a rough egalitarianism—in a way that the activity and discourse of women during this period does not.

In light of the scorn Hobbes reserves for those who advocate a freedom of conscience, especially Levellers and other Protestant sect members, it is

that much more significant that he does not admonish women preachers, prophesiers, and pamphleteers specifically. There is no doubt that Hobbes would have held these women in low esteem, if for no other reason than he had a general low regard for all public biblical interpretation (with the convenient exclusion of his own) that was not pronounced by the sovereign. Being entirely displeased with both the religious enthusiasm of the Civil War period, and the seditious potential of those claiming rights against reigning authority, Hobbes would not have been a supporter of female activists. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider to what extent Hobbes absorbed, appropriated and refashioned female enthusiasm for his own purposes. What enabled him, in the face of gender disorder, to take women's arguments about consent one step further to undermine the political theory of patriarchalism?

The fact that Hobbes chose not to respond directly to the women activists limits our ability to arrive at any final conclusions regarding the above questions. Hobbes was in correspondence with very few women and none of them were of the leveling type. It would appear that the only woman that he had an intellectual exchange with was Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, a conservative writer in her own right and the wife of Hobbes's friend, the Duke of Newcastle. From Hobbes's 1653 letter to her, we can gather that she had sent him a copy of her most recent publication; the most he expresses by way of response is gratitude.⁹³ He does not engage with her on the subject of her treatise, nor does he ever respond to the criticisms of his work which she makes in her *Philosophical Letters*.

⁹³ *Hobbes to Margaret Cavendish, Marchioness of Newcastle*, February 9, 1662, in Hobbes, *The Correspondence*, Vol II, 524.

What is interesting about Margaret Cavendish is that she does engage Hobbes on the subject of his natural philosophy; and she asserts in the Preface her profound love of reason and desire to be read, and if necessary criticized, seriously. However, she stops short of addressing Hobbes's political theory. In point of fact, she admits to not having *read* past Part I of *Leviathan*; having given her opinion on the first part, she writes,

I would go on; but seeing he treats in his following Parts of the Politicks, I was forced to stay my Pen, because of the following Reasons. First, That a Woman is not employed in State Affairs, unles an absolute Queen. Next, That to study the Politicks, is but loss of Time...Thirdly, That it is but a deceiving profession, and requires more Craft than Wisdom.⁹⁴

The Marchioness's comments confirm that the relationship of women to politics in the seventeenth century is a difficult and often remote one such that she perceives her *philosophical* critique of Hobbes to be warranted and legitimate, but the realm of politics to be off limits to her because of her gender.

As a final point on the subject, had Margaret Cavendish considered it appropriate to both read and react to Hobbes's views of the family, the two might have had an interesting exchange. Although an unreconstructed royalist (her husband was in the service of Charles I), she held views about the family, marriage and motherhood that are as unsentimental as those held by Hobbes. In her funeral oration for a newly-married woman, she described marriage rather starkly: "death is by far the happier condition than marriage; and although marriage at first is pleasing, yet after a time it is displeasing, like meat which is sweet in the mouth, but proves bitter in

⁹⁴ The Lady Marchioness of Newcastle, *Philosophical Letters: Or, Modest Reflections Upon some Opinions in Natural Philosophy, Maintained By Several Famous and Learned Authors of this Age, Expressed by way of Letters* (London, 1664), p. 47.

the stomach." Elsewhere she lamented the pain of woman in childbirth, and questioned how it was that women risked their lives giving birth only to have the children become the possessions of men. She concludes:

I know of no good reason why she should be troubled for having no children, for though it be the part of every good wife to desire children to keep alive the memory of her husband's name and family by posterity, yet a woman has no such reason to desire children for her own sake.⁹⁵

It seems that her political conservatism did not prevent her from questioning deeply-held beliefs on patriarchal marriage and father-right. On a purely rhetorical level, Margaret Cavendish presents the kernels of what would now be called a radical feminist critique of the family. Although devoted to her husband, Margaret Cavendish captures in her writing a desentimentalized view of the family. And it is this unsentimental view that she and Hobbes share, but probably did not discuss.⁹⁶

As for the source of Hobbes's familial views, there is too little information on which to base any conclusion. As a tentative hypothesis, we can at least suggest that the climate of gender disorder and the prevailing system of gendered power created a gender whirlwind out of which almost any argument might have been made. It is perhaps this flurry of activity surrounding gender that enabled Hobbes to formulate his innovative theory. With this said, the exact cause for the disruptive substance of Hobbes remarks, the cause of his divergence from his political

⁹⁵ Quoted in Hilda L. Smith, "'Though it be the part of every good wife': Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle," in Valerie Frith, ed., *Women and History: Voices of Early Modern England* (Concord, ON: Irwin Press, 1995), p. 126.

⁹⁶ She claims to not have exchanged more than a few passing words with Hobbes. See biographical notes in Hobbes, *The Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 811.

allies on the questions of gender and the family, must, in the absence of additional historical information, remain a mystery.

IV Conclusion

The point of this interpretive exercise has been to raise a different set of questions about the nature of Hobbes's gender arguments, in effect to cast his political theory in a different light. My conclusion is that Hobbes's theory had the potential, but not the intention, to unravel the core of patriarchalist political theory, and by extension, patriarchal social relations between men and women. My intention is not to convey the message that Hobbes is a proto-feminist, or that he qualifies as more of a proto-feminist than the women activists of the Civil War. Surely even the broadest definition of feminism would disqualify Hobbes, for he lacks the all-important intention to create progressive social change in the relationships between men and women. For Hobbes, gender is purely instrumental.

In the end, the implications for women in Hobbes's theory can only be bleak since, by the time the social contract is instituted, women are absent from civil society and sequestered in the private family. We might legitimately query why Hobbes's social contract excludes women when he has told us that they are no less capable of ruling families than men. In this chapter I have deliberately set this question aside in order to give Hobbes's innovations in the state of nature due consideration. In the next chapter, however, I focus attention on the elision of women from Hobbes's social contract in the course of considering Carole Pateman's elaborate origin story of the sexual contract.

V Pateman's Sexual Contract: An origin story of her own

The most extensive and influential treatment of the consequences of Hobbes's origin story for women is Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract*. Pateman, whose work in contemporary democratic political theory is widely recognized in Europe, North America and Australia, argues that Hobbes is ultimately a patriarchal thinker because he excludes women from participation in the social contract. Indeed, while Pateman's early work focused primarily on the tensions between obligation and consent in liberal democratic theory, her most recent work extends her analysis to address the patriarchal subtext, not only of liberal democratic theory, but of radical political theory as well. Underlying the social contract, according to Pateman, is a sexual contract that ensures women's subordination at the inception of civil society. Moreover, social contract theory, in Pateman's assessment, is a story of masculine birth in which men "generate political life" and women are rendered "procreatively and politically irrelevant."¹ Men consent to create civil society, giving birth to the public sphere of politics in which only they participate, and disregarding almost entirely the birth of the private sphere.

While *The Sexual Contract* offers a provocative reading of Hobbes, it is not without its problems. Some feminists, for example Nancy Fraser and Shannon Bell, have questioned the applicability of the sexual contract to gender relations within contemporary liberal societies.² Rather than

¹ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 36. Abbreviated hereafter as *SC*.

² The most recent critique is levelled by Nancy Fraser in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "postsocialist" condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

entering into these provocative debates here, I examine Pateman's theoretical formulation of the sexual contract from social contract theory. Revisiting Pateman's textual and historical interpretation of the social contract brings to light some difficulties embedded in the concept of the sexual contract itself. Moreover, Pateman supplements Hobbes's textual silences with conjecture, and in so doing, develops her own origin story of the sexual contract. Thus, as much as Pateman criticizes the origins discourse, she also participates in it.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is twofold: to discuss the consequences of Hobbes's theory for women and to situate *The Sexual Contract* itself in the tradition of origins theorizing. In viewing the text as an origin narrative, it is important to consider the radical feminist politics informing Pateman's project, and to raise questions about the value of supplementing the hypothetical story of the social contract with further conjecture.

I The dichotomy of public and private

The Sexual Contract takes as its starting point the idea that male sex right, embodied in the sexual contract, undergirds the social contract. In Pateman's view, male sex right, or male sexual access to the female body is the first political right, but its existence as a political right is suppressed by the contract that brings civil society into existence. The social contract is a "sexual-social pact" about which we know only half the story; while

Other critiques include Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1994); Carol Johnson, "Does Capitalism Really Need Patriarchy? Some Old Issues Reconsidered," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1996.

political theorists devote ample attention to the social aspect, the sexual aspect of the pact is ignored. And it is that missing half that "tells how a specifically modern form of patriarchy is established."³ Pateman's is an analytic—rather than a historical—exercise to expose the latent patriarchal assumptions of social contract theory, and to reveal the private sphere as the shadowy twin in the birth of civil society. In this introductory section it will be useful to examine Pateman's understanding of the public/private dichotomy as it points to some of persistent problems in her text.

The division between public and private is, to Pateman, fundamentally a division between what is thought to be natural and what civil. Women, while excluded from the social contract itself, "are not left behind in the state of nature," but are "incorporated into a sphere that both is and is not in civil society."⁴ Here Pateman is correcting the oversights of political theorists who tend to dismiss the private realm as something altogether separate from the public sphere. The private is overlooked, in Pateman's view, because it is womanly and natural and thus remote from the masculine and civil sphere. She rightly suggests that the two must be understood to be in a dynamic and interdependent relationship, that to speak of the public without understanding the private is, once again, to miss half the story. The real meaning of "civil freedom of public life is thrown into relief," argues Pateman, "when counterposed to the natural subjection that characterizes the private realm."⁵ The social contract reveals the story of how the civil realm came into being, but the origin of

³ SC, p. 1.

⁴ SC, p. 11.

⁵ SC, p. 11.

the private realm remains mysterious. This narrative of the sexual contract, then, reveals the private realm's previously hidden origins.

Pateman's analysis of the public/private division is designed to capture the theoretical and ideological essence of, rather than to describe, modern liberal society. In other words, Pateman knows that women are not, and were not ever, entirely segregated in the private realm. That is not her point. The benefit of her analysis of this crucial division stems from its incisive critique of the *ideology* that permeates liberal society, an ideology that perpetuates the symbolic association of women with the private realm even as they enter the public.⁶ Aside from its practical application, of course, her general analysis is meant to capture the meaning of public and private *within* social contract theory, and my purpose here is to determine how effectively it describes Hobbes.

Hobbes devotes considerable attention to the division between public and private in his social contract theory, although as Pateman herself notes, this division does not permeate his state of nature. Hobbes's state of nature, as we have seen, has no marital laws and no natural family, features which distinguish Hobbes from his successors. While Pateman is careful at points to show how Hobbes differs from the other classic contractarians, at other points, and especially in this analysis, she glosses over their differences in the interest of developing an all-encompassing theory of the sexual contract. The division between public and private for Hobbes is not premised on the fundamental split between the natural and

⁶ Pateman's critique of the public private dichotomy can be found in two other important articles: "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy," and "The Patriarchal Welfare State," both in Carol Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989).

civil in the way that it is for Locke and Rousseau. In Hobbes's analysis, no sphere in society is "natural"; this is precisely the point of his argument about the family in the state of nature. All human associations are conventional.

In general when Hobbes takes up the terms public and private it is to enter the religious and political fray surrounding the issue of private conscience. Hobbes was writing in a period during which the exact meanings of public and private were being hotly contested; this debate centered on the limits and liberties of private conscience. While Puritans upheld their right to judge the King according to their private consciences, James VI and I and others encouraged the view that public conscience obliged subjects to obey their monarch. Competing with the authority of individual conscience, then, was the idea that the commonwealth shared a common conscience and formed a unified whole. As Kevin Sharpe points out, however, the notion of a common conscience was "fraught with difficulties" precisely because God was believed to have put the "light of conscience in all men (sic)."⁷ How, then, could the autonomy of people's consciences be denied? Hobbes's answer to this question involved making a distinction between things indifferent and things necessary to salvation. His intent was to delineate the appropriate activities for subjects and sovereign once civil society had been created. To what extent could individuals follow the dictates of their consciences? Could they resist the King's orders? Could they rebel against the religious

⁷ Kevin Sharpe, "Private Conscience and Public Duty in the Writings of James VI and I," in John Morrill, Paul Slack, and Daniel Woolf, eds., *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays Presented to G.E. Aylmer*, (Toronto: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 84.

practices that they found inconsistent with their own beliefs? Hobbes answers a categorical no to the latter two questions and thereby severely limits the freedom of individuals to act in accordance with their consciences, for it is his contention that there is no greater threat to the order of the commonwealth than the belief that individual conscience should be the determinant of people's actions.⁸ Among the diseases of the commonwealth, Hobbes counts the poison of seditious doctrines, including the idea that "whatsoever a man does against his Conscience, is Sinne." In a commonwealth, as opposed to the state of nature, "the Law is the publique Conscience, by which he [the subject] hath already undertaken to be guided."⁹

Yet in circumscribing people's actions, in denying subjects the ability to act autonomously, Hobbes does not, in his theory, dismiss the importance of salvation. Because the issues over which the sovereign has power to legislate are insignificant with respect to salvation—in other words, they do not aid or hinder salvation—subjects should not experience an inner struggle of the Puritan kind. The only things necessary to salvation, in Hobbes estimation, were faith in God and obedience to the earthly sovereign. All other matters, from praying positions to choice of prayer book, were indifferent to salvation, and thus did not warrant disobedience or resistance. In assessing Hobbes's use of the terms public and private, it is important to understand the intellectual framework in which he was operating, and also to recognize that for him, just as the private is not

⁸ Freedom of conscience was itself a gendered issue, as discussed in Chapter Four.

⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Richard Tuck, ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Part II: Chapter 29, p. 223. Abbreviated hereafter as *Lev* II: 29, 223.

natural, the civil is not free. Unlike liberal thinkers, Hobbes assigns to his sovereign absolute power to govern subjects' actions.

All of this is not to deny that Hobbes's understanding of the public and private dichotomy in civil society is gendered. Women do not take part in the social contract, and they are embedded in the family and thus the private realm. However, Pateman's general statement that this private sphere is womanly is again inapplicable to Hobbes; his private sphere is no more womanly than it is natural. If anything, woman disappears altogether from Hobbes's theory—even from his discussion of the family and the private sphere—once the social covenant is formed, an issue that Pateman explores. How can the sphere be both womanly and not appear on the surface to have a woman inhabiting it?

For Hobbes, as for his contemporaries, there is no idealized, womanly private sphere in which women are described as performing their complementary functions to the male role of citizenship. The public/private dichotomy that Hobbes ignores in the state of nature and inserts in civil society is not the fully modernized, sentimental one which is manifest in the theory of Rousseau or Hegel. Mary Beth Norton points out that in early seventeenth-century English thought, no exclusive equation was made between the terms private and female, nor between private and family.¹⁰ Indeed, Hobbes distinguishes between what he considers public and what private, and the family is used as one example of a private association; but nowhere does he draw a connection between the

¹⁰ Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), p. 22.

female and the private.¹¹ Even in Locke's theory, where the separation between public and private corresponds to a division between civil and natural, the private sphere is not womanly.

Among the classic contractarians Pateman analyses, Rousseau is the only one who depicts the private sphere as the womanly domain, controlled by her, and shaped by her influences. In both Hobbes and Locke, the husband/father is the person who shapes the private as well as the formal, public realm; both realms are thoroughly masculine. Hobbes's family is ruled in the same way as the commonwealth: the ruled are embodied in every action that is taken by the ruler because they have authorized all of his actions through their (hypothetical or actual) consent.

Pateman's general theory of the public/private dichotomy has merit when applied to contemporary liberal society, but it is less useful when applied to Hobbes specifically. In Pateman's defense it should be noted that her stated interest in *The Sexual Contract* is more contemporary than historical. She is more interested in criticizing modern liberal society than she is in clarifying the ideas of specific contract thinkers. Pateman expresses her purpose as follows: "I am resurrecting the story in order to throw light onto the present-day structure of major social institutions in Britain, Australia and the United States—societies which, we are told, can properly be seen as if they had originated in a social contract."¹² Her contemporary focus is evidenced by her lengthy discussion in the text of such practical, contemporary issues as prostitution, surrogate motherhood and the marriage contract. Nevertheless, in the process of conceptualizing

¹¹ See *Lev*, Ch. 22.

¹² *SC*, p. 4.

the workings of liberalism and the dynamics of the marriage contract, she does engage in interpretation of historical texts, interpretation which is crucial to the development of her theory of the sexual contract itself, as we will see. In short, she formulates the sexual contract in response to the idea of the social contract, and therefore the quality of her analysis of historical texts is an important criterion in determining the value of the sexual contract as a conceptual device.

While my reading of Hobbes takes much from Pateman, and is in an important sense made possible by her innovative work, it is my view that Pateman's treatment of public and private in Hobbes is indicative of a general lack of historical and textual specificity in her theory. Pateman effectively treats the three primary social contract theorists, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, as if they are writing in the same period of history, and as if gender relations within their periods are roughly similar.¹³ Her generalizations often obscure more than they reveal. The point here is not to critique Pateman for the book she did not write, nor is it to claim that the only approach to political theory is a historical one. But if her intent is to trace the outline of the historical development of modern patriarchy, it is essential that she differentiate, to take one example, between the early modern, Aristotelian-influenced familial structure and the sentimental family. There are traces of sentimental familial relations in the early modern period in England, but the notion that women contribute their unique feminine traits to the private realm while men contribute to the public sphere is not yet present. More importantly, Hobbes's theory of the

¹³ Linda Zerilli makes a similar critique in her review of *The Sexual Contract*. See "In the Beginning, Rape," *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. VI, No. 6, March 1989.

family as he describes it in the state of nature represents a rare break in the transition from earlier hierarchical familial forms and the sentimental family, a point Pateman overlooks in her efforts to cast Hobbes as a patriarchal thinker.

II The conjectural history of woman's defeat

Women's position in the family, and their real or presumed consent to their subordinate position, leads to the overarching issue of the sexual contract itself. In Pateman's interpretation, women in Hobbes's civil society must enter into the marriage contract; there is no possibility for them to be independent contractors with men. To understand how this arrangement came to be she shifts the focus from civil society to the state of nature using the logic that women's exclusion from the social contract presupposes their prior subordination. "There is only one way," Pateman writes, "in which women, who have the same status as free and equal individuals in the state of nature as men can be excluded from participation in the social contract."¹⁴ Women must have been conquered by men and submitted to the sexual contract in the state of nature. This is a crucial point in Pateman's hypothesis: if men alone make the civil contract we must assume that "all the women in the natural condition have been conquered by men and are now their subjects (servants)."¹⁵ Pateman confirms women's status as servants in civil society using Hobbes's description of the family, which "consists of a man and his children; or of a

¹⁴ SC, p. 48.

