

Getting Political Theory Pregnant: Conceiving a New Model of Political Personhood

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ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Susan Bickford, Ph.D..)

This paper explores the challenges that the pregnant subject poses to a liberal conception of the self that presupposes rationality as a fundamental element of personhood without considering corporeality. I contend that such challenges must be taken seriously by liberals who assume a rational individualist model of human beings and then build upon such a conception self in order to emphasize or develop a particular set of core principles by which we ought to live. More importantly, these challenges ought to be taken seriously by feminists who have relied primarily on a woman's capacity for rationality and autonomy to advance theories of justice. Finally, this paper addresses ethics of care theorists who have challenged liberalism but have failed to ground their theories in a conception of "normal" personhood as constituted by both rationality and corporeality.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Feminist political theory is at once disruptive to mainstream political theory—a thorn in the side of the (still) male-dominated discipline—and vital to it. Broadly speaking, feminist theoretical claims seek to alter or displace those dominant theoretical claims, and the cultural norms they engender within the field, that have thus far served to deny or discount the multiple realities that both constitute and are constituted by women's experiences. Simply put, feminist political theorists reimagine the political. Sometimes our methods are constructivist, while at other times we take up a more deconstructive approach; either way, we are always in the process of renegotiating the boundaries of politics.

This paper criticizes and builds upon several important feminist challenges that have been made to the liberal conception of the self. The established challenges to liberalism that are considered in this essay fall within the boundaries of the ethics of care literature, which represents a response to liberalism's inadequacies and exclusivities where conceptions of what it means to be a human being are concerned. My goal here is to position myself within this literature in one sense, and yet to depart from it in another. I see myself within the ethics of care literature in so far as I take the relational aspects of the human condition seriously and believe they must serve as the starting place—not the finishing line—of political theory. Yet, I also see myself largely outside

of this literature since I want us to move beyond both the “feminine morality” and the “caring as politics” approaches that I will argue currently comprise the ethics of care literature. Thus, it will be necessary for me to clearly articulate what I view as the particular shortcomings of the efforts to disrupt liberalism that have been made thus far. Finally, I will suggest that we begin to think about the possibilities for an alternative challenge to liberalism and urge us to embark on some rather unexplored territory in political theory—the pregnant body—for reimagining our/selves outside of the dominant liberal paradigm.

Nancy Hirschmann and Christine Di Stefano (1996) view the core of feminist political theory as an effort to grapple with traditional political concepts (6-13). They identify three distinct but related approaches to doing feminist political theory. First, feminist theorists interrogate the apolitical posture of those concepts that are typically deemed beyond the realm of politics. This project seeks to challenge our deeply held beliefs about what things may be properly understood as political. Hirschmann and Di Stefano point to the way in which the concept of privacy has been radically politicized in recent decades by feminist theorists (see, for example, Elshtain 1981; Okin 1989; Ackelsberg and Shanley 1996). Once considered the theoretical and literal domain of all that is the opposite of “the political,” feminist political theory has urged us to question the validity of the public (political)/private (nonpolitical) distinction. Second, feminist political theorizing engages in the project of scrutinizing the “innocent space” (Flax 1992) of political theory. Closely related to the first approach, in that both seek to politicize concepts that have previously been understood as nonpolitical, delving into the “innocent space” of political theory is even more dangerous because it goes after the foundational premises of political theory. This project seeks to change that which we currently conceive of as unalterable. While the first approach might demand something like the redrawing of political boundaries to include certain activities that take place

in the private sphere, the second approach might explicitly call into question what exactly we mean by a political concept like freedom, for example (Hirschmann 1996; Zerilli 2005). Hirschmann and Di Stefano explain:

The innocent space is the foundational space of political theory; here we find concepts that “ground” particular notions of the political and are very often taken for granted as uncontestable. On closer inspection, this innocent space displays far more “corruption” than was previously appreciated and accounted for. This “corruption” consists of instability in what was thought to be firm and fixed; it is revealed in the cultural and historical specificity of concepts and norms that were presumed to be universal; and it surfaces whenever a persuasive case can be made that “innocent” starting points or foundations are themselves the effect or outcomes of power. (10)

Ontological, epistemological, and core conceptual claims that counter parallel prevailing assumptions, those things which are always taken for granted, fall into this category. Finally, Hirschmann and Di Stefano posit that feminist political theory is interested in rethinking those concepts that are already understood as political. This project seeks to broaden our deeply held beliefs. Contrary to commonly held beliefs, feminist theorists are not interested in completely doing away with current political concepts and constructions. We are, however, obliged to bring women’s experiences to bear on those concepts and constructions, thus inevitably altering them. Still, we do not seek to withdraw entirely from ongoing dialogues and debates but rather desire to deepen such conversations so as to make them more meaningful. Although these are three distinct ways of thinking about doing political theory, they are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, there is much overlap, and often the work of a single feminist theorist does more than one of these tasks at a time.

I offer the framework provided by Hirschmann and Di Stefano for two reasons: First, I believe it to be extremely helpful for thinking about the business of feminist political theory generally. Also, it captures what I ambitiously set out to do here. I seek to *challenge* the notion that the pregnant body is morally and politically irrelevant for the purposes of thinking through how we ought to live together in a democratic society.