¹⁵ SC, p. 49.

man and his servants; or of a man, and his children, and his servants together."¹⁶

Recognizing the inconsistencies between equality and subjection in Hobbes's theory, Pateman attempts to correct them, to complete the story of woman's defeat in the state of nature. Pateman presumes that, through her efforts of textual reconstruction and by reading between the lines, she can render Hobbes consistent on the question of gender relations; he can be made to tell the whole story of woman's subordination. The extent of what Hobbes tells us is that, "for the most part Common-wealths have been erected by the Fathers, not by the Mothers of families,"¹⁷ a descriptive rather than an explanatory statement. From what little Hobbes does say, Pateman formulates the hypothesis that the family has its origins in conquest.¹⁸ It is important to recognize at this point that Hobbes makes no such assertion, and that the story that follows is Pateman's alone.

Pateman's conjectural history proceeds in the following manner. Despite their original equality with men, and their mother-right, women's consent to raise their children puts them at a "slight disadvantage against men" because they have not only themselves but their children to defend. Thus one man is able to defeat one woman-child dyad, and to form a protective confederacy or family.¹⁹ Mother-right is only a fleeting condition; "for a woman to become a mother and a lord is her downfall"

¹⁶ *Lev*, II: 20, 142.

¹⁷ *Lev*, II: 20, 140.

¹⁸ Carole Pateman, "'God Hath Ordained to Man a Helper': Hobbes, Patriarchy and Conjugal Right," in Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman, eds., *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991), p. 56. Abbreviated hereafter as *FI*.

¹⁹ *SC*, p. 49

because it gives her male enemy an opening "to outwit and vanquish her in the ceaseless natural conflict."²⁰ The new patriarchal protective confederacy, presented as an intermediate social formation between atomized individuals and the social contract, would not arise from consent but from conquest because no woman would voluntarily place herself in submission. Indeed, Pateman makes much of Hobbes's fine distinction between conquest and consent²¹ as she attempts to show how sexual coercion lies beneath the surface of the supposedly consensual social compact.

Her narrative continues: once one woman is conquered, so too are the others. It may be that eventually all the unconquered women, i.e. women without children, die and leave behind only women who are tied to a patriarchal unit. However, she concludes that it is more likely that women "must all be conquered in the first generation."²² At least this is the way the story has to proceed as Pateman knows Hobbes's conclusions. The male heads of these households make the social covenant and presumably institute the marriage contract to ensure women's continued subservience. Women are legally "included" in their husbands and have no independent will or political right of their own. Thus the one-sided story of the social contract is extended to include the origins of women's subordination in civil society.

²⁰ *FI*, p. 65.

²¹ Hobbes writes "It is not therefore the Victory, that giveth the right of Dominion over the Vanquished, but his own Covenant. Nor is he obliged because he is Conquered...but because he commeth in, and Submitteth to the Victor." *Lev*, II: 20, 141. In other words, consent is understood as the basis for dominion, even in circumstances of conquest. Moreover, that consent is given under conditions of duress does not undermine its legitimacy in Hobbes's view.

²² *FI*, p. 66.

The argument that Pateman puts forth is not a straightforward one, nor is it rooted firmly in Hobbes's texts. To understand how she formulates her story of the sexual contract, attention needs to be focused on its two central elements: the protective confederacy, which Pateman views as akin to a patriarchal family; and conjugal right as the first political right. Certainly Pateman acknowledges some problems with her conjectural history; for example, she queries why any person in Hobbes's state of nature would contract to parent a child given the risks that she assumes are involved. Furthermore, she asks, how could all men defeat all women in the state of nature when Hobbes tells us that there is no substantial difference in size and strength to determine rule automatically? Strong women could form protective confederacies as well.²³ Pateman is right; by Hobbes's logic, all of the strong men and women would more likely band together to defeat the weaker state of nature inhabitants.

But there are further, unacknowledged discrepancies between her story and that of Hobbes; the issue of the patriarchal protective confederacy remains a key one. Pateman reads Hobbes's statement that no man can defend himself "without the help of Confederates" as an indication that families do come into existence in the state of nature.²⁴ These are not normal families, but are instead composed of a man and his servants and are formed through conquest.²⁵ Leaving aside the fact that Pateman

²³ *FI*, p. 65.

²⁴ Gordon Schochet also detects the existence of patriarchal families in the state of nature, but he does so on different grounds. See his "Thomas Hobbes on the Family and the State of Nature," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. LXXXII, No. 3, September 1967.

²⁵ Mary Beth Norton notes that such descriptions were the norm at the time in which Hobbes was writing. It was typical for a family to include servants and all those working and living in a household and subsumed under the family head. (See *Founding*

extracts Hobbes's definition of the family from his discussion of civil society and applies it to the state of nature, the question remains, how firmly rooted in Hobbes's texts is this idea that men conquer women and other weaker men, making them all servants, to form families or protective confederacies?

Hobbes mentions the term confederates in the context of discussing the third law of nature, the keeping of covenants made. He is making his very important case, with the use of some examples, that it is always reasonable to perform one's part of a covenant. Even in a state-of-nature situation in which all are afraid for their own lives it is unwise and against reason for a man to renege on a covenant, to "deceive those that help him," i.e. his confederates, for he will then be an outcast and will be forced to survive on his own. The discussion of confederates is not connected to any suggestion about the formation of families. Nor is Hobbes positing the existence of confederates as an intermediate stage between isolated individuals and the social contract. Rather, the confederate serves as an analogy for the leviathan. Just as it would be foolhardy to betray those who protect you, it would be unwise to break the covenant that created the leviathan. Hobbes's basic point is that nothing, not even the desire to attain "an eternall felicity after death," justifies the breaking of a covenant once made.²⁶ In this passage, Hobbes solidifies his ongoing argument for irrevocable

Mothers & Fathers, p. 17-18). Whereas Pateman makes the case that women disappear from Hobbes's descriptions of the family because they are now servants, it is more likely that they are considered subjects, or that Hobbes "forgets" women once his purpose in discussing them has been served.

²⁶ *Lev*, I: 15, 103.

political obligation against those who would claim the right to resist political authority on religious grounds.

The other textual evidence Pateman uses to advance her theory of patriarchal confederacies in the state of nature relates to what Hobbes alternately calls paternal or patrimonial kingdoms. In fact, these two topics, Confederates and paternal kingdoms, are unrelated in the text, but Pateman nonetheless connects them in her argument. She also counterposes Hobbes's clear statements about the existence and primacy of mother-right in the state of nature to his comments about paternal kingdoms to make her argument that there must be a transformation from "mother-right to the patriarchal family in the state of nature."²⁷ But it is far from clear that Hobbes meant there to have been a transformation from mother-right to patrimonial kingdoms or patriarchal families in the state of nature. Pateman, intent to expound the story of woman's defeat in the state of nature, extracts, decontextualizes, and then juxtaposes passages from Hobbes to establish her point. In constructing her narrative, however, she obfuscates Hobbes's original intent in these key passages.

Hobbes refers to paternal kingdoms in the course of his discussion of the varieties of sovereignty. He devotes the greatest amount of attention to sovereignty by institution, but he must also account for sovereignty by acquisition, "wherein the Sovereign Power is acquired by Force."²⁸ Paternal kingdoms are those in which a family dynasty conquers another, or in which it declares itself sovereign over a territory and people. If a family grows,

²⁷ *FI*, p. 63.

²⁸ *Lev*, II: 20, 138.

by multiplication of children, either by generation or adoption; or of servants, either by generation, conquest, or voluntary submission, to be so great and numerous, as in probability it may protect itself, then is that family called a Patrimonial Kingdom, or monarchy by acquisition.²⁹

Hobbes is not referring to families in the state of nature but to actual families that have usurped or declared power. History being filled with examples of familial dynasties, most of which were led by men, Hobbes would be remiss if he failed to account for their existence. His central point remains that, regardless of whether sovereignty comes into being through institution or conquest, the "Rights, and Consequences of Sovereignty, are the same in both."³⁰ He must show that his theory of political obligation applies, not only to sovereignty that comes about through a hypothetical contract, but to the common example of sovereignty by acquisition. He calls the product of sovereignty by acquisition a patrimonial kingdom, or a paternal kingdom, but he also suggests that sovereignty can be held by women, hence his reference to the Amazons and Queens. Against patriarchalists, Hobbes asserts that sovereignty flows from consent rather than from generation. Certainly, Pateman is right to call attention to the inconsistency in naming parental and political dominion *paternal*.³¹ But there is no textual evidence to support Pateman's claim that Hobbes thought maternal right would give way to a paternal body politic in the state of nature. By extension, her

²⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, J.C.A. Gaskin, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapter XXIII, p. 133.

³⁰ *Lev*, II: 20, 139.

³¹ *Ibid.*

central argument that a patriarchal confederate-family roams the state of nature must be cast into doubt.

The mythical story of the sexual contract becomes murkier when Pateman puts forth her other central claim that the original political right is conjugal. Her point is that in order for a woman to exercise maternal right—which Hobbes claims is original—procreative sexual relations had to be negotiated first. About this fact, she is not wrong. But Pateman describes this negotiation as *conjugal right*, implying, not consent, but *male access to the female body*, or rape.³² At other points in the story, however, Pateman seems to suggest that sexual relations in the state of nature would be, at least initially, consensual. Is Pateman suggesting that men actually conquer women for access to their bodies, but call conquest consent? Or do sexual relations in the state of nature begin consensually but eventually become non-consensual? If it is the latter, what causes the change? How does consensual coitus give way to conjugal right, and more peculiarly, how does conjugal right (rape) produce mother-right?

Pateman has no direct response to these questions except to say that coitus and birth are sufficiently temporally separated that the identity of the father cannot be established with certainty. Mother-right must prevail by default, but it is ultimately replaced by conjugal patriarchal right. Pateman never produces satisfactory evidence from the text, or from her reconstructive exercise, to substantiate her claim or to show how the transformation occurs. I take as axiomatic the feminist assertion that (hetero)sexual relations themselves have a political dimension, and that

³² See Zerilli, "In the Beginning, Rape."

Hobbes and other social contract thinkers tend to overlook the power involved in conjugal negotiation. It remains curious, however, that Pateman assumes that if heterosexual conjugal negotiation occurs in the state of nature it has to be, in the end, forced by men. In this argument, Pateman echoes a radical feminist position on heterosexual sex; this fact has implications for her theory of consent, as we will discuss.

The as-yet-unsettled problem of original rape in the state of nature stems from the fact that Pateman's argument is driven, not by Hobbes's theory itself, but by Freud's story of the primal scene. Whereas Hobbes represses the story of how woman "could forcibly be subjugated," Freud explains the "true" story much more clearly in Pateman's view. Borrowing from, and reinterpreting, Freud's case history of the Wolf Man, and from contemporary evidence that many of the sexual acts currently deemed consensual are actually coercive, Pateman constructs a story about primal rape. The borrowed case history describes the trauma of a son witnessing a sexual encounter between his parents, an encounter which appears to him to be—and may in fact be—violent. This encounter, combined with the father's sexual monopoly on women, angers the son who then conspires to commit parricide, an act which Pateman metaphorically connects with the social contract theorists' successful overthrow of paternal-patriarchalist political theory.³³ The sons/brothers (contract theorists) are subsequently led to make a fraternal pact that ensures their equality with one another but which also establishes their equal sexual access to women.³⁴ The sons/brothers seize "*both* dimensions of the defeated father's political

³³ SC, p. 32.

³⁴ SC, p. 108-9.

right, his sex-right as well as his paternal right."³⁵ Thus the fraternal pact, or social contract, is made and thereafter "male sex-right extends to all men, to all members of the fraternity."³⁶

The use of Freud to fill the gaps of the sublimated story of the sexual-social pact told by contract theorists is metaphorical but nonetheless enormously problematic. From a historical perspective, we must question the relevance of Freud to Hobbes's project.³⁷ Anachronism aside, Pateman makes no attempt to clarify the relationship between Hobbes's description of the state of nature and the conjectural story of primal rape and the sexual contract. Just exactly where the original rape occurs in the story of the social contract is still vague and uncertain. Does it occur at the formation of the mythical patriarchal confederacies, or is all sex in the state of nature actually rape? After the investigation of Freud, we are no closer to an answer. In either hypothesis, Pateman would have to overlook as well as supplement what Hobbes actually tells us about the state of nature to advance her narrative. It appears that Pateman develops the concept of the sexual contract and of original conjugal right in the abstract, drawing on a variety of sources including Freud's primal scene narrative, and subsequently applies it, unsuccessfully in my view, to the individual social contract theorists.

I rehearse this litany of apprehensions about Pateman's reading of Hobbes to expose the internal tensions in the sexual contract, as hers is a

³⁵ SC, p. 33.

³⁶ SC, p. 110.

³⁷ This critique is also raised by Susan Moller Okin in her review of *The Sexual Contract*. See "Feminism, the Individual, and Contract Theory," *Ethics*, 100, April 1990, p. 661.

reading that bears only a tangential relationship to his texts. Pateman's analysis of Hobbes begs too many questions precisely because Hobbes's theory is itself ambiguous. Hobbes does not explain thoroughly his transition from the state of nature to civil society and too much is left unsaid for us to make any reasonable conjecture. We should question, of course, why Hobbes would introduce his innovations in gender relations and then exclude women from the social contract. He has told us that women are not predictably weaker in strength than men, that battle will have to be the arbiter in determining who will rule the family, if one is formed at all. Yet, once civil society is established, the discussion of women's maternal dominion is abandoned, women disappear, and the remainder of *Leviathan* proceeds as though this elaborate argument has never been conceived. But should we assume there is an argument latent in the narrative which will explain why woman vanishes from civil society? Pateman does; she writes,

Hobbes's theory is an early version of the argument, presented in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in elaborate detail and with reference to much ethnographic data, that civilization and political society resulted from the overthrow of mother-right and the triumph of patriarchy.³⁸

It is not likely, in my view, that Hobbes understood his own theory in these terms, but even more importantly, *he does not recite such a narrative*. It is Pateman who offers such a story, borrowing as we have seen from Freud and others to fill in the gaps of Hobbes's theory.

The fact that women mysteriously disappear from Hobbes's origin narrative once the state of nature is transcended in no way implies that

³⁸ *FI*, p. 70.

Hobbes repressed an all-out battle between men and women that resulted in women's defeat. In point of fact, when we reconsider Hobbes's purpose in discussing the family—as a way of analyzing consensual political right—it seems highly *unlikely* that he envisioned such a scenario. If we want to know *why* Hobbes abandons his earlier arguments, we need only revert to his original political purpose: to counter patriarchalist, along with other, constitutional theories. And he is far more concerned to defeat *paternal patriarchalist arguments* than he is to defeat patriarchy as a *conjugal relation between men and women*. Hobbes is caught between a rational but purely strategic argument for the equality of women and men, on the one hand, and a traditional reliance on custom and manners, on the other. Once his purpose is served he reverts to the common assertions of gender inequality, such as: men "are naturally fitter than women, for actions of labour and danger."³⁹ Reverting to custom—despite his criticism of others for doing so—he claims that it is necessary that either the wife or the husband govern, and "therefore the man, to whom for the most part the woman yieldeth the government, hath for the most part also the sole right and dominion over the children."⁴⁰ As unsatisfactory as this reliance on tradition is from an otherwise rigorously rational thinker, it reveals neither a "conjuring trick" nor a lost battle but rather that gender itself is instrumental, strategic and symbolic for Hobbes no less that it is for his contemporaries. Despite Pateman's attempts, a consistent story cannot be forced from Hobbes when the question of patriarchal social relations was so clearly not at the forefront of his enterprise.

³⁹ *Lev*, II: 19, 137.

⁴⁰ *De Corpore Politico*, Chapter XXIII, p. 132.

III Masculine birth story?

Up to this point, this chapter has enumerated the historical and interpretive problems with Pateman's discussion of the public/private dichotomy in Hobbes's theory and with her theoretical formulation of the sexual contract. Pateman also claims that Hobbes's social contract is a story of masculine political birth, and that its political implications are deleterious to women on procreative and political grounds. This provocative assertion remains to be considered. If Pateman is correct, Hobbes should be placed firmly in the tradition of Plato, who tells perhaps the most elaborate of these masculine stories in the *Timaeus*. When Pateman's hypothesis is unraveled, however, it becomes apparent that it rests on a faulty assumption about Hobbes.

In general, Pateman is very critical of the pervasive use of origin stories in the tradition of political thought. "Political argument must leave behind stories of origins and original contracts," writes Pateman, because "to look to an original act of contract is systematically to blur the distinction between freedom and subjection."⁴¹ She reasons that part of the allure of origin stories stems from "the fact that the human beginning—or even if there was one—is a mystery."⁴² But the other reason for their popularity, and the one she is most interested in, has to do with their expression of a "specifically masculine creative power, the capacity to generate, to give birth to, new forms of political life."⁴³ Pateman hints at two stages of the story of masculine political birth. The first occurs

⁴¹ SC, p. 232.

⁴² SC, p. 220.

⁴³ SC, p. 220.

when men discover their role in reproduction, which marks a "crucial turning-point in Bachofen's conjectural history of the overthrow of matriarchy and the creation of civilization."⁴⁴ At this stage of paternal patriarchy, men "defeat" women, and establish themselves as the rulers of families and polities. The arrival of modernity signifies the second stage of masculine political birth, in which the father is defeated, and the civil fraternity is established, as we have already seen. At this stage, "all men, not just fathers, can generate political life and political right," and "political creativity belongs not to paternity but to masculinity."⁴⁵

Hobbes details the second stage of masculine birth, as is evident in the fact that he defeats paternal patriarchalism and establishes the fraternal social covenant. According to Pateman's logic, Hobbes empowers all men as men with the ability to generate political life, by which she means not just that men alone make the social contract. She believes Hobbes to be an advocate of patrogenesis. She suggests that he understands men to be the principal agents in reproduction—just as Filmer did—and that he uses that patrogenic power to enhance men's political power and autonomy. Hobbes's social contract is one more "male replica of the ability which only women possess."⁴⁶ It is "an example of the appropriation by men of the awesome gift that nature has denied them," writes Pateman.⁴⁷ In appropriating that gift, men disempower women procreatively and politically.

⁴⁴ SC, p. 36.

⁴⁵ SC, p. 36.

⁴⁶ Carole Pateman, "The Fraternal Social Contract," in Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, p. 45.

⁴⁷ SC, p. 102.

In other words, Pateman's assessment that Hobbes arrogates the primary reproductive power to men is central to her overall argument about the masculine quality of his origin story. Pateman is not the only feminist to posit Hobbes as a patrogenic thinker, for Mary O'Brien hints at the same in *The Politics of Reproduction*. O'Brien argues that Hobbes's sovereign is capable of self-regeneration, "without any need for females."⁴⁸ Pateman's argument sounds very similar to, and may well have been influenced by, O'Brien's appropriation thesis. Christine Di Stefano also sees in Hobbes's theory a tendency toward father-driven theories of reproduction as well as a denial of the "(m)other."⁴⁹ She argues that Hobbes "never embraced" his passages on mother right—an unsubstantiated allegation that fails to recognize the presence and significance of the theory of original maternal dominion in his political theory from the beginning.