I seek to *change* our most basic beliefs about how we understand ourselves as (political) human beings, as well as how we understand pregnancy. Finally, I seek to *broaden* our view of what it means to be a democratic citizen given our new self-understandings. In this paper, I will focus primarily on the second project, which will require us to briefly consider the first. I will not here explicitly outline institutional and structural changes that should be brought about by our new self-understandings, though that is certainly a part of my larger project. However, I see this paper as potentially engaging with and contributing to a larger body of literature on democracy and citizenship, thus broadening our understanding of both of these familiar concepts in political theory. I will not here develop a comprehensive theory of the pregnant subject as a model for rethinking ourselves as democratic citizens. But once we have a grasp on the particular liberal conception of the self I am considering in this paper, and have parsed through what is useful and what is not, both for women and for democracy, about the ethics of care literature in terms of challenging liberalism, we will have done much of the work to clear the way for the pregnant body to emerge as a useful starting place for theorizing the political.

It is not my intention to essentialize women, or to adopt the uncritical view that women's bodies or experiences provide them with a privileged position relative to men. Instead, I share the view of Elizabeth Grosz that if "feminists are to resuscitate a concept of the body for their own purposes, it must be extricated from the biological and pseudo-naturalist appropriations from which it has historically suffered," (1994: 20). I think this is possible by attempting to disrupt the mind/body split, and by recognizing that the particular corporeal form I explore in this paper—the pregnant body—is perhaps best thought of as a field of bodies, rather than a singular body. Grosz describes a field of bodies as a "discontinuous, nonhomogenous, nonsingular space, a space that admits of differences, incommensurability, intervals or gaps between types,

a field, in short, that is established and regulated according to various perspectives and interests” (23). Although I do not expand very much on the notion of the pregnant body as a field in this paper, it is consistent with the way in which I wish to take up the body here.

I argue that the pregnant subject complicates and poses significant challenges to a liberal conception of the self that presupposes rationality as a fundamental element of personhood without taking into account corporeality. These challenges ought to be taken seriously by liberals who assume a rational individualist model of human beings and then build upon such a conception self in order to emphasize or develop a particular set of core principles by which we ought to live. More importantly, these challenges ought to be taken seriously by liberal feminists who have relied solely on a woman’s capacity for rationality and autonomy to advance theories of justice or equality. Finally, this paper criticizes nonliberal feminists who have attempted to challenge liberalism but have failed to ground their theories in a conception of the human condition as always already constituted by embodied persons who are both interdependent and mutually interested in one another by virtue of both rationality and corporeality. Basically, they have ignored the body; specifically, they have overlooked the pregnant body as a potential site for reimagining political personhood. My argument is twofold: I intend to demonstrate that a new understanding of the pregnant body helps us to acquire a more accurate understanding of what it means to be human both caring and dependent. Beyond a theoretical argument that draws out the importance of corporeality for conceptions of personhood, there is also a normative component to the argument I am advancing. I hope to convince the reader that the pregnant body also provides us with a better model for thinking about how we ought to think of ourselves, and that it is by adopting a pregnant model of personhood that practices and relationships of care and dependency can be widely accepted.

This paper is divided into seven sections. I begin with a discussion of the body's importance for political theory, as well as how I want to think about the body in this paper. Then I move on to explore a particular version of the liberal conception of the self. Specifically, I consider John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. I engage with Rawls for three reasons: First, Rawls provides us with an especially robust and intricate account of the self from which he derives the principles of justice. Second, Rawls is one of the most prominent, if not the most prominent, liberal theorists of the twentieth century. Third, there have been many criticisms of Rawlsian liberalism set forth which seek to challenge his conception of political personhood, but none of them have succeeded in giving us an adequate alternative conception of personhood. Rather, they have tended to point to alternative ways of organizing society or other values besides justice that we might emphasize. While insightful, these alternatives do not quite get at the root of the problem, which is a particular conception of personhood that does not comport with alternative practices and ways that we might organize society. In contrast, the argument I will set forth criticizes the Rawlsian conception of personhood and seeks to replace it with a new one. I believe such a replacement is necessary, since theoretical arguments about how to best organize society are closely related to fundamental assumptions about the self.

The third, fourth and fifth sections of the paper considers some criticisms of liberalism that have been advanced within the liberal feminist tradition, as well as in the ethics of care literature. The sixth section discusses the importance of conceptions of the self and explores what I think we are doing when we make claims about what constitutes a politically relevant human characteristic in political theory. The final section attempts to find a middle road between the two strands in the ethics of care literature by exploring the pregnant subject as a useful starting place for an alternative to the rational, autonomous self are the heart of liberalism.

In order to theorize the pregnant body outside of the discourse of liberalism, we must say more about what the pregnant body is and how we might conceptualize it. Since we generally understand pregnancy within a liberal paradigm of human nature, thinking of the pregnant woman and the fetus as two clearly separate entities with fixed and rigid boundaries, this will require a great deal of patience. We must attempt to talk about the pregnant body outside of the dominant liberal paradigm, while at the same time recognizing and being mindful of the pervasiveness of that discourse. The pregnant subject that I attempt to construct illuminates a radically different account of the human condition, one which takes seriously our embodied experiences and repositions the pregnant subject as a model of political personhood for everyone, rather than a politically irrelevant and contingent identity status. Uncovering the challenges the pregnant subject poses to the liberal model of personhood will require all of us to engage in the process of rethinking ourselves. Let me begin by addressing some valid concerns about the dangers of developing a corporeal feminism, and discussing why the body is so important for political theory in general

Chapter 2

Body Matters

Many feminists recoil at the idea of developing feminist theories of corporeality, or taking up the body as a potential site of resistance, transformation, and liberation from “malestream” political theory. This is understandable, since biology and women’s association with bodily functions, as opposed to the capacity for rationality, have long been used to justify their lower status relative to men. There is also a sense in which taking up the body seems quite antithetical to the project of political philosophy. Grosz writes about the roles of rationality and the body in the Western philosophic tradition, and its gendered implications:

Philosophy has always considered itself a discipline concerned primarily with ideas, concepts, reason, judgment—that is, with terms clearly framed by the concept of the mind, terms which marginalize or exclude considerations of the body. As soon as knowledge is seen as purely conceptual, its relation to bodies, the corporeality of both knowers and texts, and the ways these materialities interact, must become obscure. As a discipline, philosophy has surreptitiously excluded femininity, and ultimately women, from its practices through its usually implicit coding of femininity with the unreason associated with the body. It could be argued that philosophy as we know it has established itself as a form of knowing, a form of rationality, only through the disavowal of the body, specifically the male body, and the corresponding elevation of mind as a disembodied term. (1994: 4)

Hesitancy to re-associate women as a group with the body is, in many ways, unsurprising. Yet, I would like to suggest several reasons why the body is critical for

feminist political theory, as well as for political theory that does not necessarily claim the name “feminist” but is nonetheless concerned to set forth ideas about the best possible political world in which we might live.

Feminist theorists have always had to deal with the body, even if the dominant Western philosophical tradition has dismissed it or, as Grosz suggests, set itself in opposition to it. This is not the same as saying that all feminist theorists privilege the body, for it is often the case that the body is addressed and then dispensed with or bracketed in some way, but feminist theory differs significantly from nonfeminist political theory in that it at least begins with acknowledgement that the body matters (Shildrick and Price 1999: 1). Early radical feminist Shulamith Firestone (1971), for example, argued that women must be freed from the chains of their biological status as gestators if they are ever to take their rightful place alongside men. In contrast, other radical feminists have argued for the privileging of women’s material reality and experiences as compared with the way men see and think about the world, frequently emphasizing their maternity and reproductive functions. Still other contemporary feminists see the body as inescapable but fluid, the effect of power rather than a natural given, a site of potentiality rather than foreclosure. Regardless of the particular manner in which feminists choose to acknowledge or take up the body, it is precisely because the Western philosophical tradition has associated women with the body, and the body with all that is undesirable and problematic about human life, that feminist theorists find themselves grappling with it and reconsidering its relevance for political theory and practice. This sometimes looks like a defense of women’s capacity for rationality, or resistance to the idea that women are (merely) bodies. At other times, it looks like a defense of the body, or resistance to the idea that bodies can be legitimately ignored. In any case, theorizing the body ought not to be such an unsettling prospect to feminist political theorists; the historically male tradition in which we find ourselves has left us

little choice.

To adequately theorize the body, we must disrupt the mind/body dualism that has served to disadvantage women who are seen as bodies, while at the same time privileging men who are seen as rational creatures who somehow possess the ability to transcend their bodies in a relentless pursuit of the good life. While ancient philosophers, like Plato, often constructed the body in opposition to the soul and to the capacity for reason, which was thought to be encompassed by the soul, and others, like Paul and Augustine, constructed the body in opposition to true salvation, it was Descartes who really crystallized the mind/body distinction (Bordo 1993; Grosz 1994). Mind/body dualism assumes that there are two distinct entities that are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, each defined in gendered opposition to the other. It should be disrupted in two ways. First, feminists seek to dispel the belief that women are bodies, while men are rational creatures. Second, the hierarchical nature of the mind/body relationship places the mind above the body, seeing it as far more fundamental to our identity as human beings. The body must be restored to its proper place as equally constitutive of humanity.

Feminists have contested and continue to contest the claim that women are mere bodies and that men are somehow freed from the specificity and limitations of embodied experience. Human beings, regardless of sex, are constituted by both a capacity for reason and corporeality; it is not as though the former somehow liberates us from the latter. Martha Nussbaum (2002: 2006) has been a forceful critic of the false dichotomy between human dignity, which rests on the capacity for reason, and the natural world, which is largely constituted by mere “animal dwellers.” She believes this split has dangerous political implications for us because it “makes us think of the core of ourselves as self-sufficient, not in need of the gifts of fortune; in so thinking we greatly distort the nature of our own morality and rationality, which are thoroughly material and

animal themselves” (189). Morality is, at least partly, an issue of materiality because the kinds of moral choices available to us are related to, and often depend on and or are constrained by our corporeality. In other words, we often privilege that which sets us apart from animals, the ability to make moral choices based on our rationality, while forgetting all that we share in common with them, and we do so at our own peril. I see no apparent reason why we should seek to transcend the body, especially since it can sometimes tell us important things about the world that the mind alone cannot. For example, bodies, though variable, often tell us when we are tired and need sleep, or hungry and need food, even when our rational selves might prefer to push on without rest or nourishment. Bodies can tell us when to be afraid of a particular situation, thus sending information to our brains that lets our rational selves know there is something to fear even though we may have wanted to believe there was nothing there; the body can work to change our minds about the world we apprehend.