As we know from the previous chapter, categorizing Hobbes as a patrogenic thinker is highly problematic. In contrast to Filmer and Plato before him, Hobbes acknowledges women's unique contribution to reproduction; he recognizes the limits on paternal certainty; and he even accords mothers dominion over children where there is no prior agreement to the contrary. Consider Hobbes's explicit comments on maternal contribution in *De Corpore Politico*, in which he discusses how men become subject to one another and by "what title one man cometh to

⁴⁸ Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 158-9.

⁴⁹ Christine Di Stefano, *Configurations of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Chapter 2.

have propriety in a child, that proceedeth *from the common generation of two, (viz.) of male and female.*" He continues,

And considering men again dissolved from all covenants one with another, and that every man by the law of nature, hath right or propriety to his own body, the child ought rather to be the propriety of the mother (*of whose body it is part, till the time of separation*) than of the father.⁵⁰

Of course, that he recognizes the child's emergence from the mother's body is no guarantee that Hobbes does not believe the father to be the "principal agent" in reproduction, but if he does hold that belief, he gives no indication of it.

To suggest that Hobbes presents a story of masculine political birth is to imply as well that he exhibits anxiety and tension regarding the issues of women, reproduction and birth. Theorists who are either consciously or unconsciously preoccupied with masculine birth typically give clues as to their obsession in the way of masculine fantasies about reproduction, as in the case of Plato. Or theorists might reveal their anxiety about gender in frequent references to witches, appropriate wifely behaviour, or the proper patriarchal rule of the family, as in the case of James VI and I and Filmer. Hobbes provides no such clues, and is exceptional for his lack of masculine anxiety, for at every turn he does more to open up the space for a conception of woman as autonomous than most other ancient or modern thinkers. If anything, Hobbes's strategic use of Amazons and Queens symbolically—although unintentionally—empowers women, both politically and reproductively.

⁵⁰ Hobbes, *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, Ch. XXIII, 130. Emphasis added.

If Hobbes does not arrogate primary reproductive power to men, and if he communicates no particular fixation on the issue of reproduction, Pateman's theory that his is a masculine birth story is substantially weakened. Hobbes's social contract is a masculine birth story *only insofar as it portrays (exclusively) men consenting to the social contract and setting up civil society*. But in this sense Hobbes tells a story that is as masculinist—no more and no less so—than most other political theorists. The O'Brien appropriation thesis that Pateman imports has value and meaning only when applied to a story like Plato's *Timaeus*, where the imagery of birth is clearly central. In implicitly categorizing Hobbes with Plato, Pateman risks obscuring Hobbes's actual innovations in gender hierarchies and casts him as one in a long, undifferentiated line of patriarchal thinkers.

I suggest, then, that Pateman's theory misrepresents Hobbes's origin story and its political implications. In point of fact, the more important implication of Hobbes's origins theorizing is the lesson he offers to those theorists who would use origins to come to terms with the present. Hobbes's significant insight on the origins discourse is his recognition that political solutions cannot be found in the narratives of mythical, historical, or customary beginnings. Pateman's attempts to locate the origins of modern patriarchy in contract theory, and Second Wave feminist attempts to locate an original matriarchy, fail to appreciate Hobbes's lesson; there is nothing about an original matriarchy, or fanciful reconstructions of patriarchy's beginnings, that can solve the problems of present-day gendered power relations. More often than not, the search for origins involves the creation of narratives that embody our present political concerns,

narratives that can do more to limit our understandings of political problems and solutions than to aid them. Hobbes, too, is guilty of creating this kind of narrative in the state of nature. The lesson Hobbes offers, then, lies in his critique of genetic theory as opposed to his actual origin story. We should note, finally, that Hobbes's theoretical disagreement with genetic approaches actually produces insidious results on the issue of gender: despite roughly egalitarian origins, the hierarchical status quo is legitimate because it rests on contract. After having levelled all hierarchies, he reestablishes new and perhaps more profound hierarchies in civil society. That Hobbes saw no problem with this resolution is the real complication for feminists.

IV An origin story of her own

Pateman expressly states that her intent is not to replace "patriarchal tales with feminist stories of origins,"⁵¹ and yet in her extension and supplementation of Hobbes's theory this is exactly what she has accomplished. However, she is by no means the first to tell the story of woman's defeat, for *The Sexual Contract* is one of the last in a long line of similar, Second Wave feminist attempts. In this final section, attention is turned to the politics informing Pateman's own origin story.

While many feminist origin stories focus on the ancient past, trying to recover a lost Western pre-history, Pateman offers a story of modern, contractual patriarchy. She critiques other feminist origin narratives for looking too far back in the past for patriarchy's roots, for risking an

⁵¹ SC, p. 18.

ahistorical description of patriarchy when, in her view, "there are stories available of a much closer origin."⁵² In Pateman's assessment, her own project improves on the earlier stories and escapes the ahistorical trap. It is my contention, however, that Pateman's origin narrative is of a piece with the earlier feminist stories, even if it surpasses them in rigour and theoretical complexity. Whether Pateman acknowledges it or not, her story of the sexual contract exhibits many of the same problems, and arises from the same political desire, as most other political origin stories including the social contract.

Like all origin stories and all political theory, the story of the sexual contract is deeply influenced by the politics of its author. The political dimension of her project does not distinguish her from most other theorists. The problem arises, however, when her political goals overtake her interest in providing a plausible and historically-accurate account of the sexual contract. In her earlier work, Pateman had written extensively and critically on consent and obligation in liberal theory, and had discussed the "women question" only in passing. As her career progressed, however, she recognized that she had "underestimated the depth and complexity of the problem"; she criticized her earlier analysis for not going far enough.⁵³ As she writes in the 1985 Afterword to *The Problem of Political Obligation*:

The development of democratic theory has to take criticism of social life a good deal further than I pursue it in this book. Apart from my brief references to promising to obey and marriage, I concentrated on the private and public spheres as conventionally discussed. But my

⁵² SC, p. 29.

⁵³ Carole Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critique of Liberal Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 188.

argument has to be extended to the repressed realm of personal, sexual and familial relations.⁵⁴

As Pateman was increasingly influenced by radical feminism,⁵⁵ she began to view the radical democratic theorists with whom she had associated as being implicated in the problem. Her more recent research has led her

to the conclusion that a distinctively feminist perspective in political theory provides as searching and as fundamental a critique of radical democratic theory as it does of liberalism, precisely because both theories are sexually particular, predicated upon the patriarchal separation of private and public, women and men.⁵⁶

Pateman underwent a significant transformation in her thinking as she turned her attention to the private, female realm of subordination. It is this focus on the private realm that led her to develop the theory of the sexual contract. Her origin story of the sexual contract, like other Second Wave feminist stories of origins, serves an explicitly political purpose in that it is part of an effort to assert the structural autonomy, historical longevity, and persistence of patriarchy. This assertion was a step toward achieving the recognition of gender as a central, rather than a marginal, category of analysis. An analysis of women could not be "tacked on" to class analysis, nor could women and men be treated as if their experiences in the labour market or in politics were analogous. In particular, *The Sexual Contract* is a message to political theorists who had dismissed the private realm and feminism in their theory, and who continued to discuss politics as if the private realm either did not exist or had no political implications for society. Perhaps more importantly, Pateman delivers a message to radical thinkers and to socialists (a broad designation meant to

⁵⁴ Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, p. 192.

⁵⁵ Pateman acknowledges this point in the preface to *The Sexual Contract*.

⁵⁶ Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, p. 193.

include anarchists and Left thinkers of all varieties) who, in spite of their focus on relations of power, also ignore the specificity of women's subordination. This intransigence of gender issues is part of a systemic problem—in other words, a problem that is deeply embedded in the Western political system itself—in Pateman's view. In rejecting the radical democratic line on women, and in turning to a feminist origin story, Pateman is repeating a pattern laid out by radical feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

That her story has radical feminist roots is manifest most clearly in her preoccupation with sexual domination, with the problems of consent and coercion in sexual relations. In fact, we could say that the central theme of *The Sexual Contract* is the sexual conquest of women's bodies by men. As we have seen, Pateman enters the discussion on the origins of women's oppression with an eye to demonstrating the coercion that lies behind the veil of consent in the arena of sexual relations. Too often, apparently consensual relations are actually coercive; too often, women feel that for economic, safety, or other personal reasons, they must "consent" to sex, marriage or prostitution. Pateman's point is that this consent cannot be legitimate because it occurs in an environment in which women are not truly free. Moreover, it is "consent to" an option proposed by the other party, rather than a mutually agreed-upon decision. How valid can consent be for women if they are forever in the position of consenting to another party's agenda? She detects in the marriage contract "echoes of the story of the primal scene." While the original sexual contract is "made only once...it is replicated every day as each man makes his own 'original'

marriage contract."⁵⁷ Through the marriage contract a woman becomes a "wife," and a man "gains right of sexual access to her body...and to her labour as a housewife."⁵⁸

To the extent that Pateman reveals the coercive underside of "apparent" consent, her project remains crucial to feminist politics. She aims to separate the interwoven strands of conquest and consent, and she is rightly critical of Hobbes's positing that consent is always voluntary and thus unproblematic. In her narrative, however, she inverts Hobbes's error, manufactures the theory of conquest, and reads conquest into every act formerly declared consensual. She once again reweaves the strands of consent and conquest and obscures any kind of negotiation, any grey areas, behind the facade of conquest. In this way, she too blurs "the distinction between freedom and subjection," for to assume that women's position must be the result of conquest is to take too broad a sweep at a complex problem. For one thing, it bears reiteration that we, in Western society at least, do not know the origins of patriarchal social relations, just as we do not know the origins of politics and power. Furthermore, it seems unnecessary and even dangerous for feminists to relinquish entirely the concept of consent on the basis that it always disguises subjection. Even in the most egalitarian society, a notion of consent would still be necessary to negotiate human interactions. In the end, the idea of the sexual contract glosses over the difficult interchange between consent and coercion, opting for dramatic narrative over nuanced analysis to capture the reader's imagination.

⁵⁷ SC, p. 115.

⁵⁸ SC, p. 115.

Indeed, this criticism gets to the heart of the problem with feminist origin stories themselves. Feminist origin stories are not the result of benign or impartial historical inquiry, but are imbued with the politics of the Second Wave women's liberation movement. They tend to present a dramatic and stark picture of gendered social relations in an effort to legitimate their politics. But to generate such a narrative elides the very complex evolution and development of patriarchal social relations. Diane Purkiss detects a similar elision of historical complexity in the dominant feminist approach to the European witch-hunts.⁵⁹ Feminists have tended to resist historical accuracy regarding the variability within, and the multifarious causes of, the witch-hunts; to Purkiss, their resistance to historical accuracy is evidence that the myth of the Burning Times has political value for feminism. The myth of a patriarchal war against women simplifies history, it refuses historicity in a sense, and favours instead "a story with clear oppositions" between oppressed and oppressor, between the innocent and the guilty.⁶⁰ The narrative about the oppression of witches, according to Purkiss, acts as a "Holocaust of one's own"⁶¹ for feminism, helping radical feminists demonstrate the existence and severity of women's oppression to both men and women.

I contend that Pateman's radical feminist leanings represent the strength and the weakness of the text. In Purkiss's dismissal of radical

⁵⁹ The predominant feminist approach to the witchhunts is epitomized in the writings of Robin Morgan (see Chapter 6 for discussion), as well as in Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* (London: Women's Press, 1979) and Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1973).

⁶⁰ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 8-11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Ch. 1.

feminism, she overlooks the historical importance of the narratives that feminists have generated. Despite its shortcomings, Pateman's text does serve a political purpose. But at the same time, that purpose is undermined by a refusal of historicity, by a radical feminist desire to prove conquest. It relies on conjecture when historical and textual accuracy is impossible. A more historically-oriented theory of patriarchal relations would see the disruptions as well as the continuities in social relations between pre-modern and early modern society. While it is important to investigate whether, and to what extent, early modern gender relations were transformed by the prevalent contract discourse, it is essential to recognize that the transformation was far more gradual than the metaphor of the sexual contract captures. Indeed, neither liberalism nor capitalism themselves have dramatic births but rather evolve and take shape over the course of decades and centuries. Even if the sexual contract is taken as a metaphor rather than a statement of fact or historical truth about the origins of modern patriarchy, it remains problematical. To focus exclusively on the origins of sexual relations is really to disregard the many ways in which gender relations are reproduced and reconstituted on an ongoing—even a daily—basis. In the end, Pateman's desire to "leave behind stories of origins and original contracts," is undermined by her creation of the sexual contract, which perpetuates contractual and origins-thinking rather than terminating it.

V Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have shown that Pateman favours a fabricated, metaphorical narrative of an original rape over textual specificity, that

she casts aside historical precision for the political benefits of a story of woman's sexual defeat. The utility of filling the gaps of Hobbes's already conjectural story remains elusive, for it would seem that Pateman's attempt to reconstruct the origins of modern patriarchy produces more confusion than clarity. While Pateman obviously recognizes that the social contract is a hypothetical device, at times she implies that the sexual contract did occur in history, that it is manifest in the institutions and practices of contemporary liberal society. For a theorist intending to reveal the fallacies of hypothetical consent, and to expose the problems with imaginary beginnings, this slippage between myth and history is troubling.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Pateman's sexual contract does mark an improvement in feminist origins theorizing, as many of her predecessors failed to pay lip service to the ideal of historical objectivity. Myth and history are fused into one as radical feminists of the Second Wave turn to origin narratives in an effort to legitimate an autonomous women's movement. Exactly how this autonomy is asserted, and what kinds of stories are used to justify radical feminist politics, is the subject of consideration in the final chapter.

VI Getting to the Root of Patriarchy: Radical Feminism's Quest for Origins

*Power to all the people or to none.
All the way down, this time.¹
—RobinMorgan*

*...we must invent a past adequate
to our ambitions
we must create a future adequate
to our needs²*

In the beginning, woman was the superior sex, the model of the human species. She was idolized and worshipped in the form of a Goddess at the same time as she ruled politically. The feminine principle, embodied in the culture, derived from woman's primal reproductive power. Peace prevailed; men were little more than helpmeets, cogs in the wheel of the great matriarchy. Aristotle was wrong; according to the rejuvenated myth of the lost matriarchy, he had inverted the truth.

This matriarchal myth was first advanced by the ancient Greeks, but was later popularized by thinkers such as J.J. Bachofen, Frederick Engels, and Erich Fromm.³ Early Second Wave radical feminists revived it for their

¹ Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," *Rat*, Feb. 9-23, 1970. Reprinted in Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far: The personal chronicle of a feminist* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978). Italics in original.

² From the centerpiece of *Quicksilver Times*, Special Supplement: Women's Liberation, 1969. Credit/The Old Mole. New York University, Tamiment Library, Women's Liberation Newspaper Box.

³ J.J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: selected writings of J.J. Bachofen*, Trans. Ralph Manheim, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1942). Erich Fromm popularized the writings of Bachofen in such articles as "The Significance of the Theory of Mother Right for Today," written in 1970. See the most recent collection of Fromm's essays: *Love, Sexuality and*

own purposes. Indeed, radical feminist writing in the early stage of the Women's Liberation Movement is replete with metaphors and stories of origins; with references to Goddesses, Amazons, and matriarchy; and with narratives about the cause of women's oppression. That the telling of origin narratives was a passing phase for feminism raises the question as to why origins were so central to early radical feminists. Why, at the beginning of their movement, from the late 1960s through the mid 1970s, did radical feminists turn to the question of origin? What political purpose did origins serve for radical feminism?

This chapter is an attempt to come to terms with these formerly unexamined questions in feminist historiography. To this end, it examines the development and politics of the Women's Liberation Movement, in particular the radical feminist stream.⁴ While the origin narratives invoked in radical feminism exhibit a range of political and historical difficulties—not to mention biological ones—the point here is to do more than reveal their shortcomings. The origins discourse in feminism needs to be placed in the political context in which women's oppression came to be treated as an autonomous political issue worthy of attention and analysis.

I The nature of the origins discourse

Matriarchy: About Gender, Rainer Funk, ed., (New York: Fromm International Publishing, 1997).

⁴ It should be noted at the outset that many of the authors cited here use the terms feminism and radical feminism interchangeably. To a large extent, radical feminism was the dominant stream of the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and certainly radical feminism supplied much of the momentum of the movement. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will attempt to specify whether the claims being made refer to radical feminism or to feminism in general.

To be sure, questions about origins and about Western prehistory have always loomed large in feminism because, from the beginning of recorded history, hierarchical gender relations have prevailed. In a certain sense, feminism cannot escape the unanswered question of origins, as being a feminist necessarily entails asking how things got to be the way they are. For this reason, feminists have long expressed an interest in origin myths, especially the Genesis myth at the core of three major religions, because they provide an account of the origins of women's oppression. Thus we find Sarah Grimke, in her 1838 *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman*, providing a rendition of biblical creation. Properly to assess "The Province of Woman," she writes, demands that "we must first view woman at the period of her creation."⁵ Archaeology and anthropology have a similar importance as they offer fragments of insight into human beginnings. It makes logical sense that the authors of *A History of Their Own*, to take one instance, began their comprehensive history of European women with an examination of these fragments in a chapter entitled "Buried Traditions: The Question of Origins."⁶

Ultimately, the question of origins presents an *aporia* to feminists. Important as the quest to understand patriarchy's beginnings might be, the answers remain elusive. There is no answer—and there might never be an answer—to the question of origins. There may not, in the end, be an identifiable and discrete historical event that explains the rise of

⁵ Sarah M. Grimke to Mary S. Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, Letter 1, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), p. 3-4. Originally published 1838.

⁶ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present, Vol. I* (Toronto: Harper and Row, 1988), Chapter 1.

patriarchal social relations. Nevertheless, Second Wave radical feminists have focused attention on this question. While it can be useful to interpret myth or to piece together the fragments of archaeological, anthropological and historical evidence about origins, these enterprises have not captivated the interest of radical feminists. Rather, radical feminists have reconstructed and revitalized myths about an ancient matriarchy and, in the process, have collapsed any distinction between myth and historical inquiry. Their origin stories pick up where history and evidence left off. Unhindered by this lack of evidence, the more recent theorists of matriarchy and the feminists who have co-opted and refashioned their myth, have synthesized a universal story about the replacement of female rule by patriarchy. Drawing on a series of examples, this section aims to show both the prominence of, and the distinct approach to, the question of origins in this period of feminist analysis.