I will explore the way in which the mind and the body are interrelated, but there is also a sense in which the body can sometimes act independently of the mind, as Mary O’Brien reminds us, “[R]eproductive labor might be said to combine the functions of the architect and the bee: like the architect, parturitive woman knows what she is doing; like the bee, she cannot help what she is doing,” (1979: 115). Denying our vulnerability by denying our bodily existence gives us the persistent illusion of dominance and control. Bodily knowledge can contradict this assumption.

Privileging rationality over corporeality has given us a distorted view of the self and our relationship to the world in which we live. Nussbaum argues that “we learn to ignore the fact that disease, old age, and accident can impede the moral and rational functions, just as much as other animal functions,” and so we often are surprised or infuriated to discover that we cannot do all that we think we can do or all that we desire given the imperfect bodies we inhabit (189). Susan Bordo (1993) writes about

how the deployment of the mind/body dualism by political philosophers has provided instructions, rules, and models for the body, with the ultimate gain of “learning to live without it” (145). Once we can control the body, the hope is that we can leave it behind. The trouble we run into, of course, is that it’s rather difficult to “achieve intellectual independence from the lure of the body’s illusions, to become impervious to its distractions, and, most important, to kill off its desires and hungers” (Bordo 1993: 145).

In contrast to the move to dominate and then transcend the body, we might think of it as less of a constraint on our rational faculties and more of a force that we must learn to work with and adapt to. The mind would often have us believe we can control and direct a great deal about our lives; but the body teaches us—if we would only pay attention—that we are, in fact, not always in control and that this need not be such a terrifying prospect. Despite major technological advancements, menstruation, conception, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, and menopause are frequently, though not always, completely beyond a woman’s control, even though these processes are always interpreted and experienced in a particular social context. More importantly, this series of surprises and changes in a woman’s body are not exceptions to a rule of stability and stasis. Rather, when taken together, they constitute the majority of many women’s lifecycle. Though excluded from these particular experiences, men are not exempt from bodily functions. Often this is experienced as a lack or inability to do something, as when one falls ill or ages and can no longer do the things that brought happiness in one’s youth. Yet, again, the body can surprise us in a positive way by giving us (bodily) knowledge that might contradict rational knowledge, as when illness or disease unexpectedly subsides, or when the marathoner can complete twenty-six miles even though his brain told him he should stop running miles back. The point is that the mind/body dualism has encouraged us to experience the body as confinement

and limitation, as a constraint on our rationality, or our “higher selves.” Disrupting the dualism by bringing back into focus the fact that (all) human beings are constituted by both animality and rationality will give us a more adequate and richer conception of the self. Further, such a disruption can open the door for reconceptualizing the body, helping us to see it as something other than a threat to all that our minds tell us we could do if not confined to “imperfect” and “uncontrollable” bodies.

Beyond problematizing the notion that women are disadvantaged by their bodily subjectivity—one that we have perhaps not done enough to dispell—and the view that human beings are primarily defined by their capacity for reason, political theorists should take seriously the idea of embodied subjectivity. A concept originally developed by phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962), embodied subjectivity has been taken up and revised by feminists like Iris Marion Young (1990), Rosalyn Diprose (1994), and Margaret McLaren (2002) to refer to the multiple ways in which the body and the mind act upon one another. Grosz (1994: 6) notes that one of the biggest challenges facing those who implicitly or explicitly ascribe to the mind/body dualism, as well as those who wish to overcome it, is to explain necessary interactions and connections between these two apparently always mutually exclusive entities. As I’ve said, we often experience the body as acting independently of the mind, as in the case of a pregnant women whose body cares for the fetus even if she does not necessarily want it to. However, it is also the case that the body and the mind influence one another in significant ways. Embodied subjectivity can express the way that the mind helps to shape bodily experience, as well as the ways in which bodily experience shapes one’s worldview.

Grosz notes that Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the body-subject and lived experience has resonated with many feminists who wish to argue that the production of knowledge and the particular structures made manifest by certain types of knowledge

rely on our lived experience (1994: 94). For Merleau-Ponty, as for Marx, the body is not a mere passive thing to be manipulated by the forces of rationality. Feminists, some of whom we will consider a bit later in the paper, have found common ground with these two thinkers, arguing that women's lived experience is radically different from that of men, and thus gives them a unique standpoint from which to view the world. In "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," Nancy Hartsock suggest that the Marxian method for analyzing class relations provides a useful model for analyzing gender relations in a society where women and men engage in different activities and, as a result, form different relationships with both the social and natural world. Hartsock wants to attend to the epistemological consequences of the claim that, generally speaking, women's lives have historically been quite different from the lives of men. Following Marx, she begins with the division of labor, although she departs from Marx in positing a specifically sexual division of labor that gives rise to the material conditions of women and men. Hartsock does not believe the division can be reduced to mere social dimensions, and she is very clear about her desire to "keep hold of" bodily experience. Men, whose lives are not entirely encompassed by their role in the production of use-value objects, and who do not participate in the process of reproducing other human beings, experience abstract masculinity, that is, they experience the world as a self distinct from and in opposition to others, alienated from both the social and the natural. In stark contrast, women occupy a realm one can conceptualize as occupying a space below that of the male-dominant reality—or underground, while still being forced to act within and speak the language of the realm above. The female construction of self is one that tends toward connectivity and continuity with both the social and the natural world (45). This self is constituted by the material conditions, partly social and partly biological, of women

and thus is likely to produce a worldview that is the actual inversion of men's worldview. This opens up a space for the feminist standpoint to emerge, though Hartsock is clear that the extent to which this standpoint can be actualized and taken up by all women (and men too, Hartsock hopes) depends on whether or not feminist theorists are able to develop and articulate its structural determinants (48).

This brings me to the other important dimension of embodied subjectivity, the articulation of experience as produced and lived through certain knowledges, theoretical arguments about conceptions of the self, and social practices. Even as she suggests women possess a unique standpoint, Hartsock acknowledges that we come to see and to experience ourselves through the lens of dominant paradigms. We experience the body through our relationship to ideology, and expected bodily norms and practices. In *Discipline and Punish* (1979), as well as in *The History of Sexuality* (1980), Foucault argues that bodies are “in the grip”, as he describes it, of dominant discourses of power. Bordo writes of the importance of Foucault's genealogical works in helping feminists to articulate the power of dominant discourses on women's lived bodies (1993: 142). For example, we experience ourselves as fat or thin, beautiful or ugly, masculine or feminine, depending on the particular knowledges available to us. Embodied experience, then, cannot always be taken as an unproblematic given, or an authoritative position from which to judge the validity of theoretical claims. Experience is both implicated in and shaped by the particular knowledges and practices available to us. I am interested here in both embodied subjectivity, as well as the ways in which those subjectivities, and all that they invite and foreclose, are shaped by dominant discourses of power. My own interpretation and understanding of pregnant bodies is intended to provide an alternative to the dominant discourse on pregnant bodies, yet it cannot escape power either. Indeed, this project seeks to provide an alternative conception of the self, one that will create new ways to think about the self in relationship to others (new

knowledge) and engender alternative practices of citizenship.

Before moving on, I would like to briefly address a criticism concerning the body's relevance to conceptions of specifically political personhood. Some might concede that the body is obviously important, but bracket it for the purposes of generating explicitly political principles. For example, many liberals are concerned with the body as something we should take care to protect, as in arguments for a right to bodily integrity that are grounded in a Lockean conception of the body as personal property. This view sees the body as a mere object to which the "true" self that is at the heart of political theory has a right rather than drawing on a conception of self that actually encompasses the body. But this position is likely to generate unsatisfactory political results because it relies on an unsatisfactory conception of the self.¹ All arguments about the proper way to apprehend and order the society in which we live closely with others—the task of political theory as I see it—are related to fundamental assumptions about the self.² Some characteristics are certainly less important than others. For example, qualities like hair color or height should not be relevant to shared conceptions of political personhood because such particulars do not necessarily bear on how we conceptualize justice, or how we should proceed in making decisions about the proper ordering of society. Embodied subjectivity, however, helps us to see the particular ways in which rationality and corporeality are interrelated, what is important for politics and what is not. Also, bodily knowledge and lived experience can complicate some of our most

¹Perhaps the best example of the failure of these kinds of liberal arguments is the contemporary abortion debates. Viewing the body as a right which needs to be secured has resulted in a tremendous impasse, as those who oppose abortion have successfully taken up similar arguments in defense of the fetus's right to life as have historically been mounted by feminists in support of a woman's right to control her own body. We only wait to see whose rights will triumph. If we had a conception of the self that took the rational and bodily aspects of our existence seriously, we might not view pregnancy as such a radical exception to the rule of physical autonomy and control.

²Even poststructuralist and postmodernist political theorists maintain a conception of the self, thought it is a fractured one that is the effect of power rather than a natural entity that exists somehow prior to power.

widely held beliefs about what the political principles of a just society should and can be. It should foreclose some possibilities, while simultaneously creating new ones.

Chapter 3

Political Liberalism and the Rational Individual

Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

The idea of inviolability is common in liberal political thought. It presumes that, regardless of one's relationship to others, human beings should strive for autonomy and control over one's body and mind to the fullest extent possible. For liberals like Mill and Locke the individual is constructed in such a way as to diminish the vulnerability that arises from our embodied experiences, or material existence. The idea of an individual who is instead penetrable and perhaps lacking complete control over one's mind and body as a result of material and social realities is generally dismissed as unacceptable and such individuals are considered to be not up to the task of citizenship. Perhaps it is the predominance of the idea of inviolability that leads John Rawls to merely assume the ideal rather than to justify it at the outset of *A Theory of Justice* when he boldly proclaims, "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override" (1999: 3). Here, he gives the reader insight into his view that there is a clear line to be drawn between self and other, and between self and society. It is from this initial premise that Rawls makes the move to claim that justice is the first virtue of all social institutions. The primacy of justice, much like the primacy of the individual, is regarded by Rawls as obvious to the reader. The remainder of the book, then, is an effort to provide us with a particular theory

that can justify justice as the first virtue of society and to persuade the reader that the principles of justice that Rawls enumerates are indeed correct. Here, I will briefly explain the original position, the conceptual device Rawls uses to arrive at the principles of justice, and summarize his criteria for political personhood.

Rawls designates his theory “justice as fairness,” which is intended to convey the idea that a truly just society is said to be fair if persons who are required to submit to the procedures and institutions of a given society would choose those same principles if they were totally ignorant of their position in society. Rawls is a contractarian who believes we can imagine ourselves in a kind of state of nature in order to determine what political principles and institutions are suitable. If, after engaging in the appropriate exercise of reason, we cannot or would not submit to the rules of a given society, then that society cannot be considered a just one.