In this examination of Second Wave feminist narratives, I am interested not only in the full-length versions of the stories, of which there were several, but also in the proliferation of the theme of origins within the Women's Liberation Movement. Many of the activists who did not themselves generate an origin story nevertheless used, borrowed, and quoted from these stories. Segments of origin stories appeared in feminist newspapers, political speeches and written polemics. Feminists invoked origins almost as a matter of course in discussions of strategy and theory. This emphasis on origins is most evident during the years in which radical feminism was born and peaked as a political movement, from 1968 to 1975. Following this period, the myths do not entirely disappear, but they take different forms.

Given their importance at the beginning of the women's movement, feminist newspapers and underground publications are a good starting point for assessing the proliferation of origin myths. Although radical feminists had no formal strategies for communicating with each other, they developed extensive informal networks through which ideas about feminism and political action reports were circulated. Newspapers and newsletters such as *Off Our Backs*, *Everywoman*, *Herself*, *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* and *The Other Woman*, formed an important part of this network, as many activists joined newspaper collectives, which in turn received the newspapers of other feminist groups located across North America. The re-publication of stories from other papers was common, and in some cases, articles were cut and pasted wholesale from other papers. The feminist papers were thus mutually influencing with respect to content: if one group covered a particular story or controversy, it was likely that others would as well. While each newspaper had a different focus, all typically covered a standard range of topics from political rallies and protests to the latest news from the war in Vietnam; they also provided space for discussions about feminist theory and strategy; and they offered detailed advice on practical matters from plumbing and car repair to gynecology. In sum, these small feminist newspapers were key to the transmission of feminist thought and strategy.

It is not surprising, given their range of topics, that the theme of origins surfaced repeatedly in these papers. Origin stories were often included in lists of recommended reading published in the newspapers. Feminist book lists were a staple in the early Women's Liberation Movement; it was widely understood that women needed to educate

themselves in their own history and in current feminist theory. The New York Radical Feminists went so far as to devise a program of study for new feminist groups under their umbrella organization: each group had to commit to six weeks of intensive reading in contemporary movement literature as well as six weeks of reading in the feminist classics and feminist history to be admitted as members.⁷ Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* were most commonly cited on book lists as representing the cutting edge of feminist theory and as essential reading for any member of women's liberation.⁸ Also recommended, however, was a variety of origin stories about the rise of patriarchy: Elizabeth Gould Davis's *The First Sex*, Helen Diner's *Mothers and Amazons*; Engels' *The Origin of the Family*; Robert Briffault's *The Mothers*; Bachofen's *Mother Right*; Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*, Elaine Morgan's *The Descent of Woman*; and Wolfgang Lederer's *The Fear of Women*.⁹ Each of these texts presents an account of the "world historic defeat of the female sex."¹⁰

Long excerpts from feminist origin stories commonly appeared in the feminist newspapers, situated either in book reviews or in "herstory"

⁷ In addition, each group had to undergo three months of consciousness raising. "Organizing Principles of the New York Radical Feminists," in Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, eds., *Notes from the Second Year* (New York, 1970), p. 120.

⁸ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1979); Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970).

⁹ Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971); Helen Diner, *Mothers and Amazons: the first feminine history of culture* (New York: Julian Press, 1965); Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); Elaine Morgan, *The Descent of Woman* (New York: Bantam, 1972); Wolfgang Lederer, *The Fear of Women* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Janovich, 1968).

¹⁰ Engels' expression from *The Origin of the Family*.

sections. Davis's *The First Sex*, for example, was reviewed in the Canadian paper *The Other Woman*. Quoting extensively from the text, the reviewer, Pat Leslie, concludes with Davis's statement that "Recorded history starts with a patriarchal revolution. Let it continue with a counter-revolution that is the only hope for the survival of the human race." Leslie suggests that "it is not so important to quibble over whether the matriarchy was egalitarian or supremacist as it is to have free-flowing discussion on our own female past."¹¹ Leaving aside for the moment the content of Davis's origin story, it is particularly noteworthy that, from the outset, feminists acknowledged that the theory of matriarchy does not rest on secure historical ground, and moreover, if matriarchy once existed, its characteristics were as yet undetermined. In short, while Davis might not have been correct about the details on matriarchy, she nevertheless remained essential reading for feminists—in Leslie's words, "highly recommended by all of us who have read it."

Everywoman, published in Venice, California, assisted women in the project of feminist self-education by running a regular "Herstory" section along with a "Herstory Almanac." The "Almanac" commemorates the acts of great women in history, matching the date of the paper with important dates in women's past.¹² The lengthier "Herstory" section provides excerpts from authors on specific topics, like matriarchies and Amazons.¹³

¹¹ Pat Leslie, Book Review, "The First Sex," *The Other Woman* (Toronto), Vol. 1, No. 2, Sept. 1972, p. 15.

¹² Mary Lyon, for example, is commemorated for founding Mt. Holyoke College, the first women's college in the United States. "Herstory Almanac," *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Feb. 5, 1971, p. 7.

¹³ Ann Forfreedom quotes Helen Diner's *Mothers and Amazons* in "Herstory: Matriarchies," *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Feb. 5, 1971, p. 7; Barbara Miles quotes from

In her piece "Amazons and Battle-Axes," Barbara Miles tries to correct the 2000-year old patriarchal tradition which has portrayed and disparaged Amazons as merely-mythical beings. "The real story," she asserts, "as usual, is more interesting." First, she reports, Amazons were real, not just mythical. Secondly, they were beautiful, "healthy-bodied" women who made excellent fighters. Since there were many generations of Amazons, the author claims, "we can assume they engaged in heterosexual activity now and then; or there [was] always parthenogenesis." Parthenogenesis, a recurring theme in the feminist origins discourse, refers to spontaneous reproduction by women without the aid of fertilization. These pieces are meant to fill in the blank spots of women's history.

The theme of origins also routinely surfaced in newspaper articles on feminist theory and politics. Because the radical feminist movement arose out of, and in opposition to, the New Left, one of the most common points of debate was the accuracy of Engels' *Origin of the Family and Private Property*. Some feminist writers used Engels to show that patriarchy has not always existed.¹⁴ Those feminists who remained within the Left organizations, i.e. those who did not become radical feminists, tended to view the cause of women's oppression in the terms Engels set out, with women's oppression being incidental to the development of private

Pandora's Box in "Herstory: Amazons and Battle-Axes," *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 4, March 5, 1971, p. 5.

¹⁴ Linda Carcione, "True Story: The Women's Movement, Part One," *Quicksilver Times*, Special Supplement on Women's Liberation, 1969, p. 21. New York University, Tamiment Library, Women's Liberation Newspaper Box. One of the feminists who popularized the use of Engels during this period was Evelyn Reed. Although Reed did not become a radical feminist, but rather remained within the Marxist camp, she was no less preoccupied with describing an origin theory, and she adhered to Engels's belief in an original matriarchy.

property. Others claimed that feminism needed to develop its own analysis of women's oppression, but paradoxically they still used Engels to show that the family is fundamental to the economic base of capitalist societies.¹⁵ And still others pointed to Engels' sexist bias, recognizing his efforts to explain women's oppression, but rejecting the notion that Lenin, Marx or Engels can "tell us how to change it."¹⁶ Engels, then, served as the starting point and the spring board for feminist debate about origins.

In point of fact, feminist writers during this period raised the topic of origins as if feminist strategy could not be discussed without some prior discussion of it, no matter how brief. Dawn Chalker begins her analysis of "The Economics of Oppression" in *Her-self* with a short description of the biologically-based cause of women's subordination. She begins:

This attempt to synthesize ideas into a feminist theory accepts the premise that women's position of inferiority and subservience to man developed out of her role in reproduction [sic] which incapacitated her at certain times and forced her into the position of caring for children.

Chalker must preface her feminist theory with an argument about why women are oppressed, an argument

based on the belief that *men have always been in awe of women's reproductive powers and, although respecting this power, finally turned it against women.* In an attempt to control nature which he feared, man began to assert himself over woman whom he has also feared as a powerful and unexplainable force in nature.¹⁷

In a few short sentences, Chalker summarizes the popular feminist origin narrative, the one that so many writers have recited in one form or another. Chalker's narrative strays considerably from a historical analysis

¹⁵ Barbara Mehrhof, Linda Feldman, Sheila Cronan, and Ellen Willis, "New York Women Reply," *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, No. 7, August 11, 1969.

¹⁶ Dawn Chalker, "The Economics of Oppression: Women in Capitalist Society," *Her-self*, Vol. 3, No. 8, March 1975, p. 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Emphasis mine.

of the cause of oppression: in attributing male dominance to biological envy of women Chalker enters the realm, not of history, but of politics and myth.

Even a brief examination of this cross-section of feminist newspapers provides a sense of the pervasiveness of the feminist origins impulse. In fact, the theme of origins is ubiquitous. In New York City, undoubtedly one of the most important centers for the Women's Liberation Movement, one could take classes in "The Origins of Women's Oppression and Male Chauvinism" in 1970.¹⁸ At the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in Toronto, a group of feminists created a kit for teachers who wanted to teach women's history and feminism to their classes but who lacked the materials necessary to do so. "The Women's Kit"¹⁹ is a large box containing a guide book by the same title and countless clippings, articles, pamphlets, bound essays, posters, postcards, and even record albums, all on the topic of women, their status and their history. Assembled and distributed between 1972 and 1974, the kits represent a kind of time-capsule from this period of early feminist activism: the contents reveal the diversity of interests within feminism, the international focus even at this stage, and, not surprisingly, an interest in origins. Included in "The Women's Kit" are short, bound essays on "The Great Goddess," and the "Fear of Women." These two short texts, both written and compiled by Pamela

¹⁸ Advertisement for classes in "Women's Liberation and Socialism," New York University, Tamiment Library, Women's Liberation File, 1970.

¹⁹ "The Women's Kit," developed by Pamela Harris and Becky Kane, with Donna James, Margot Smith and Claire Watson (Toronto: OISE, 1974). Under 100 kits were made and distributed. They are not identical; there is some variation in feminist periodicals, depending on availability, but each contains essentially the same kinds of items. An example of "The Women's Kit" can be found at University of Ottawa, Canadian Women's Movement Archives.

Harris, combine a series of quotes from other authors on these topics with some photographs and comments from Harris herself. Both texts retell the story of woman's mystical reproductive power and try to account for the rise of patriarchy by resorting to an argument about men's fear and jealousy of women. In "Fear of Women" Harris explains that "woman is put down and kept down, not because men really see her as inferior, but because they see her as superior."²⁰ In the goddess text she surmises that these Goddess-worshipping societies "were conquered by other male-dominated, women-suppressing societies."²¹ Harris's language about origins reflects and reinforces radical feminist belief in an early matriarchy. Most of the feminists who engage with the origins discourse allude to a "before," a universal, primordial matriarchy, a point in history when woman controlled society and the world was a more nurturing, peaceful place. All of these authors rely heavily on male theorists like Engels and Bachofen, attempting to harness their insights for the benefit of the feminist movement.

Even major feminist writers whose intent was not specifically to develop an origin story felt the compulsion to respond to the question of origins, or to give an interpretation of existing evidence of matriarchy. Simone de Beauvoir, ever-influential to the creators of the Women's Liberation Movement, theorized the Golden Age of matriarchy to have been a myth. Radical feminist believers in the matriarchy were obviously undeterred by Beauvoir's statement that, "we must be careful to note that the presence of a woman chief or queen at the head of a tribe by no means

²⁰ Pamela Harris, "Fear of Women," p. 8, in "The Women's Kit."

²¹ Pamela Harris, "The Great Goddess," p. 24, in "The Women's Kit."

signifies that women are sovereign therein."²² Later, Sarah Pomeroy entered the debate, ultimately concluding that the evidence was not sufficient to determine the historicity of matriarchy.²³ Adrienne Rich took up the issue of matriarchy in *Of Woman Born*, cautious about feminist historical sources, but at the same time, aware that "a critical exploration backward in time can be profoundly radicalizing."²⁴ Rich was somewhat more sympathetic than Pomeroy to those feminists who wished to begin this exploration, those who were curious to investigate history, "not as verifiable evidence of things done" but as "something like the notebooks of a dreamer."²⁵

Ms. magazine also contributed to the origins hype by republishing a collection of William Moulton Marston's *Wonder Woman* comic strips. This 1972 collection was introduced by Gloria Steinem herself and contained an interpretive essay about Amazons by Phyllis Chesler. Steinem's foray into the subject of matriarchy and Amazons is particularly intriguing simply because she was not a radical feminist, and she did not participate in fanciful theorizing. Steinem's interest in *Wonder Woman* stems from her desire for girls to have a positive action heroine of their own with whom they can identify. While she is not convinced that *Wonder Woman*'s mythical inspirations—the Amazons—actually existed, she claims that "being a writer, not a scientist tied to proven fact," gives her license to fuse

²² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 71.

²³ Sarah B. Pomeroy, "A Classical Scholar's Perspective on Matriarchy," in Bernice A. Carroll, ed., *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

²⁴ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), p. 86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

together "the sometimes contradictory versions of Amazonia into one amalgam; into a story that sounds right to me." And so she recounts the Amazon myth in the standard way, complete with the biological envy thesis. She claims that if it is shown to be factual at some later point, Wonder Woman will then become "one small outcropping of a larger human memory"; and the "girl children who love her" will have been "responding to one small echo of dreams and capabilities in their own forgotten past."²⁶

Chesler's piece in *Wonder Woman* is similarly provocative. She begins with a re-created conversation between herself, Helen Diner and Johann Bachofen.²⁷ Here and in her groundbreaking *Women and Madness*, Chesler touches on Greek myth, the historicity of matriarchy, and the relevance of Wonder Woman herself. She gives a positive reading of the myth of the Amazons, arguing that the image of these past creatures "produces fear and disbelief—together with an overwhelming sense of pride and excitement."²⁸ Furthermore, feminist visions of the Amazons are not just about dismantling patriarchal history but contribute to positive feminist self-understandings. Indeed, a number of radical feminists declared themselves to be modern-day Amazon women; among the most famous was Ti-Grace Atkinson in her collected writings entitled *Amazon Odyssey*.²⁹ A Milwaukee collective named itself after the Amazons and published a newspaper by the same name. "We call our paper, Amazon as a

²⁶ Gloria Steinem, "Introduction," in William Moulton Marston, *Wonder Woman* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1972), pages in text unnumbered.

²⁷ Phyllis Chesler, "The Amazon Legacy," in Marston, *Wonder Woman*.

²⁸ Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997) p. 311. Originally published in 1972.

²⁹ Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974).

tribute to [Amazon] women, and a challenge to male society," reads their mission statement; "we are on the road to building a new identity for women. This is the road to liberation."³⁰ Chesler is ambivalent about such categorical statements, for she cautions that it may be "unrealistic and perhaps dangerous" to take Amazon fantasies too far, but she asserts nonetheless that these visions must be respected as "difficult truths with which to inform our lives—in some way."³¹

Amazon warriors are also a focal point in Elizabeth Gould Davis's work; indeed, this overview of the feminist origins discourse would not be complete without a discussion of *The First Sex*. Davis wrote the most comprehensive, and the most contentious, feminist origin story of the early 1970s. Radical feminists of this period relied heavily on Davis's narrative, as her claims about the primacy of women and the historicity of a primordial matriarchy appeared in countless feminist works.³² In fact, Davis proved to be far more influential on the subject of matriarchy than the feminists who were writing in a more historically-informed manner.³³ Significantly, Davis was a generation older than the women who were active in creating the radical feminist movement, but she was aware of

³⁰ Amazon Collective (Milwaukee, WI), "Amazon? Claiming Our Culture," *Amazon*, Vol. 1, No. 3, July 1972.

³¹ Chesler, *Women and Madness*, p. 311

³² The references to Davis are too numerous to list. However, it is important to mention Jill Johnson, a regular contributor to *The Village Voice*, who had an active role in popularizing Davis's work. See *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

³³ Esther Newton and Paula Webster discuss this point in "Matriarchy: As Women See It," *Aphra*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Summer 1973, p. 12. *The First Sex* was eventually published as an inexpensive paperback, at which point its sales and thus its influence rose dramatically.

their struggles in the student movement and she spoke to them in a language to which they were increasingly attuned.³⁴

Davis presents women not only as superior beings, but as the first beings on the earth. Parthenogenesis was the human means of reproduction.³⁵ The deity was also originally "all female," although gradually she transforms to incorporate the male and female in one, becoming the "creator and begetter in one body."³⁶ Davis cites Plato's discussion of the original unity of male and female in the *Symposium* as evidence for this hermaphroditic deity. When the male of the human species did come into existence, it was as a mutation, an "accident of nature."³⁷ Evidence for this is adduced in women's more "highly evolved" reproductive organs, and in the deformity of the Y chromosome. "Geneticists and physiologists tell us," writes Davis "that the small and twisted Y chromosome is a genetic error," and thus that, "man is an imperfect female."³⁸ In Davis's rendering of creation, maleness is nothing more than a "recessive genetic trait like colour-blindness and hemophilia with which it is linked."³⁹

³⁴ See her comments in the final chapter on the subordinate role of women in the student movement (*The First Sex*, p. 328-9). Although a generation older, Davis did not entirely escape controversy and politics within the feminist movement. Just as many feminists disparaged her work as liked it. Furthermore, Davis was posthumously accused by the re-formed Redstockings group of being a Naval Intelligence officer. See below, f.n. 127.

³⁵ Davis, *The First Sex*, p. 34.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁸ *Ibid.* The theory of the deformity of the Y chromosome is among many assertions Davis makes that are unsubstantiated. My purpose at this stage is merely to recount her narrative, however, and so I will not dwell on her repeated errors of fact and interpretation. See, however, the critiques offered by Amy Hackett and Sarah Pomeroy in "Making History: The First Sex," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall 1972.

³⁹ Davis, *The First Sex*, p. 35.

Throughout the ancient world, man was enslaved by woman; he was dominated by her immense, Amazonian power. Woman "held the secrets of nature" and was the "originator and repository" of all culture. Women provided food and shelter for their families, "discovered" agriculture, constructed implements; and the law and economy revolved around them. By contrast, men were the objects of scorn and derision and had to be dragged kicking and screaming into civilization.⁴⁰ This matriarchal age is represented by Davis as a universal stage in human civilization, lasting for millennia in prehistory, following which cultures dispersed across the globe. We should note, too, that matriarchy refers here to an organization of society in which women rule; it is not merely an egalitarian arrangement, but a reversal of the patriarchal hierarchy. According to Davis, a feminine-centric culture, if not a gynocracy, lasted into the period of recorded history. That this universal stage was peaceful is attributed to the worship of the Goddess for, unlike the father God who punished his worshippers, the mother Goddess "loved all her children equally" and unconditionally.⁴¹ Moreover, gynocratic society was marked by a "real democracy in which the happiness and fulfillment of the individual"⁴² superseded all other societal goals.

Eventually, however, female supremacy met with a counter-revolution that resulted in its collapse under patriarchy. Men had been convinced of their inferiority for so long that they developed a subconscious but

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40-41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴² The use of the term "individual" is noteworthy. To speak of individuals even in ancient Greece is understood to be anachronistic.