Rawls introduces the original position as a kind of conceptual device from which persons in a well-ordered society can choose the principles of justice they want their social structures to embody. It is intended to simulate conditions that might exist prior to the structuring of a particular political society, but with some general knowledge of society and history. Equality is made possible in the original position with the veil of ignorance, which means that persons in the original position have no knowledge of their particular status in society, their “conceptions of the good,” or “their psychological propensities” (1999: 11). Also, subjects are not granted even rational knowledge of the particular type of body they inhabit. The veil of ignorance supposedly allows us to move from “widely accepted but weak premises to more specific conclusions,” (1999: 16). The widely held but weak premises ideally allow Rawls to situate almost all persons within the confines of the argument, and thus must make certain claims about the nature of people living in a society that takes justice to be its primary virtue.¹

¹In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls appears to be making universalistic claims about human beings

To achieve fairness, then, equality must prevail in the original position, and so certain commonly shared assumptions must hold there. Rawls believes these assumptions are so widely accepted that, “one or more persons can at any time enter this position, or perhaps better, simulate the deliberations of this hypothetical situation, simply by reasoning in accordance with the appropriate restrictions,” (1999: 119). Depending on the strength and limitations of his assumptions, it is possible that the original position is restricted only to certain types of persons, thus having the effect of excluding others from the ability to reason in accordance with the restrictions (Nagel 1989).

All persons in the original position possess rationality. Rawls has a peculiar and rather strong account of rationality, which for him means that a person can give primacy to his own plan of life and that he will always desire more goods rather than less in order to pursue that plan of life (1999: 123). Yet, the ability to give primacy to one’s own plan of life assumes a coherent, single subject who can in fact easily discern and disentangle his own plan of life from another’s, not a particularly controversial idea in liberal political theory. Natural and social forces that might prevent one from being able to “rationally choose” are ruled out from the start. We might also note that it is both the ability to make the choice to privilege one’s own interests and the actual move to do so that constitutes rationality for Rawls. Choices made in the original position can only be explained in terms of furthering self-interests.

Rawls also views the political subject as autonomous, a view that is shared by most liberals (Jaggar 1983: 33):

and he makes no distinctions between persons who have a non-liberal conception of the good, and liberal persons for whom competing conceptions of the good life are a necessary condition. However, in later writings, most specifically in *Justice as Fairness* (1999), Rawls reconsiders and declares that he is talking about “political personhood” within a constitutional democracy. In both cases, he is making claims about what he takes to be the essential characteristics of a particular (political) subject, and he does so by stripping away what he takes to be non-essential characteristics of persons, or “contingencies.”

Thus, in the usual way, a rational person is thought to have a coherent set of preferences between the options open to him. He ranks these options according to how well they further his purposes; he follows the plan which will satisfy more of desires rather than less, and which has the greater chance of being successfully executed. (1999: 124)

Putting aside the fact that many people are autonomous but still make bad choices, it is the authority of self-judgment that Rawls is emphasizing here. In her analysis of the major tenets of liberalism, Allison Jaggar makes a distinction between those who emphasize the moral versus the instrumental value of reason:

Those who emphasize the moral aspect of reason stress the value of individual autonomy; that is, they value reliance on individual judgment, uncoerced and unindoctrinated, rather than on established authority in determining matters of truth and morality. Those liberal theorists who emphasize the instrumental aspects of reason stress the value of individual self-fulfillment and the importance of each individual's being able to pursue her or his own self-interest as he or she defines it. (1983: 33)

This distinction cannot be easily made, however, because it obscures the way in which the instrumentality of reason is related to autonomy. The liberal who values reason as instrumental in helping us pursue a plan of life still presumes autonomy because the individual must be able to define what his or her interests are in the first place. It is true that Rawls does not explicitly make a normative claim that we should always regard ourselves as autonomous and ignore social constraints. The criterion in the original position is considerably stronger. We simply *are* all autonomous creatures and thus possess the authority to rank our individual options and further our self-interests, even if we forfeit our right to do so once we're in society. This conception of political personhood privileges self-judgment over other potential social influences, and it dismisses the possibility that a person may be *unable* to act with such authority in society, that is, to be autonomous, given their experiences of sociality, community, or corporeality.

Finally, persons in the original position must be mutually disinterested with respect to all other parties behind the veil. This is meant to ensure that people are "neither envious nor altruistic" when deciding on the principles of justice. The only thing we know about our relationships with others is that we have competing interests given the condition of moderate scarcity, and that no prevailing view of the good life is imposed on us. Persons behind the veil are prevented from taking any interest, positive or negative, in one another's interests.² Rawls cautions us to not confuse the conditions of the original position with what persons might do in ordinary life or in a well-ordered society, but the constraints of the original position are intended to reflect fair terms of social cooperation to which any rational person would agree prior to entering into society.