"everlasting resentment against women."⁴³ As Bachofen, whom Davis quotes extensively, explains, it is the very "strictness of the patriarchal system" that "points to an earlier system that had to be combated and surpassed."⁴⁴ Fear of woman, pregnancy- or womb-envy, and resentment of their past subordination: each of these is offered as a factor in explaining the creation of patriarchal society by men. With the advent of patriarchy came war, property rights, arrogance, self-interest. Woman's body and her accomplishments were disparaged and she was forced to relinquish her autonomy. The end of gynocracy did not mean, in Davis's view, the end of human connection to the Goddess, for the Celts retained their connection to the Goddess long after the rise of patriarchy; moreover, a desire to retain that connection is evident in many Goddess-symbols and markers that Davis enumerates throughout the text.⁴⁵

In sum, *The First Sex* is devoted to the detection and exposition of evidence that supports the matriarchal theory of women's history. The existence of a primordial matriarchy is demonstrated to Davis by the fact that the beginning of recorded history shows goddesses among the Greek deities. For Davis, as for Bachofen, myth is evidence enough; myth is a transparent window on the past. Myth reflects history. The Greek myths about Amazons, Goddesses and matriarchies are a repository of truth about an earlier age. Therefore, in addition to the irrefutable archaeological evidence that she argues does exist, Davis (selectively) offers the texts of Hesiod, Homer, Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle—presenting these thinkers as

⁴³ Davis, *The First Sex*, p. 148.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Davis, *The First Sex*, p. 148.

⁴⁵ For one example, the fact that priests still wear robes is said to be a symbol of the ancient worship of the Goddess. See Davis, *The First Sex*, p. 99.

accurate reporters of the past—as evidence that a matriarchal age preceded their own. Again, to quote Bachofen, "the mythical tradition is to be seen as an authentic, independent record of the primordial age."⁴⁶ If Goddesses existed in myth, that alone was evidence for Davis that a gynocratic age once existed.

Putting aside for the moment the obvious shortcomings in Davis's approach, we need to achieve some understanding of her purpose. It is evident from her final two chapters, which are given over to the discussion of contemporary politics, that Davis's preoccupation is with the patriarchal absurdities of the present. She concludes the introduction of the book by inviting a matriarchal counter-revolution: a transformation of society to end the "rot of masculine materialism" that threatens the very core of life. But she is vitally aware of the socialization that has convinced women of their inferiority, a socialization that hinders the possibility of any counter-revolution. "In order to restore women to their ancient dignity and pride," Davis writes, "they must be taught their own history, as the American blacks are being taught theirs."⁴⁷ *The First Sex* is designed to fill that very mandate, though Davis herself did not witness the results of her effort, as she died in 1974. In the lengthy *Ms.* eulogy to Davis, Rhoda Lerman affirms Davis's origin story as the movement's "own myth," its bible.⁴⁸ It is biblical, Lerman clarifies, not because it is entirely accurate as history—for she concedes it may be "faulty, insufficient, wrong" and

⁴⁶ Davis, *The First Sex*, p. 78.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Davis, suffering from cancer, committed suicide when she was 64 years old. Rhoda Lerman, "In Memoriam: Elizabeth Gould Davis," *Ms.*, Vol. III, No. 6, December 1974, p. 74.

"incomplete"—but because it "uplifted, inspired, and brought light." In short, it was empowering and thus politically useful.

II The emergence of radical feminism

To understand just how empowering and useful the myth of the lost matriarchy was to feminism at this point in its development, it is first necessary to achieve a sense of why radical feminists were drawn to origins. The answer to this question is related to the rise, and nature, of radical feminism as a movement. As we examine this history, it becomes evident that the origins-focus of radical feminism is a logical outcome of women's experiences in the civil rights movement and the New Left. Indeed, radical feminism is built on the premise of getting to the root of women's oppression, a goal that overtly prioritizes the need for a theory of origins.

Most of the women who would create the radical feminist movement received their political education and experience in the civil rights movement.⁴⁹ Indeed, it would be fair to say that the entire northern student movement learned the skills of political activism and analysis from the civil rights movement. Participating *en masse* in the activities of the Student non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), northern and southern students alike began "to see the south through the eyes of the

⁴⁹ My focus here is the American example both because of the surplus of sources and because it is in this context that some of the most important radical feminists developed a theoretical system. We should note that the same patterns were emerging in Canada, where a number of feminists worked in the civil rights movement, joined student movements on the Left, and followed the same trajectory as their American counterparts in becoming dissatisfied with Left caucuses. See Myrna Kostash, *Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1980).

poorest blacks."⁵⁰ The movement organized the 1964 Freedom Summer, a mass voter-registration campaign in which many whites actively participated. Student activists, while "putting their bodies on the line,"⁵¹ were aware that the danger and violence they encountered was a pale reflection of that facing southern blacks. Nevertheless, those involved with SNCC were inspired by its idealism in the face of racist hatred and violence, by its radically egalitarian principles of organization, and by its commitment to grass-roots politics. To all who participated, especially in contrast to the hostile political climate of the south, the movement was the "beloved community."⁵²

By most accounts, women and men participated in the civil rights movement on a roughly equal level.⁵³ In particular black women of SNCC held positions of power and were involved in the decision-making process of the committee's inner circle. White women participated in the voter-registration drives and demonstrations, and went to jail alongside the men. At the same time, however, both black and white women were aware that most of the SNCC leadership was male, and that attitudes about women's position in society were not as progressive as they could be. There was a brief moment, in fact, during which these women "shared a feminist

⁵⁰ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 43.

⁵¹ This expression is taken from Todd Gitlin, but surfaces throughout movement literature. "Putting your body on the line" was the only way to become a member of the student and civil rights movements which otherwise had no formal membership system. See Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, rev. ed. (New York: Bantam, 1993), p. 84-5.

⁵² Evans and Gitlin both write of the incredible idealism, but also the solidarity of the "beloved community." See Evans, *Personal Politics*, p. 36-41.

⁵³ See Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991); and Evans, *Personal Politics*.

response to the position of women in SNCC" but, as Sara Evans explains, they lacked the solidarity and trust to extend their shared observations into anything deeper.⁵⁴ It is significant to note that while relations between white and black women were by no means idyllic—and in fact they were strained further by the sexual relationships that sprouted between white women and black men—black women activists were role models to white women in the organization, who could find no comparable models in American society at large.

White women's participation in SNCC ended in 1965, but not by their own choice. By this point, SNCC had turned irreversibly toward Black Power and away from the idea of a "beloved community" in which all, including whites, could participate. As black activists focused on defining the movement for themselves, white activism within SNCC was discouraged. This transformation within SNCC had a disillusioning effect on many of the white women who had devoted years to the civil rights movement.⁵⁵ Mary King, for example, remembers the disappointment she felt at the shift, claiming to be most affected "by the way that the Black women turned against me."⁵⁶ Carol Hanisch similarly recalls that, while she understood the incentive for Black Power, it was nonetheless difficult to face the fact

⁵⁴ Evans, *Personal Politics*, p. 88. White women activists did raise the issue of women's position in SNCC only to be met with skepticism and Stokely Carmichael's famous utterance: "The only position of women in SNCC is prone."

⁵⁵ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 97-8.

⁵⁶ Quote in Evans, *Personal Politics*, 98. King and Hayden wrote a memo to raise the issue of women's marginalization within SNCC entitled, "A Kind of Memo from Casey Hayden and Mary King to a number of other women in the Peace and Freedom Movements," reprinted in Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1987).

that she "really didn't belong in that struggle anymore."⁵⁷ Nevertheless, white women departed the civil rights movement equipped with organizing skills, an appreciation for non-hierarchical decision-making, and a sense of what political solidarity could look like. Perhaps even more importantly, the civil rights movement taught women the necessity of rediscovering and reclaiming their own history, of getting to the root cause of oppression. Although they did not act upon it immediately, the significance of that lesson was not lost on them.

Upon returning to the north, many of the women activists became involved in student movements such as the Northern Student Movement, and particularly in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). But these New Left organizations offered a very different experience for women; whereas the civil rights movement had women organizers, SDS did not. SDS, committed to achieving a total analysis of class oppression in America, was an inwardly-focused, cerebral, and intellectually-competitive movement. Of course, the movement was also directed toward action; "action was the core of the movement's identity," according to former SDS president Todd Gitlin.⁵⁸ Certainly women participated in the demonstrations, the occupation of the Columbia campus, the anti-war marches, and the national student conferences, and were members of the newspaper collectives. But their participation was at a different level from men. When it came to policy formulation and decision-making, women were excluded for the

⁵⁷ Carol Hanisch, "Hard Knocks: Working for Women's Liberation in a Mixed (Male-Female) Movement Group," *Notes from the Second Year*, p. 60.

⁵⁸ Gitlin criticizes the lack of coherent ideology underlying the movement's actions at the same time as he praises the movement's break with what he calls 1950s complacency. See Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 84-5.

most part. A sexual division of labour, which women in radical movements had already rejected in the larger society, prevailed within SDS and the New Left in general. Active in the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, Leslie Cagan was relegated to "mimeoing," addressing, and mailing "while the men would sit in one of the offices making the decisions."⁵⁹ As the New York Radical Women later remarked, "Even within the radical movement we are relegated to service: typing, mailing, and food preparation, with sexual service on the side."⁶⁰

Not only were women assigned to house-keeping and care-taking tasks and excluded from decision-making, their attempts to generate a critique of this contradiction were met with outright hostility.⁶¹ This hostility and antagonism toward "chicklib," as SDS'er Mark Rudd called it, was extensive

⁵⁹ Leslie Cagan, "Something New Emerges: The Growth of a Socialist Feminist," in Dick Cluster, ed., *They Should Have Served that Cup of Coffee* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), p. 238. As Judith Brown puts it, "Most women are not long suffering in the movement; they never really get in, and their brief passing is hardly noted. The radical female is cooled out, very simply, because she is not wanted politically, and she cannot proffer her secretarial skills as payment for inclusion in traditionally male activity—political decision-making." See Part II of Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, "Toward a Female Liberation Movement," in Leslie B. Tanner, ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation* (New York: Signet, 1970), pp. 393-8.

⁶⁰ [Rosalyn Baxandall], "Roz's Page," New York Radical Women, *Notes from the First Year* (New York), June 1968, p. 28. There are too many feminist pieces on Left sexism to count, as almost all radical feminist writing in this period excoriates the Left. Among the most influential are: Marge Piercy, "The Grand Coolie Damn," in Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Vintage, 1970); Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*; and Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," in *Going*.

⁶¹ This was also true in the Canadian case. The Knitting Circle was formed by radical women of the New Left Caucus at the University of Toronto upon their discovery of an internal discussion paper that ridiculed its women members. The paper presents women as clucking, gossiping hens in a knitting circle, thus the women's choice of name. See their response to the men's mockery: The Knitting Circle of the New Left Caucus, "Destruction is the Highest Form of Creation, or The Real Contradictions in the Social Relationships in the New Left Caucus (Back to the Materialist Knitty-Gritty)," [ca. 1969], University of Ottawa, Canadian Women's Movement Archives, File: New Left Caucus, The Knitting Circle of.

and acted as a catalyst to the development of radical feminism. Certain events in particular pushed radical women away from the Left and toward their own movement. One such event occurred at the 1967 National Conference for New Politics (NCNP) in Chicago. The NCNP, a meeting of 2000 activists from all over the United States, was intended to unite the movement. As Alice Echols explains, one of the key issues for the movement at this convention was Black Power and the relationship between white and black activists; the black caucus made several demands of the delegation, including that Blacks receive fifty per cent representation on each of the committees, and a fifty per cent share of the convention vote.⁶² White delegates conceded this demand as well as others, although this ultimately generated little in the way of the desired consensus.

Demands made by women who had drafted a resolution for presentation to the NCNP were treated rather differently.⁶³ The women, in fact, could not even get their resolution on the agenda for discussion, but were encouraged to draft a new resolution with another group of women who had already submitted one. Although they complied, the content of the second, reformed resolution did not reflect the essence of the original, a fact that enraged Ti-Grace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone who were involved in drafting the original. Atkinson and Firestone drafted yet another resolution, which demanded among other things that women

⁶² Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 46-7.

⁶³ As Echols states, "whereas radical men seemed eager to do penance for their racism, they actively resisted women's attempts to raise the issue of sexual inequality." See *Daring*, p. 48.

receive fifty-one per cent of the votes. After threatening to tie up the entire convention, the two were successful in getting their resolution on the agenda and proceeded to make 2000 copies for circulation. In the end, however, only the second, reformed proposal was discussed while Atkinson and Firestone's resolution was ignored. Jo Freeman later reported that, following the rebuff, the chair of the conference proceeded to pat "Shulie on the head" saying "Move on little girl; we have more important issues to talk about here than women's liberation." According to Freeman, "That was the genesis."⁶⁴ And so it was: the first autonomous women's liberation group was founded a week later in Chicago.

For a time, radical women continued to work within the Left, some within women's caucuses, which Firestone named "Ladies' auxiliaries of the Left."⁶⁵ Although SDS put together their "SDS National Resolution on Women," in which they acknowledged that women endure a "qualitatively different kind of oppression which they experience as women in addition to the exploitation of all working people," the situation changed very little for women in SDS and other radical groups.⁶⁶ This fact is made evident in the infamous 1969 counter-inaugural demonstration incident. SDS activist Marilyn Webb took the stage to speak about women's liberation only to be

⁶⁴ Reported in Echols, *Daring*, p. 49; and Marlene LeGates, *Making Waves: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996), p. 335. See also Ellen Willis' account of this event in "Up from Radicalism: A Feminist Journal," New York University, Tamiment Library, Women's Liberation File (undated). Reprinted from *US* magazine (Bantam Books), No. 2; October, 1969.

⁶⁵ Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 39.

⁶⁶ "SDS National Resolution on Women" (Boston: New England Free Press, 1968), New York University, Tamiment Library, Women's Liberation File 1968.

interrupted by male calls to: "Take her off the stage and fuck her!"⁶⁷ No reproach was made by male activists; rather, the women were told by the organizers that they were going to cause a riot if they did not cease speaking.⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that Webb had been among a group of SDS women arguing *against* a separate women's liberation movement, an argument she retracted following this experience. A short time later, Shulamith Firestone, who admonished the men at the demonstration for their behaviour, wrote a response to the incident in the *Guardian*. In her words,

We say to the left: in this past decade you have failed to live up to your rhetoric of revolution...Women's liberation is dynamite. And we have more important things to do than to try to get you to come around...The message being: Fuck off, left. You can examine your navel by yourself from now on. We're starting our own movement.⁶⁹

This tension between the New Left and radical women was an important incentive to the feminist turn to origin narratives. Put simply, *the hostility felt by radical feminists toward the Left cannot be overstated*. From a feminist perspective, movement men embodied an insidious contradiction in fighting for liberation while living out a bourgeois existence vis-à-vis both their sexual and political relationships with movement women. That they refused to take action to resolve this contradiction, that they willfully mocked and baited the women who challenged them, only added fuel to the fire. By the time the counter-inaugural incident occurred, radical women had already successfully

⁶⁷ This is perhaps the most reported incident relating to sexism in the movement literature. See Echols, *Daring*; LeGates, *Making Waves*; Cagan, "Something New Emerges..."; and Gitlin, *The Sixties*, p. 363.

⁶⁸ Gitlin, *The Sixties*, p. 363.

⁶⁹ Quoted in LeGates, *Making Waves*, p. 337.

carried out the Miss America protest⁷⁰ and they were already developing a new confidence in their own political skills. Their experiences in the civil rights movement and the New Left had given them a new awareness of their own abilities, even as it relegated them to menial tasks. As Evans explains, the feminist movement "was born in that contradiction—the threatened loss of new possibility."⁷¹

It is in this context that the Women's Liberation Movement came into being. And it is also in this context that radical feminists turned to narratives of origins to justify and augment their separatist politics. But their turn to origin narratives was more than a reaction *against* the larger movement; it was also direct consequence of their experiences in the broader movement. As much as the emergent radical feminist movement was premised on rejection of the sexism of the civil rights and New Left movements, it also took crucial lessons from both. Radical women in the civil rights movement witnessed the reclamation of black history and the search for the roots of racial oppression. They too perceived a need to get to the root of their own oppression. The analogy of racial oppression was to become a fruitful one for feminists, as we saw in Davis's call for women to learn their own history just as Blacks were learning theirs. Civil rights activists, feminists and SDS'ers all adhered to the view that a strategy for

⁷⁰ More than one hundred women from across the United States gathered to protest outside the 1969 Miss America contest in Atlantic City; they marched, chanted, performed street theatre, handcuffed themselves to a giant mannequin of Miss America, and crowned a live sheep as Miss America. This protest is one of the earliest acts of the Women's Liberation Movement, and incited thousands of women to join the movement. See the reports of the event in *Liberation News Service* (New York), No. 104, September 17, 1969; and Robin Morgan, "Women Disrupt the Miss America Pageant," in *Going*.

⁷¹ Evans, *Personal Politics*, p. 221.

change requires a theory about the nature and origin of the problem. For the civil rights movement, oppression had an identifiable beginning—slavery—if not an obvious solution. Similarly for the New Left, the root cause of oppression was capitalism, the rise and history of which was knowable. But not so for women who, as I have already pointed out, were unable to draw on a readily-available history of their oppression. Up to the point of the formation of the radical feminist movement, radical women had been convinced that the primary source of their oppression was American capitalist, racist society. When they turned their energies to foment a feminist revolution, they also had to name the cause, hence the origin, of their subordination to men.⁷² Shulamith Firestone was the first to revive the word patriarchy to connote the system that oppressed women, but it would be other radical feminists who would hypothesize its origins.

As much as radical feminists borrowed from the civil rights movement, they also appropriated from the Left the distinction between reform and radical change. This new stream of feminists used the word radical deliberately. "I call myself a radical feminist, and that means specific things to me," writes Robin Morgan, "The etymology of the word 'radical' refers to 'one who goes to the root.'"⁷³ Radical feminists were also led to the quest for the origins of patriarchy by their rejection of the reform agenda that they associated with NOW and liberal feminism. In the period

⁷² "Unfortunately, there has been a real lack of discussion among women's groups and individual women about what we see as the root of women's problems and how we see change coming about...For only when women have a grasp on these questions can we build a strong and effective movement." Kathy Kozachenko, "The Women's Movement: Political Definitions," *her-self*, Vol. 1, No. 5, October 1972, p. 4.

⁷³ Robin Morgan, "Introduction: Rights of Passage," in *Going*, p. 9. See also Ti-Grace Atkinson's assertion that she was "probing deeper and deeper into the roots of the oppression of women" in *Amazon Odyssey*, p. xxi.

of the late 1960s and early 1970s all feminists, liberal and radical, were preoccupied with socialization patterns, with the reproduction of patriarchal ideas and attitudes among new generations of women and men. All feminists focused a keen eye on advertising, media, political rhetoric, literature, and anything else that portrayed women as passive, feminine, sexual objects. The formation of NOW and the Kennedy Commission on Women both contributed to the creation of a climate in which it was again acceptable to articulate women's concerns. But what differentiated radical feminists, what made them a completely different breed of activist, was their emergence out of the student movement. From SDS and the broader movement they absorbed the significance of the difference between reform and revolution, and they viewed anything short of revolution as a failure. While they still focused on the question of socialization, radical feminists also theorized that the source of women's oppression must lie in a deeper, structural relation between the sexes, and that reforms aimed to minimize oppression would not uncover its root cause.

III "Goodbye to All That": the politics of origins

In the foregoing, I suggest that the origins impulse is implicit in the defining ideas of radical feminism, as theorizing the structural configuration of patriarchy led naturally to the question of its beginnings. As several feminists openly concede, however, the stories formulated about patriarchy's beginnings may not rest in a firm historical foundation. So why rely on an origin story at all? Recall Lerman's eulogy to Elizabeth Gould Davis, in which she presciently alludes to the utility of *The First Sex*. Radical feminists began to invent a story of women's past that would be

politically useful to them, a story that would be "adequate to their needs." For the purposes of illustrating the close relationship between origin stories and politics in the women's liberation movement, I have chosen a small case study. There are few feminist works that highlight the value of the origins discourse to an emerging movement, that demonstrate the connection between the use of origin narratives and the radical feminist rejection of the Left, as clearly as those of Robin Morgan and Jane Alpert.

Their life stories intertwined, Morgan and Alpert were friends and political allies. They are both notorious for their vehement rejections of the Left, and they also shared the view that an ancient gynocracy had once existed. Although it was Alpert who wrote a short origin narrative in the form of an essay, "Mother Right: A New Feminist Theory," Morgan was her informal editor for the piece before it was submitted and published in *Ms.* Moreover, Morgan's own work, including her poetry and political tracts, is infused with the language of origins and matriarchy. Of course, the ideas put forward by Alpert and Morgan did not go uncontested in the Women's Liberation Movement: in particular, Alpert's piece served to polarize feminist debate on the question of the matriarchy.

Morgan and Alpert worked together at *Rat*, one of the many "subterranean" newspapers of the Left. They were among the group of radical women in the editorial collective who seized control of the paper in 1970. Prior to the takeover, *Rat*, like so many of the underground papers, took a less-than-enlightened view of women and feminism. In fact, *Rat's* line seemed to be that women's liberation was a bourgeois concern only, that it was part of the problem rather than the solution. As Morgan stated in a 1969 interview with *The New York Times Magazine*, by the Left's

standards, "a liberated woman was someone who was indiscriminate about whom she sleeps with"; there was little recognition that "women don't want to be objects."⁷⁴ Drawings, stories, and poetry in *Rat* and the other papers verged on the pornographic, representing what Tom Hayden called the "hip version of the morality of the dirty old man."⁷⁵ But *Rat's* days as a pornographic paper were numbered, for Morgan and Alpert and the new editorial collective published their own feminist version following the takeover.

By far the most important article that ran in the first feminist edition of *Rat* was Morgan's landmark diatribe against the left, "Goodbye to All That." Drawing on countless examples of male sexism and outright misogyny, Morgan admonishes, and finally dismisses, the Left for its irrelevance to the feminist struggle. A professional writer, Morgan summons powerful rhetoric to legitimate her political transformation. Throughout she repeats her wish to get to the bottom of the problem, to "run it on down," claiming that a revolution led by white male radicals is hardly going to solve the problem since they too are implicated in the oppression of women. Morgan bids goodbye to her brothers in the peace movement and the New Left who offer nothing more than women's caucuses toward the goal of liberation; she incites women members of the Weathermen⁷⁶ to "Left Out," or to cease rejecting "their own radical feminism for that last desperate grab at male

⁷⁴ Quote in Peter Babcox, "Meet the Women of the Revolution, 1969," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 9, 1969, p. 88.

⁷⁵ Tom Hayden was a leader of SDS; this statement was made in reference to the *Berkeley Barb*. Quote in Babcox, "Meet the Women," p. 92.

⁷⁶ The Weather Underground, or the Weather Bureau, a Leftist group that carried out several bombings, and of which Jane Alpert was a member.

approval that we all know so well."⁷⁷ The only option, Morgan asserts, is to "seize our own power into our own hands, all women, separate and together, and make the Revolution the way it must be made—no priorities this time, no suffering group told to wait until after."⁷⁸ Leaving behind what she terms variously the "counterfeit Left," the "counterleft," and the "boys movement," Morgan calls for a real revolution, "All the way down, this time."⁷⁹

What makes the piece so significant, aside from her rhetorical skill, is the fact that Morgan had tried to combat women's oppression from within the confines of the Left.⁸⁰ As a member of the New York Radical Women (NYRW), and a key organizer of the Miss America protest, Morgan had been critical of sexism in the Left all along, but she nonetheless continued to defend the movement against the criticisms of radical feminists who argued for total separation. When NYRW divided into sub-groups, Morgan founded the politico sub-group WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) rather than joining the radical feminist sub-group, Redstockings. A politico group, WITCH was committed to the Left's analysis of the cause of the problems in American society. Whereas Redstockings turned to consciousness-raising, WITCH turned to performing "zap actions."⁸¹ Morgan's history with the Left made it all the more surprising

⁷⁷ Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," p. 123.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁸⁰ She discusses her efforts to get the Left to change its view of women's liberation in the introduction to "Take a Memo, Mr. Smith," in Morgan, *Going*.

⁸¹ A zap action is a creative, impromptu protest against a specific issue or event; they often took the form of street theatre in which feminists dressed in costume to attract attention and raise awareness.

when she abandoned it outright and endorsed radical feminism; and it made her rejection that much more virulent.

Morgan's repeated call to run the analysis "all the way down" symbolizes her commitment to get to the root and origin of women's oppression. She endorses the radical feminist view that women's oppression is the original oppression, the template for all others. Sexism, until it is uprooted, "will continue to put forth the branches of racism, class hatred, ageism, competition, ecological disaster, and economic exploitation."⁸² She recites the need to recapture the ancient gynocracy, "the oldest culture of all," in which equality and peace prevailed before the rise of the "death-dealing sexual, economic and spiritual repression of the Imperialist Phallic Society."⁸³ By invoking origins, Morgan demonstrates to male Leftist activists, and the women who remain active in the Left, that women's oppression is older than any other, that its longevity and severity requires separate political organizing. Her intent is to foment a mass-based, feminist revolution, the consequences of which will be far greater than any revolution brought forth by the "boy's movement."

That origins imperative, latent in "Goodbye To All That," comes to the surface in Morgan's other work. In her writings as well as her many public speeches, Morgan combined her criticism of the Left⁸⁴ with discussion of the lost matriarchy,⁸⁵ the Goddess religion, and the age-old

⁸² Morgan, "Introduction: Rights of Passage," p. 9.

⁸³ "WITCH Documents," in *Sisterhood is Powerful*, p. 605.

⁸⁴ "I am not here to revive the Left, but to bury it," Morgan stated in a speech to a Stony Brook women's centre. See "A Woman's Perspective of Robin Morgan," in the undated, untitled newsletter, New York University, Tamiment Library, Women's Liberation File (undated).

⁸⁵ Morgan, "Introduction: Rights of Passage," p. 11.

persecution of women. She admits to having been profoundly influenced by both Davis and Diner⁸⁶ and recommends their work to other feminists. Like others, Morgan admits that these works are somewhat flawed but still "indispensable."⁸⁷ She is self-critical in *Going Too Far* of her devotion to the Left and of zap actions, lamenting that WITCH "always *meant* to do the real research" on witches, matriarchy and the goddess faith.⁸⁸ She developed something akin to a religious faith centered on the Goddess and, in the process, glorified the female role in reproduction. To honour the Goddess, she invented a new religious ritual of symbolically drinking menstrual blood.⁸⁹ She concluded one famous speech with the request that the participants join hands to recite an initiation chant from her WITCH coven to the Goddess, who has "been with thee from the beginning."⁹⁰

In Morgan's rendering, radical feminist activism became a matter of life and death: nothing short of a gynocidal war awaits women. The mass-murder of women, and especially of those whom she calls witches, is a recurring theme in Morgan's writing. Witch history is part of women's "entombed history, a remnant of the Old Religion which pre-dated all patriarchal faiths and which was a Goddess-worshipping matriarchal

⁸⁶ Diner's book was discussed at a 1969 Thanksgiving conference in Chicago. In response to that discussion Pat Hansen wrote: "This book has been for me a starting point into a completely new understanding of female cultural history." Women need, in Hansen's view, to reject patriarchal definitions of women and to choose instead "the matriarchal culture that preceded the patriarchal when woman was recognized for her inherent creative potentials." See Pat Hansen, Letter to the Editor, *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, Vol. 1, No. 5, January 1969, p. 11.

⁸⁷ Robin Morgan, "Letter to the Editors," *oob*, Vol 2, No 8, March 1972, p. 30.

⁸⁸ Robin Morgan, "Three Articles on WITCH," *Going*, p. 72.

⁸⁹ See Claudia Morrow, "Robin Morgan: Credit Union Benefit," *her-self*, [Vol. 4, No. 2], June 1975, p. 3.

⁹⁰ Robin Morgan, "Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions," in *Going*, p. 188.

faith."⁹¹ Identifying with witches reconnects women with their history and with the worship of the Goddess, but it also constructs a story of their brutal victimization. In a speech at the University of Maryland, Morgan called upon women to initiate a militant struggle against the "primary contradiction"—sex—because the risks to women who identify with feminism are increasing. "Women used to risk losing friends, maybe a job; now they are risking losing their children and losing their lives."⁹² The focus on mass victimization is made particularly clear in Morgan's famous poem, "The Network of the Imaginary Mother,"⁹³ in which she lists the names of women who were hanged or burned in the Burning Times. Each section of the poem concludes with some version of the same question, "What have they done to us?"

While Morgan was spreading the radical feminist message across the country, Alpert was living underground to escape the charge of conspiracy for a Manhattan bombing. As a member of the Weather Underground, Alpert was a self-described militant leftist whose primary commitment had been to violent "actions" against the capitalist state, but she had been introduced to feminism while at *Rat*. After living underground in isolation from the Weathermen and women, and after attending regular sessions of a radical feminist consciousness-raising group, Alpert too began to question her participation in Left organizations.⁹⁴ She wrote a short origin story

⁹¹ Morgan, "Three Articles on WITCH," p. 72.

⁹² Quoted in Fran Pollner, "Robin: harbinger of a new season," *oob*, Vol 2, No 7, March 1972.

⁹³ Robin Morgan, "The Network of the Imaginary Mother," in *Upstairs in the Garden: Poems Selected and New 1968-1988* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).

⁹⁴ At precisely this point, she became re-acquainted with Robin Morgan. My interest here is less in their tumultuous friendship—which has been well described by

entitled "Mother Right: Toward a New Feminist Theory" which addressed the tension between radical women who wanted to retain ties to the left and those who wanted to sever those ties.⁹⁵ Alpert's strategy to convince women to follow her path comes to light in the two parts of her essay. The first part is both a virulent critique of male politics and a personal attack on her former partner, Sam Melville, who also had participated in the bombing. During Alpert's time underground, Melville was killed in the Attica prison uprising of 1971. While the Weather Underground as a whole mourned the victims of Attica and protested their murder, Alpert admonished her sisters for sending her letters and clippings on the subject. "You fast and organize and demonstrate for Attica," she writes, "I will mourn the loss of 42 male supremacists no longer."⁹⁶ Separating herself from the women in the Underground she exclaims: "As long as you are working politically with men, as long as you are letting men define your attitudes, behavior, and standards, then we stand on opposite sides of a line..."⁹⁷

The second section of "Mother Right" pieces together the skeleton of an origin story. Here she asserts her position that "female biology is the basis of women's powers."⁹⁸ Unlike feminists such as Firestone who see female biology as an obstacle to be overcome, Alpert argues that in biology lies the

Alpert in her memoirs—and more in their shared politics: their rejection of the Left and concomitant adoption of a matriarchal feminist theory.

⁹⁵ Alpert originally intended the piece to be addressed to the Weathermen, but it was Morgan who recommended that she address it: "Dear Sisters in the Weather Underground". See Jane Alpert, *Growing Up Underground* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1981), p. 343.

⁹⁶ Jane Alpert, "Mother Right: A New Feminist Theory," *Ms.* Vol. II, No. 2, August 1973, p. 88.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

source of the feminist revolution. She insists that female biology is powerful whether or not a woman ever actually gives birth to a child. On a historical level, Alpert is persuaded by the theory that ancient gynocracies and Amazons once existed. She is influenced by a copy of *The First Sex* given to her by Morgan, and affirms the text as "visionary" despite its being "somewhat factually problematic."⁹⁹ Radical feminism, in Alpert's rendering, is not narrowly "political," but is rather "closely tied to theories of awakening consciousness, of creation and rebirth, and of the essential oneness of the universe—teachings which lie at the heart of all Goddess-worshipping religions."¹⁰⁰ A feminist revolution must re-create the conditions of matriarchy—whether or not it ever existed historically—and put an end to all forms oppression.

In assessing the political rhetoric of Morgan and Alpert, it is essential to recognize that they do not simply turn to spirituality from politics, as might be assumed by their interest in Goddess worship. Rather their turn to the theory of primordial matriarchy is deeply political and directed toward the achievement of specific feminist goals. In the writings of Morgan and Alpert, the connection between origin stories and politics is laid bare. The language of an originary matriarchy did political work for feminism, facilitating the development of the movement's autonomy. Alpert, like so many feminists during this period, legitimates a separatist politics for feminism. "I urge women to leave the left and leftist causes and

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91. In her memoir, Alpert concedes that, "Davis had most of her facts wrong and had grossly misinterpreted modern scholarship." She drew this conclusion after having re-read several of the ancient texts that Davis cited.

¹⁰⁰ Alpert, "Mother Right," 94.

begin working for women, for ourselves."¹⁰¹ In other words, it is against the Left that women can join together and fight the feminist cause. Other radical feminists, like Ellen Willis, sought the same end, arguing that women's struggle was not secondary, that feminism would not take a back seat to any other movement, and that one does not get radical fighting other people's battles.¹⁰² The more feminists used the language of "foundational oppression," and the "primary contradiction" of sex, the more feminism was legitimated as an autonomous movement, apart from the broader movement. As in the political theory of Plato and Hobbes, the origin story in feminism was seductive, politically appealing, and highly persuasive. Whereas Plato and Hobbes desired to influence their contemporaries, to convert them to a different way of thinking about politics and power, radical feminists were building a political movement, and the origin story was seductive to those coming to feminism for the first time, or to those who were dissatisfied with the movement as a whole. The central problem with both Morgan's and Alpert's work is that, in asserting the need to discover the roots of patriarchy, they revert to an ahistorical, unsubstantiated, mythical story of those roots. That feminists have commonly acknowledged the flaws in the matriarchal theory but continue to use it nevertheless confirms again the political utility of the origin story for feminism.

¹⁰¹ Alpert, "Letter from the Underground," *oob*, Vol. III, No. 9, July/Aug 1973. *oob* published Alpert's letter as a preface to "Mother Right," but Ms. published only the piece itself with a forward by Gloria Steinem.

¹⁰² Ellen Willis, "Liberation Forum," *The Guardian*, February 15, 1969, p. 11. New York University, Tamiment Library, Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement File.

In addition, the origin story is normative and prescriptive for radical feminists, offering an imagined past as a justification for a more meaningful and woman-affirming future. If matriarchy is a true stage in human history the door is open for a feminist revolution and the recreation of matriarchy. Alpert calls for the reversion to, and resumption of, matriarchal principles, asking her readers, "Do we dare demand less?" Recall that Davis, too, desired a matriarchal counter-revolution to end the masculine cycles of destruction. But what exactly did matriarchy prescribe? For one thing, a more peaceful society, one in which women held political and spiritual power. Religion was intrinsic to life, in Alpert's description, such that women could not be worshipped as deities but simultaneously be devalued in practice. No "sharp division" existed between life in the domestic sphere and social life, and women were integral to both.¹⁰³

In linking past and future, feminists found models and justifications for radically egalitarian, non-hierarchical organizations and political groups. While the Left paid lip service to such a model, radical feminists enacted these principles, adopting consensus as the only route to decision-making. Such an emphasis was placed on consensus that radical feminist groups were bogged down in their meetings; they were slow to take decisions; and many feminists experienced exhaustion and burn-out as a result. In keeping with the ideal of leaderless groups, radical feminists also curtailed the activities of those among them who were skilled speakers and writers, preventing them from making public appearances and speeches, lest other

¹⁰³ Alpert, "Mother Right," p. 91

members of the group not be given due credit. Many feminists later viewed these strategies as significantly flawed for suppressing women's different abilities and strengths.

To the extent that radical feminism was also about creating a new self-image for women, origin stories assisted by offering a glorified image of woman on which a new identity could be based. Memorialized by Davis and others as strong, independent, nurturing, life-centered, and mothering, matriarchal and Amazon women provide a normative model of womanhood. And those who adhered to the matriarchal theory often explicitly acknowledge their search for a new identity, as Alpert did:

feminist culture is based on what is best and strongest in women, and as we begin to define ourselves as women, the qualities coming to the fore are the same ones a mother projects in the best kind of nurturing relationship to a child: empathy, intuitiveness, adaptability, awareness of growth as a process rather than as goal-ended, inventiveness, protective feelings toward others, and a capacity to respond emotionally as well as rationally.¹⁰⁴

The suggestion seems to be that women have a true identity which has been corrupted by patriarchal society and needs only to be rediscovered. On the one hand, radical feminists seek to value women as women, to affirm their qualities rather than accepting the male view of them. On the other hand, however, the new identity being forged has little to do with past matriarchy, but is rather a construction, one which is then read back into the past and sanctified for the future.

Up to this point, we have assessed the predominance of origin stories, and enumerated their political uses for radical feminism. I contend that it is important to understand the reasons underlying feminist use of origin

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

stories, to understand their immense political value to an emerging radical feminist movement seeking to "trump" the male left and caught up in the process of self-definition and invention. While the feminist turn to origins is understandable, the origin stories themselves are rife with contradictions and problems.

IV: The perils of inventing a past

"Mother Right" proved, in the end, to be a highly divisive piece, bringing to the forefront the latent tensions within radical feminism regarding the theory of the matriarchy. Alpert elicited a polarized response: feminists either found the piece empowering and uplifting or specious and reactionary.¹⁰⁵ The critiques raised by Alpert's opponents are consistent with larger problems in the radical feminist origins discourse. My intent here is not to dissect each origin story in order to reveal its logical flaws, but rather to draw out the historical, ontological, and political problems common to the stories. In historical terms, these stories combine a faulty historical methodology with inaccurate and fanciful assessments of the past. They also manipulate biology in such a way as to invert an already-problematic Aristotelian ontology. And finally, the political result of the origins discourse was not to promote mass support of feminism—as was intended—but to undermine and divide the movement.