Knowledge about oneself or the world is rational knowledge; subjects can imagine the possibility of certain things, but they are denied embodied knowledge. No one knows his or her sex, race, class, natural abilities, or affinities. Rawls selects this peculiar method of stripping away all of the social and material conditions of human life in an effort to get at some kind of categorical or universal identity:

The veil of ignorance is so natural a condition that something like it must have occurred to many. The formulation in the text is implicit, I believe, in Kant's doctrine of the categorical imperative, both in the way this procedural criterion is defined and the use Kant makes of it. Thus when Kant tells us to test our maxim by considering what would be the case were it a universal law of nature, he must suppose that we do not know our place within this imagined system of nature. (1999: 118)

More than the presupposition of ignorance of place within this imagined system, Kant and Rawls both assume that we do not know the particular ways in which we

²Persons in the original position do take an interest in some (unknown to them) third party, and this is why Rawls conceives of them as "continuing persons," or heads of households. However, the third party is merely an extension of the self as Rawls conceives it and designed to secure goods for future genetic lines.

experience our particular place in the imagined system of nature. Rawls cannot maintain his conception of political personhood while at the same time maintaining that bodies provide us with a certain kind of knowledge that the mind alone cannot. For Rawls, embodied knowledge prevents the possibility of unanimity because we would seek outcomes that would be beneficial to our particular bodies.

It is not hard to see why Rawls wants to avoid such bias. Keeping the body out allows him to maintain his particular conception of the political subject. Yet, there is a loss that occurs with this move. Rawls is assuming that bodily experience is never so fundamental that it is constitutive of the (political) self. The requirement of unanimity in the original position is made possible, in part, by the exclusion of the body. Subjects in the original position know that they have a body, but are denied knowledge about themselves and the world that is gained through embodied experience.

Rawls is careful to point out that the original position is distinct from Kant's transcendental argument in that it at least attempts to establish a foundation for the right over the good that is grounded in some kind of practical "real world" situation. Later, important criticisms of *A Theory of Justice* were advanced, most notably those of Thomas Nagel (1989) and Michael Sandel (1982), which challenged his theory on the grounds that his conception of personhood was particularistic, not universal, and that the conditions of the original position were far too strong to extend beyond a specific group of people.

Rawls attempted to meet some of his critics objections in "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical Personhood," (1992) as well as in *Political Liberalism* (1993). He conceded that his theory of justice is not intended to be universally applicable, but rather is tailored for a specific kind of society, wherein there exists a plurality of incommensurable ideas of the good. The original position now appears as a conceptual tool that can be tailored to help us discover the principles of justice that would be agreed

upon by rational persons living in a constitutional democracy. This begs two questions: First, can such a method ever be useful since it always requires an extreme abstraction of the world in which we live? Perhaps there is a contractarian out there somewhere who can adequately capture the complexities of the human condition and from that deduce principles on which we can all agree. I will leave this question for others to answer and move on to the second issue that concerns me here: Can a conception of political personhood within a liberal democracy be considered adequate if it only accounts for rationality while dismissing other aspects of personhood? Can it help us to develop appropriate political principles and practices?

The overarching theme taken up by most feminist critics of liberalism is that it relies on a conception of the self that masks relationships of care, dependence/interdependence, and mutuality, all of which these critics take to be fundamental for human flourishing. In other words, they tend to take the view that human dependency “is not an exceptional circumstance. To view it as such reflects an outlook that dismisses the importance of human interconnectedness, not only for the purposes of survival, but for the development of culture itself” (Kittay 1999: 29).

There are two types of responses to Rawlsian liberalism that I wish to explore. The first is a particular version of liberal feminism that attempts to meet the needs of dependency and care, and the second is an alternative to liberalism altogether that can be generally categorized as an “ethics of care.”

Chapter 4

Liberal Feminism and the “Capable Self”

Martha Nussbaum (2002) attempts to salvage liberalism in the hopes of answering the challenges presented by dependency and care, which arise naturally from the human condition as she sees it. She begins by criticizing Rawls’s particular conception of self, which she sees as too closely aligned with the Kantian view that posits the (rational) human world in stark contrast to the (animalistic) world of nature. As an alternative, she suggests we take a view of the self that is more Aristotelian/Marxian, one that “sees the person from the start as both capable and needy—‘in need of a rich plurality of life activities,’ to use Marx’s phrase, whose availability will be the measure of well-being,” (194).¹ Nussbaum believes liberalism is well equipped to meet the demands of need and dependency. Specifically, she argues that if we adopt a suitable list of “central capabilities,” a list that would include both emotion and affiliation, and use it as an analogue to Rawls’ list of primary goods, then concerns for care and dependency are likely to come into play often when thinking about what we need to attain social justice. This will help us to achieve a more Aristotelian/Marxian view of the self. Nussbaum has surely put forth a good effort to address the disregard for dependency

¹Although Nussbaum argues for a more Aristotelian/Marxian view of the self, a move that initially seems, contrary to liberal political theory, her work remains properly liberal since she positions this new self within a larger framework of that which is necessary for attaining social justice. Nussbaum’s is an essentially distributive notion of justice that views care and dependency as “capabilities” to which we all have a right.

and care that is so prevalent in liberal theory, but she has not delivered on her promise of “redesigning the political conception of the person, bringing the rational and the animal into a more intimate relation with one another,” (193). Further, although she is concerned about the “problems” of dependency and care, she employs a rhetoric of capabilities that calls up an image of a self who must overcome bodily needs in order to become a fully agentic and capable being.