As much as origin stories assisted in the legitimation of the Women's Liberation Movement, they also relied on a fundamental misperception

¹⁰⁵ See the controversy in *her-self* in several 1975 issues, and in *oob* from 1973, when the original Alpert piece was published, to 1975 when an interview with Alpert followed.

about history: that myth and history can be equated. In Davis's analysis we witnessed a heavy reliance on myth as a source of historical information; but for Davis, as for Bachofen and other matriarchal theorists, that relationship is conceived in an all-too-simplistic fashion. While historians of ancient societies study myth for the historical information it can reveal, they recognize the inherent limitations of such an approach and use caution when making generalizations about their subject. Myth is a complex composite of history, politics, and fantasy; but this should not lead us to the altogether different conclusion that it contains the ultimate truth about a bygone age or that it is a straightforward repository of historical information.¹⁰⁶ Davis assumes that the existence of powerful queens in a particular age indicates a contemporaneous matriarchal political structure. Sarah Pomeroy undermines this logic by asking whether the reigns of Mary Stuart, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I will connote the existence of matriarchy to future historians.¹⁰⁷ Ultimately Davis grounds too many of her claims about the past gynocracy in this reductionist and uncomplicated view of history, and those who use Davis inevitably import her errors into their origin stories.

Aside from the methodological errors implicit in this understanding of history are the substantive errors in content. The question of whether there existed matriarchies or Amazons remains unanswered, and is perhaps unanswerable. To the best of historians' current knowledge, the Amazons

¹⁰⁶ The question of how to interpret the goddesses of Greek mythology remains a contested one. Among the most recent contributions on this subject is Sue Blundell and Margaret Williamson, eds., *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁰⁷ Pomeroy, "A Classical Scholar's Perspective," p. 219.

did not exist but were rather a fantasy of the Greek imagination.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, they were a fantasy that served a particular purpose to their creators; they were used as a counterpoint to ancient Greek society to show the normalcy and the logic of patriarchal arrangements. It is to this end that Hobbes's contemporaries revived the Amazon myth as a political and literary tool. Hobbes, as I have shown, inverted this use of the Amazons and celebrated their independence and power, but he used them as an example for the same reasons that his opponents did: to service an immediate political goal. The examples of the Greeks and of Hobbes should remind us that the Amazons are invoked for specific political reasons. Feminist use of Amazons is no different, despite the apologies made toward reclaiming women's past. While the value of learning women's history is unquestionable, these feminists invoke the Amazons and matriarchy to recast history in a more favourable light for women, and to summon an Amazon identity for women. That their interest in history is subordinate to their political interests is evident from their hostility to those who discredit their thesis.

Any attempt to question the validity of this feminist myth/history is cast as a patriarchal attack, even if the questions come from feminist scholars in the relevant fields of history, archaeology and anthropology. One feminist mocks the "rigorous rules of research" that guide male academics, and credits the "Amazon dream/reality" for removing women "from the context of having only Victim images."¹⁰⁹ In her assessment of

¹⁰⁸ See Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ Emily Erwin Culpepper, "Female History Myth Making," *The Second Wave*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring 1975.

the matriarchy theory, Leah Zahler echoes this sentiment: "the important question...is not the historicity of matriarchy but our feelings about it." She explains that the "idea of matriarchy helps establish a sense of community among women, a shared culture," and we ought, therefore, to turn away from the question of its veracity and toward the discovery of what it can do for feminism.¹¹⁰ In an academic exchange between Merlin Stone, the author of *When God Was A Woman*, and Sally Binford, a feminist anthropologist, on the question of matriarchy and Goddess worship, Stone proclaims that "entering into a discussion about whether or not ancient Goddess worship existed...is much like inviting us into a discussion of whether or not World War II actually occurred."¹¹¹ For her part, Binford is "persuaded that logic, reason, and arguments based on knowledge of the data cut no ice at all" with believers in the matriarchy. As an anthropologist, Binford finds herself fascinated by the tenacity with which women cling to this belief, and she "can explain it only as a religious phenomenon."¹¹² This is undoubtedly true about Goddess-worship *per se*. But feminist myth/history is not just spiritual; it is explicitly political in its willful defiance of evidence, in its refusal of historicity.

The underlying assumption with Morgan, like Pateman and others, is that without a dramatic story of victimization—original rape, mass slaughter of witches, or a world-wide historical conquest of women—feminism is not justified. Something akin to a holocaust of women, as

¹¹⁰ Leah Zahler, "Matriarchy and Myth," *Aphra*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Summer 1973, p. 30.

¹¹¹ Merlin Stone, "Response," in Charlene Spretnak, ed., *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1982), p. 550.

¹¹² Sally R. Binford, "Are Goddesses and Matriarchies Merely Figments of a Feminist Imagination? Myths and Matriarchies," in Spretnak, *Politics*, pp. 542-3.

Purkiss has named it, is the political prerequisite for a legitimate feminist movement, because only something that dramatic can provide the clear political oppositions that feminism needs. Here we see the value of origin story as political rhetoric, and the choice to dispense rhetoric about women's common historical bond at the expense of historical accuracy.

As well, the existence of an ancient matriarchy is posited as the historical precedent for the liberation of women in this century. Yet as Hobbes understood clearly, history cannot be the determinant of the future. Empowering as the notion of matriarchy might appear to be, it "would weaken us if it was based on only illusion."¹¹³ Indeed, as one feminist argues in response to Alpert's piece, history, and the study of the past, cannot "reveal a blueprint for the future." In Ti-Grace Atkinson's view, by invoking a matriarchal past feminists like Alpert "reveal a doubt" by "searching for proof that women can fulfill their humanity. We should not need proof."¹¹⁴

In defense of matriarchal theory, however, Judy Antonelli suggests that women are not seeking proof; rather they are

gaining our heritage, something every oppressed group must do. We are building a future by discovering our past, a past which has been consciously suppressed by men to keep themselves in power.¹¹⁵

It would seem that Antonelli, like feminists who participate in the origins discourse, confuses the process of "discovering" women's history—which is as she says vital to any oppressed group—with the practice of inventing a

¹¹³ Betsy Warrior, "Conviction and Faith," Letter to the Editors of *oob*, Vol. III, No. 9, July/August 1973, p. 25.

¹¹⁴ Paraphrase of Ti-Grace Atkinson by Judy Antonelli in "Atkinson re-evaluates feminism," *oob*, Vol 5, No 5, May-June 1975, p. 19.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

past. The difference between the two, *discovering* and *inventing*, is lost in the feminist origins discourse.

Historical problems that surface in the origins discourse are matched by problems of flawed biological analysis. Deeply skewed and unsubstantiated genetic theories attesting to the primacy of the X chromosome underlie Davis's theory that women are the primary beings of the human species. Like Aristotle and other male theorists who search for a biological justification for what are social and political hierarchies, Davis (and thus those who build on her work) "advance" the political goals of matriarchal feminism through the use of biological theories that verge on the absurd. And we should not underestimate the influence that Davis and those like her held over feminists. Even feminists who did not support Alpert's "Mother Right" assert uncritically that "the female is most likely biologically superior to the male,"¹¹⁶ or that woman's body "is the more creative."¹¹⁷ Rosalind Miles reiterates Davis's theories in the 1981 origin story entitled *The Women's History of the World*. Miles supplements Davis's hypothesis of the originary status of women with the incontrovertible fact that the oldest human remains are those of a woman, dubbed "Lucy."¹¹⁸ True, Lucy's remains do exist; but what follows from this assertion? It seems as though Atkinson's criticism is correct, that feminists cite these hypotheses about prehistory to testify to the legitimacy of the goals of feminism.

¹¹⁶ Roxanne Dunbar in "Dear Jane Alpert," *Letters to Ms.*, Vol II, No 8, February 1974, p. 61.

¹¹⁷ The Feminists, "Building the Matriarchy," *Letter to the Editors of oob*, Vol III, No 9, July-August 1973, p. 26.

¹¹⁸ Rosalind Miles, *The Women's History of the World* (London: Paladin, 1988), p. 20.

The ramifications of this attempt to assert the primacy of the female using Lucy as evidence can best be assessed by considering the possible ramifications of discovering scientific or archaeological evidence of an earlier male. Lucy's discovery does not indicate to archaeologists that males did not exist, nor does the existence of Lucy's remains preclude the discovery of more ancient remains that are male. If, sometime in the future, a further discovery is made, and that discovery is of a male creature, will radical feminists be forced, on the one hand, to admit that the male is primary after all, and on the other, to conclude that feminism has no historical precedent and therefore no legitimate basis as a political movement? In fact, logically, there should be no political implications following from Lucy's discovery; but in arguing that there are, radical feminists leave themselves open to the claim that if women are not primary, feminism is unjustified.

Radical feminists who assert female primacy and superiority also fail to recognize that they are merely inverting the language of Aristotle. How else are we to read statements that the Y chromosome, and therefore maleness, developed as a genetic mutation? Or that women alone hold the key to the destiny of the human race?¹¹⁹ The message is that women are the biological norm from which men are only a deviation. Because these statements are based on incorrect biology, we can only conclude that they are overtly political. If we are to be critical, as feminists, of ancient political theorists who universalize the traits of *one sex as human* traits, and who find the "opposite" sex deficient in these traits and thus in

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

humanity, we should not make an exception for feminists who merely invert the sexes and retain the same universalizing, phallogentric language.

Indeed, one of the central problems with all of the feminist origin stories is their uncritical celebration of women's biology. Davis and Alpert both generate a new ontological argument about the sexes and reproduction. In contrast to phallogentric ontology, this feminist ontology establishes women's consciousness as a product of their reproductive capacity, regardless of whether they have children or not. In this view, there appears to be a singular experience of being a woman that is determined by biology. All women are by nature nurturing, good, life-giving beings. The key to creating a better polity is to restore women to power, and by virtue of their different ontology from men, peace would be achieved. Biology, then, is presented as both the source of women's superiority and the cause of their oppression. Reverting to an ontological argument has the unfortunate consequence of turning the oppression of women into biological destiny, for it is men's envy of women's biological power that causes them to create the structures of patriarchy in the first place. On this point, recall Mary O'Brien's theory of masculine envy and appropriation. O'Brien articulated most clearly the view to which Davis and her followers adhere, which is that the only "safe" period for women occurred prior to knowledge of men's reproductive contribution. Once he learned of his importance in the process, woman's fate was sealed. This argument turns on two disputable points: the first is that there was a stage in human history in which no one understood the process of conception; the second is that women's reproductive power is superior to that of men

and thus worthy of envy. With respect to the first point, it remains uncertain as to whether men were ever ignorant of their contribution to reproduction. Brian Hayden has argued that "it is naive to believe that groups intelligent enough to invent language," were not intelligent enough to "make the association between sex and reproduction."¹²⁰ If they were not ignorant, then the thesis that men worshipped women for their parthenogenetic reproductive power is erroneous.

As to the second point, we have already recounted the problems associated with the male-envy/appropriation thesis in the discussion of Plato. In that discussion, O'Brien's theory of masculine envy and appropriation is found lacking because it rests on a political value judgement about women's biological superiority rather than an objective, biological basis. I argue that Plato's glorification of reproduction and birth should be interpreted, not as an instantiation of his envy of woman's actual power, but as a masculine fabrication. To argue differently is to imply that differences between men and women are ontological and originate in reproductive biology. Indeed, O'Brien implies that women's reproductive role is superior, and that men know it is superior. She wants to suggest that women's biology has some inherent meaning—always the same, always powerful and awe-inspiring—yet this idea works against her other claim that reproduction and birth are not merely physical processes but are also thinking processes. If reproduction and birth are more than base biological functions, if they are mediated by woman's consciousness, how

¹²⁰ Brian Hayden, "Old Europe: Sacred Matriarchy or Complementary Opposition?" in Anthony Bonanno, ed., *Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Amsterdam: BR. Gruner, 1986), p. 22.

can we argue that they have a constant, unchanging meaning? Would not the meaning of reproduction and birth vary in accordance with historical and cultural context? By arguing, as O'Brien, Davis and others do, that woman has an enviable, all-powerful role in reproduction, we would be committing ourselves to the view that hierarchical gender relations are inevitable, that their cause lies in unchangeable facts of nature rather than in power and politics. This kind of argument is untenable and it has the effect of rendering political struggle irrelevant.

Indeed, feminist origin stories occupy a difficult political space, inspiring at one and the same time a brand of feminist nationalism and a de-politicized, feminist spirituality. Because they are used normatively, origin stories are told with an eye to the restoration of female rule, the resumption of gynocracy after 5000 years of patriarchy. Ti-Grace Atkinson, following her rejection of radical feminism, criticized the matriarchy camp for a "reactionary nationalism" in which the power structure is revised but not ultimately challenged.¹²¹ Women are meant to view themselves and their past through the lens of the feminist origin story and to use it as the basis for action—but as a basis for action, the origin story is troublesome. Origin stories tend to portray women as a class, the class that experiences the most pervasive and detrimental kind of oppression. The origins discourse encouraged radical feminists to adopt and then invert the Left's line on foundational oppression; Morgan, in Todd Gitlin's analysis, "offered a recycled version of the Left's hierarchy of suffering."¹²² While radical feminists made an important advance in

¹²¹ Paraphrase of Atkinson by Antonelli, *oob*, p. 19.

¹²² Gitlin, *The Sixties*, p. 374.

bringing women's oppression to the forefront of politics, the language of foundational oppression ultimately undermined the cause of radical feminism by alienating those who experienced more than one kind of oppression. Hence the current conversation in feminism about diversity and differences among women.

As overtly political as this feminist brand of nationalism appears to be, Morgan, Alpert, Davis and others portray the feminist revolution as supra-political, as more profound than a political shift. In Morgan's writing, the revolution would resemble a "sea-change," equivalent to major transformations in thinking like the Reformation or the Copernican revolution. In short, the revolution origins theorists seek is presented as less political than a class-based revolution and thus *more significant* because of its complete transformation of patriarchal culture. This kind of thinking has the ironic consequence of producing a depoliticized reaction; greater emphasis is placed on the peaceful, co-operative aspects of Goddess-worshipping societies, on lesbian and feminist separatism, and on the creation of a woman's culture, and much less emphasis is placed on political transformation.¹²³ Significantly, while the drive to tell origin stories is political, their effect can be to promote a feminist *evasion* of politics. As

¹²³ "We must look to our matriarchal past for guidance in defining a culture that is a logical extension of nature," writes Kathleen Barry, for "female culture...will reverse the subordinated link to nature [that] patriarchy forces on women." Barry is making the case that women's studies programmes should be run by those whose first priority is to create a female culture. See Kathleen Barry, "West Coast Conference: Not Purely Academic," *oob*, Vol. 3, No. 10, September 1973, p. 25. Another famous call for a female culture is found in the *Fourth World Manifesto* (New Haven, Conn.: Advocate Press, 1971) by Barbara Burris (in agreement with Kathleen Barry, Terry Moon, Joann DeLor, Joann Parent and Cate Stadelman). In this lengthy and controversial document the "long-suppressed and ridiculed female principle" is affirmed and women all over the world are identified as the "female culture" and the "Fourth World."

Atkinson asserts, origins thinking can lead women to "escapism, fantasy, [and] spiritualism."¹²⁴ It encourages individualist solutions to social problems, and turns feminists away from concrete politics toward the other-worldliness of the Goddess and spirituality.

The evasion of politics emerges in a call for separatism. As a group, The Feminists argue that Alpert's one downfall is her suggestion that men and women can live together while women work to create a matriarchal society. "Living with men precludes actual collectivity," they write. Living in feminist collectives is the "physical requirement" to "self-preservation and the building of power."¹²⁵ According to this view, rebuilding the matriarchy is a task that women must perform alone and in isolation from all men. This separatism is fueled as well by theorists like Morgan who depict the feminist struggle as an all-out war of men against women, who copy "movement machismo" but replace it with "their own version of revolutionary apocalypse."¹²⁶ In this view, women are each other's only allies. Again, as important as it was for radical feminism to draw attention to the specificity of women's oppression and to organize separately from other movements, the intense political separatism encouraged by the movement did not bring about the desired goal of a mass solidarity.

¹²⁴ Paraphrase of Atkinson by Antonelli, *oob*, p. 19.

¹²⁵ The Feminists, Letter to *oob*, p. 26.

¹²⁶ Gitlin, *The Sixties*, p. 373.

V: Conclusion

My characterization of this strand of radical feminism should in no way lead to the conclusion that all radical feminists accepted the matriarchal theory—for we have seen that they did not. Nor was it the case that all radical feminists had become cultural feminists by the mid-1970s, as Alice Echols has suggested in *Daring to Be Bad*. If anything, the turn to origins created a profound division in the feminist movement, a division that centered on the utility of Alpert's piece, women's identity, and the direction of feminist struggle. Within radical feminism there emerged a call for a return to "true radicalism" in the early 1970s, and among this sub-group the matriarchy theory carried virtually no weight.¹²⁷ Indeed, the reconstituted Redstockings group cited the popularity of origin stories as a primary indicator of de-radicalization. Unfortunately this point was accompanied by some outrageous claims that undermined the import of their political message.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, the new Redstockings group made

¹²⁷ Like Alice Echols, Brooke Williams sees a shift in feminism in the mid-1970s from radical to cultural feminism. Brooke, as she calls herself, argues for the need to return, not to an original matriarchy, but to the original principles of radical feminist politics. Cultural feminism and the matriarchal emphasis that accompanies it, in Brooke's view, "is an attempt to transform feminism from a political movement to a lifestyle movement." See Brooke, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism," in Redstockings, *Feminist Revolution*, an abridged edition with additional writings (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 83. See also Brooke, "When Going Back Is Going Forward," *Meeting Ground*, No. 1, January 1977; and Brooke Williams, "The Chador of Women's Liberation: Cultural Feminism and the Movement Press," *Heresies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, [1980].

¹²⁸ A few years after the original Redstockings for Women's Liberation collective dissolved, some of its original members along with some additional feminists reformed the group to protest the de-radicalization of the women's liberation movement. The group issued a lengthy press release entitled "Feminist Revolution," in which they accused various feminists of being too liberal or of conspiring with the state. Elizabeth Gould Davis was claimed posthumously to be a suspicious character because she had been in the Navy, and because of her occupation as a librarian. The group was especially critical of Gloria Steinem for her liberal sympathies in *Ms.* and for being a conspirator with the CIA. Steinem (reluctantly) defended herself against the charges,

an important connection between the emphasis on origins and the decline of radicalism in the feminist movement.

After the mid-1970s the fervour about origins subsided to a large extent. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, but I will offer a few suggestions to account for their decline in popularity. First, origin stories were not as politically necessary to feminists once the movement was under way. The turn to *origin stories* was driven by a political imperative specific to the *origins* of the Second Wave radical feminist movement; once the legitimation of an autonomous feminist movement had been achieved, feminists may have felt less inclined to use these narratives. Second, feminists who continued to think in terms of origins and patriarchy tended to focus their attention on the feminist spirituality movement and later the ecofeminist movement, both logical destinations for those interested in the goddess. These "cultural feminist" movements were, and continue to be, harshly criticized by the now dominant stream of feminist thought which emphasizes differences between women and women's experiences rather than women's biological and social similarities. Finally, I suggest that, in some circles at least, the debate about origins continues.

Two popular feminist books pick up the theme: Rosalind Miles' *The Women's History of the World* and Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade*.¹²⁹

and several other feminists came to her defence, including Robin Morgan. See the reprint of the press release in Redstockings, *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Kathie Sarachild (New Paltz, NY: Redstockings, 1975), Columbia University, Barnard Center for Research on Women, Restricted File. For legal reasons having to do with contentious charges against Steinem, the unabridged version is not widely accessible. See also Steinem's essay and Morgan's letter, both in *Her-self*, Vol. 4, No. 4, September 1975; and Mary Thom's account of the incident in *Inside Ms.: 25 Years of the Magazine and the Feminist Movement* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), pp. 74-9.

¹²⁹ Miles, *The Women's History of the World*; Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1987). As well, see

Moreover, the debate continues under a different guise in the work of contemporary feminists such as Judith Butler. In her *Gender Trouble*, the search for origins has taken newer, subtler forms in the theorizing on the body and power. Butler seeks not to spin the same imaginative narratives characteristic of the earlier origin stories, but rather to theorize the body before heterosexual power relations are inscribed upon it. This gives the sense of an *original sexless and genderless body* that precedes the social creation of two opposing sexes.¹³⁰ And this too is an origin theory of hetero-patriarchal social relations.

In the final analysis, given the ambiguity and historical uncertainty surrounding the rise of patriarchal social relations, it is doubtful that feminists will ever abandon entirely the question of origins. Yet, the origins impulse has proved to be an *aporia* for feminism. The inquiry into the origins of patriarchy, I have argued, is a logical one insofar as feminism has a commitment to understanding women's oppression. Moreover, origin stories performed a critical political function in the radical feminist movement and in the feminist movement at large. In the end, however, origins thinking worked against the discovery of viable political solutions to practical political problems and conflicts. While it would be too simple to argue that the turn to origins *caused* a significant decline in radical feminist activism by the mid-1970s, or that it alone is responsible for radical feminism's theoretical difficulties, it is nonetheless the case that an important moment of action was lost when the creation of a

Peggy Reeves Sanday's academic treatise: *Female power and male dominance: On the origins of sexual inequality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹³⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

woman's culture became the focus of feminism. The critical edge of radical feminism—the radical momentum that feminists gathered as they moved away from the Left to create the Women's Liberation Movement—was worn away in part by the capricious and fruitless search for the golden age of matriarchy.

Conclusion

Stories of political origins constitute a recurring motif in the history of political thought. Although individual stories have been well studied, the origin story as motif has escaped analysis. In examining three specific stories, this thesis has questioned the necessity of using origin stories in political discourse. Quite distinct from historical inquiry, the origins rhetoric has a great deal more to do with the political preoccupations of individual thinkers than with legitimate investigation into the origins of politics. Discovering the actual origins of politics and power is secondary to using political origins to legitimize or naturalize a pre-conceived political end. My point is not to suggest that all theory should or can be perfectly objective, but that origin stories stray so far from that ideal that they tend to obfuscate more than they aid political solutions.

Drawing on the pre-Socratic philosophers, Plato's *Timaeus* posits the existence of an ordered cosmos to correspond with his idea of an ordered *polis*. In using an origin narrative, Plato stands above the disorderly business of politics. The *Timaeus* permits the fifth-century BCE political theorist to reveal a political strategy that has its foundation in nature and, therefore, places it beyond political debate and contestation. Plato relies on the gendered Receptacle metaphor in which the act of creation is driven by the father and the passive dimension of creation is assigned to the mother. Patrogenesis affirms the act of creating the *polis* as a natural, rather than a conventional, event. In addition, as a tool of masculine empowerment patrogenesis enhances the capacity of male citizens to re-

create the *polis* in Plato's image. The metaphor of autochthony, extant in the *Republic* and the *Menexenus*, reinforces the argument that Plato willfully employs the origins motif when it will assist him in his drive to achieve his desired political configuration.

Like Plato, Thomas Hobbes prefers the order implied in his social contract to the chaos and anarchy of civil war and constitutional politics. He too uses an origin narrative to extract himself from the complexity of politics. What most clearly separates the seventeenth-century political theorist from his ancient Greek counterpart is his critique of normative origin stories. For Hobbes, origins are revealing but they cannot be prescriptive. Therefore, his theory of the state of nature is presented as a critique of existing constitutional origin stories and as the scientific basis for understanding natural human motivations. The state of nature theorized in the *Leviathan* stands in marked contrast to the civil society Hobbes hopes to create. It is the laws of nature, including man's desire to follow peace, that make that civil society possible and necessary.

Few origin stories display the rhetorical flourish contained in Hobbes's state of nature. He very carefully selects the kind of language and argumentation that will have the greatest impact on his readers. At the same time, in his use of a familial similitude for political rule he skillfully undermines the basis for patriarchalist political theory. In point of fact, this thesis offers an alternative interpretation of Hobbes's arguments on gender. Whereas Carole Pateman argues that Hobbes's social contract implies the sexual conquest of women in the state of nature, this thesis contends that Hobbes's political theory (inadvertently) opens critical spaces for an anti-patriarchal conception of women and the family.

Indeed, in reducing all human relationships to rational consent Hobbes takes his argument about women and the family one step further than the seventeenth-century women religious activists were able.

When Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* is examined in detail, it becomes evident that her emphasis is less on uncovering Hobbes's purposes and more on contemporary liberal democratic gender politics. In the same way that Plato and Hobbes both construct origin stories to suit their political purposes, Pateman creates an origin story of her own. Pateman's political project is to draw attention to the blurred lines between consent and coercion in gender relations and it is from social contract theory that she develops her theory of the sexual contract. Pateman's weakness is her problematic use of historical and textual material which does not necessarily substantiate her arguments. But in this, she participates in a larger feminist political project: to discover the roots of patriarchy. Still, Pateman's contribution represents a later and more theoretically sophisticated version of that feminist quest.

In books, pamphlets, newspapers and speeches, early second-wave feminists created their own origins discourse. As part of a strategy to divorce themselves from other radical movements, such as the civil rights movement and the New Left, and to create an independent Women's Liberation Movement, radical feminists drew on the ancient theory of the matriarchy. Ignoring the lesson of Hobbes on prescriptive origin stories, they took the historically tenuous matriarchy as the normative foundation for a post-patriarchal society. The feminist origin stories explicitly presented patriarchy as the longest standing and most severe system of oppression in Western history. The implication of this argument is that

women should recognize women's liberation as the most important liberation struggle. These stories also offered feminists the opportunity to define their identity along imagined ancient matriarchal lines. However, the stories also served to divide the movement as some feminists turned towards goddess worship and a woman-centred culture while others became disillusioned with the loss of feminism's radical edge. In the end, while the feminist drive to use origin stories is explainable, it has undermined the movement's ability to arrive at real solutions to the political challenges it confronted.

Herein lies the primary weakness of political origin stories in general: they detract from our ability to formulate political strategies by involving us in a fanciful pursuit of beginnings. After all, beginnings always elude us. And yet, political thinkers seem unable to move beyond the origins discourse—to put an end to the perpetual drive to fabricate and use origin stories. It is essential to distinguish here, as I have from the beginning, fanciful and mythical *origin stories* from historical, theoretical, and even scientific investigations into origins. To call *origin stories* into question is not necessarily to implicate all origins inquiry per se. Whatever the weaknesses of origin stories, it may not, in the end, be possible to leave them behind. We are caught in a pattern, and this is the *aporia* of origins—our attraction to them, and their elusiveness to us.

By way of concluding this discussion, I want to offer some suggestions as to why origin stories persist. Certainly, origin stories do political work for their creators. They are often used as avenues of response to a theorist's adversaries—they must enter the field of debate because others have done so before them. It becomes a self-reproducing pattern. But

there is more to the phenomenon than this. There are compelling reasons to believe that origin stories have continued relevance to modern life, even to societies that characterize themselves as highly rational. Recall from Chapter One the description of the significance of creation stories in general: there is a sense in which "what is said will concern the basic patterns of existence, something more than is contained in other myths."¹

That modern Western Judeo-Christian society, for example, understands Genesis to be mythical does not diminish its importance to that society. Evidence for the ongoing relevance of the Judeo-Christian creation story is easily found in the revival of the fascination with Genesis, not only at a religious, but also a scholarly and societal level. The mid- to late-1990s witnessed a flurry of interest in Genesis, accompanied by a new wave of Genesis translations, interpretations and commentaries.² We might legitimately ask why this has been the case? What is it about this story that captures the imaginations, not just of religious scholars, but of the larger Western society? My suggestion is that people are searching for a meaning that they perceive to be deeply embedded in this origin narrative, perhaps something that they need in order to recover or revive a sense of what human life is meant to be about. In trying to recover or uncover the purpose and meaning of life, people are drawn to Genesis, convinced that within its lines lies a clue about life's real significance.

¹ Marie-Louise von Franz, *Creation Myths*, rev. ed. (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1995), p. 1.

² Some examples include: Karen Armstrong, *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis* (New York: Ballantine, 1996); Bill Moyers, *Genesis: A Living Conversation*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1996) and the PBS Television series by the same name. An early contribution to the revived debate is Elaine Pagels's *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage, 1988).

It is entirely possible that fear and anticipation of the millennium is driving the Genesis revival. When people fear change, or when they are trying to make sense of profound societal shifts, they turn to myths such as Genesis to help them understand their place in that change. The origin story has the ability, they believe, to situate human beings and to direct them as to where they ought to be. This relationship between societal change and origin stories is certainly evident in the stories examined here. Each of these stories represents an attempt to grapple with and make sense of profound change. The tentative status of the Athenian *polis* as a form of political organization along with what Plato perceived to be the instability of the new democratic regime can be seen as motivating factors for Plato's entry into the origins discourse. Similarly with Hobbes, the climate of the seventeenth-century was deeply unstable for a theorist intent on establishing order. The Civil War, the competing political interpretations of regime's proper configuration, the religious enthusiasts: together these sources of instability drove Hobbes to try to make sense of the nature of politics through the use of origins. At the rise of their new movement, feminists, too, were pushing for societal change and trying to reinvent and reinterpret woman's origins. Change and (perceived or real) instability inspire the turn to origins, because again origin stories uniquely offer theorists a way to contemplate and posit meaning and solutions.

Origin stories, therefore, are not likely to disappear, largely because human beings are inescapably involved in assigning meaning to their experience. In other words, what distinguishes human beings—our consciousness, our ability to think rationally as well as mythically—is also what creates this "aboriginal human need" to speculate about our

beginnings and the nature of existence. As much as human beings strive for scientific, anthropological, archaeological, and historical accounts of beginnings, it is also quite likely that even the most comprehensive scientific explanation will fail to satisfy the never-ending desire to render meaningful human origins and existence.

To take this a step further, human beings will always be involved in this process of meaning-production, of myth-making, precisely because we are afraid of the consequences of not producing meaning. Myths of origin serve as a means of evading the uncomfortable truth that life is devoid of inherent meaning. It is on this basis that, throughout this study, I have indicated the danger in arguing the deep meaning and significance of reproduction. This is not to say that interpreting such human events is not a worthy exercise, only that we should not assume that a true and final meaning can be posited once and for all. The point is that, in creating myth, and assigning value and significance to human events and processes, we may also be avoiding the abyss of our meaninglessness.

Studying these myths of origin is useful because they offer us clues about the self-understandings that our culture has generated. At the same time, studying origin stories, and in turn being critical of their more pernicious falsehoods and uses, is a way of becoming more self-reflective and more self-aware. While we may not be able, nor perhaps should we try, to put an end to our curiosity about beginnings, being more critically-aware and reflective about the function of origin stories can only advance our search for an equitable politics. In documenting and assessing the dynamics of the origins imperative in political theory, this study is intended to offer some critical reflection on this human drive.

Appendix I: Reconsidering Plato's *Republic* and Gender

Rather than viewing Plato's statements in the *Timaeus* as aberrations on an otherwise clean record where women are concerned, I suggest that this dialogue presents an important counter to the interpretation of Plato as a feminist. In this as in some of his other dialogues, Plato tends to designate the male as the universal, and male experience as the standard, according to which the female is assessed—usually as deficient or lacking. Although the *Republic* is held up as an early example of enlightened attitudes toward women, and it does to some degree represent a digression from ancient Athenian attitudes toward women, to accept it at face value elides the gender dynamics of dialogues like the *Timaeus*. Women in the *Republic* are admitted into the club of guardians on the basis that they do not differ in any significant respect from men. As Wendy Brown aptly states, "when not engaged in reproduction, women can be just like men."¹ That Plato seriously entertained a notion of equality is a positive antidote to ancient ideas about women's natural inferiority, but this sentiment does not, in my view, set the tone of his entire political theory. To accept Book V's argument about women as Plato's last word on women is to overlook the significance of the gender dynamics in his other dialogues.²

¹ Wendy Brown, "Supposing Truth Were A Woman...": Plato's Subversion of Masculine Discourse," in Nancy Tuana, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994).

² I am sympathetic with Okin's argument that the reason Plato gives women an equal role in the guardian class has to do with his understanding of the public/private dichotomy. For Plato, as for other contemporary defenders of the Athenian *polis*, the private realm poses a threat to the unity of the city. To minimize its threat, Plato dissolves the separation altogether in the guardian class, and creates a large family of guardians. Having done this, he has no role for women, for women and children are held in common. Plato has no choice but to give women an equal role in governing the

Book V is problematic in its argument, despite the fact that it introduces a political role for women. Underneath the layer of apparent egalitarianism lies a phallogentric ordering of difference. Women, in Plato's model, can be guardians only to the extent that they can leave behind what makes them distinct. True, they will still give birth,³ but they will only participate in guardianship if they can adopt what Plato has delineated as the new masculine behaviour, and shed entirely most of what has been formerly associated with the feminine. That is, they must rid themselves of the markers of difference, and we are left with the impression that their reproductive roles and capacities, formerly the things that excluded them from politics, are now diminished in significance⁴. It must be noted here that in arguing that there is a cost to women's "equality" in Book V, I am not suggesting that women are tied fundamentally to the body. The effective elision of their reproductive "difference" is problematic, not because women are unable to escape bodily concerns, as Straussian interpreters would argue. Rather, Plato's problem

city. After all, Plato's only real quarrel with women's seclusion in the private realm is based on his view that the private realm itself is a source of instability for the city, diverting men's interests from the crucial business of state. See Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

³ And giving birth may be all that they do if we follow Plato's description to its conclusions. Women in their prime breeding years will be pregnant as much of the time as it is possible. Ideal women, he tells us, would reproduce with ideal men, producing gold-quality children. This does not, upon reflection, seem like equality at all: by ensuring that women are perpetually pregnant, Plato delimits their participation in the rigorous training and military exercises of the guardians. Their lives would not be substantially different from when they were in the private realm, except that they would have no connection to their own children once they were born. It would be difficult for women in such an arrangement to "forget" their reproductive capacities.

⁴ Whatever powerlessness women experienced in ancient Athens, they generally retained control over the process of birth and, by default, over the private realm—but not so in the *Republic*.

with difference here stems from his designation of the male as the model guardian. If the male is universalized, women's reproductive role, and its relationship to politics, cannot be seriously or impartially considered.

Ultimately, Plato has no means to accommodate difference other than to, on the one hand, suppress it altogether or minimize it, which is what he does in Book V, or on the other, order it hierarchically, which he does in *Timaeus*. These approaches to difference are two sides of the same coin, and are again phallogentric, for neither approach is able to comprehend woman except in a way that compares or contrasts her to man. In assessing Plato's *Republic*, feminists have had only two options: to disagree with Plato's move, and argue that women's roles in reproduction are all-important to determining their social and political roles,⁵ or to accept his move, on the basis that reproductive differences between men and women are irrelevant to politics. The point is that neither the "sameness" nor the "difference" argument is adequate. Neither of these positions recognizes the possibility that women's capacity to give birth might be politically significant—possibly in a way that has yet to be conceptualized. Is the only means to achieving gender equality to deny any importance or significance to what does mark women as "different"? Conversely, does admitting some significance to women's reproductive roles necessarily imply women's attachment to the body or confinement to the private realm? The problem with the debate about Plato and reproduction is that to

⁵ Allan Bloom uses such an argument to prove that the *Republic* was intended as a comedy. Plato would no more make philosophers kings than he would make women equal, according to Bloom. His position on women is that they are all too bodily to participate in politics, and are included in the guardian class only as breeders. See his "Interpretive Essay," in *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed, translated with notes and an Interpretive Essay by Allen Bloom (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 380-3.

continue to discuss *women's difference* at all is to concede Plato's terms. At this stage, we cannot assess the ontological and political significance of reproduction on its own terms because we do not, in fact, have the language or the conceptual tools with which to do it.

In raising questions about Plato's phallogentric, patrogenic, masculine city, I do not recommend as an alternative the inverse of this dualistic ontology. It will do us well, in expelling both the phallogentric ontology and its inverse, to consider what an alternative city or political vision might look like. Imagine how different Plato's origin myths might appear if he were, not just enchanted with, but actually placed value in, parturition. Similarly, imagine what a different political vision might emerge if Plato theorized the embodied nature of rationality, in both male and female. While imagining the Plato that never existed has only limited rhetorical value, imagining new gender dynamics, and especially new theories of reproduction and birth apart from phallogentric gender dynamics is invaluable. In a sense, the framework that Plato articulated is still the one to which we, even as feminists, are largely confined.

Mary O'Brien is correct in stating that the ancients "had not 'forgotten' that beginning is birth, and that comprehension of birth process is a necessary and complex philosophical challenge."⁶ Plato takes up that challenge but produces phallogentric results, even on a subject in which we might expect that women would define, rather than mimic, the process. All of this is not to overvalue, or to locate a greater creative potency in, the female. On the contrary, the point is to follow Virginia Held's suggestion

⁶ Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 126.

that "human birth, like human death, should be understood to be central to whatever is thought to be distinctively human."⁷ When birth and reproduction are understood as fundamentally human affairs, then the female role can no longer be taken as a sign of *difference*, nor can the female be the scant analogue of the male.

⁷ Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 112.

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