Rather than accounting for the acts of dependency and care as a fundamental component of who we are as human beings, she opts to account for dependency and care, which stem from our “animality,” as things we must take care to secure for the individual. Nussbaum still begins with a disembodied self for whom bodily needs must be secured, rather than beginning with an embodied self for whom conditions of dependency on others and caring for others is already a fundamental characteristic of personhood. The distinction is an important one. My criticism is that Nussbaum has not done enough to alter our conception of personhood, but has instead only altered the list of things we should take into account when deciding on the principles of justice. I argue that it is more useful for feminist political discourse to say that we are fundamentally caring and depending beings, and that the inability to receive or give care is best thought of as a byproduct of a political system that distorts and is incompatible with the human condition and its basic requirements. In contrast, Nussbaum begins with a person who is in need of certain capabilities that she does not currently have, much like Rawls’s person who is in need of certain primary goods that he currently lacks.

Nussbaum wants to incorporate care and dependency into our conception of personhood, but to think of care and dependency as things that all human beings “need” and are too often not able to “have,” presupposes that care and dependency are things

separate and distinct from what we already are as human beings. Rather than beginning with a conception of self that is always already dependent and caring, and then working from there to determine political principles, Nussbaum believes she can secure the material needs of dependency and care via the rational, disembodied self of Rawlsian liberalism simply by amending her capabilities list to include care and dependency. This does very little to alter the Rawlsian conception of self such that we can begin to see and experience ourselves as both caring and dependent beings. Since we are left with the ideal of an autonomous and fully agentic political subject, we are likely to see those in greater need of the “capability” to be dependent—to the extent that we can even make sense of this conceptually—and the capability to care for others as somehow deficient.

In contrast to liberal feminists like Nussbaum, ethics of care theorists do not believe there is anything salvageable in a political theory that privileges the ideal of individualism, or individual capabilities, over connectivity and interdependence. I will discuss two strands within the ethics of care literature. The first I will refer to as the “feminine morality” approach. It is characterized by a presupposition of the shared female experience of caring for others and it attempts to use these experiences as a model for good behavior in society. The second, I will refer to as the “caring as politics” approach. In contrast to the first strand, it seeks to move us away from the highly gendered and apparently essentialist claims of the “feminine morality” approach by placing care within a broader historical context of caring as political practice. Before we begin to consider the virtues of redrawing the boundaries of the political, let us turn to those who have asked this simple question: Who cares? The answer seems obvious. Women care.

Chapter 5

Feminine Morality: Women as Natural Caretakers?

One is tempted to say that ethics has so far been guided by Logos, the masculine spirit, whereas the more natural and, perhaps, stronger approach would be through Eros, the feminine spirit. In one sense, “Eros does capture the flavor and spirit of what I am attempting here. In another sense, however, even “Eros” is masculine in its roots and fails to capture the receptive rationality of caring that is characteristic of the feminine approach. (Noddings 1984: 1)

It is not difficult to see why feminist theorists have taken up the question of care and its relationship to gender difference and inequality. The assertion that women do most of the caretaking in our society hardly seems a radical claim. Indeed, women are primarily responsible for the caretaking that goes on in the household, including tending to the needs of husbands, children, aging parents, as well as caretaking that goes on in the private and public service sector. Almost all women engage in some type of carework in both the private and the public realm. What has been a far more controversial position to take, however, is the view that women are somehow naturally inclined, and so better situated than men, to do the carework that is so obviously necessary for a well-functioning society. Caring, when thought of in this light, is typically constructed as a virtue that most women are lucky enough to naturally possess.

Carol Gilligan’s now famous work, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (1982), can be read as a challenge to the liberal conception

of the self that is strikingly apparent in the work of the psychologist to whom she is largely responding, Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg's (1981) account of moral development has largely influenced many moral and political philosophers' views on what it means to be a functioning moral agent in a democratic society. Kohlberg found that individuals properly progress on a moral scale from acceptance in the eyes of others (note the relationality of the morally underdeveloped person) to an eventual Kantian kind of selfhood, wherein respect for one's own and others' autonomy and conformity to any social contract we as autonomous beings have entered into, both in reality and in the abstract, are the driving motivators behind our moral choices. In contrast to men, Gilligan found that women, who scored rather low on Kohlberg's scale of moral development, exhibit a different kind of morality—an ethic of care, which is associated more with concrete experiences and responsibilities to others, rather than abstract principles and an impermeable, separate sense of self. Gilligan juxtaposes women's different voice, or their ethic of care, with the morality of justice associated with men:

In this conception, the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules. (19)

Drawing heavily on the work of Nancy Chodorow (1978), Gilligan asserts that women's failure to separate from others appears as their moral failure within the male-centered field of developmental theory. Yet women's different voice ought not to be understood as a failure according to Gilligan, but rather is the consequence of their "feminine orientation," which is not constituted by individuation (8). Women are psychically wired to see and act in the world one way, men another. Despite Gilligan's later desire to distance herself from the highly gendered conception of care she offers,

the fact that women do most of the carework in our society and that this is likely to produce differences in women's and men's perspective on the world seems difficult to contest.¹ The problem, of course, comes in when Gilligan suggests women and men are *naturally*, and thus inevitably, different, though it's important to point out that she does not ground her argument for gender difference strictly in biology. Unfortunately, the possibilities for transforming women and men such that both are able to take up both justice and care are left largely unexplored by Gilligan. Yet she is to be credited for drawing our attention to the problems that arise whenever we use men's experiences to measure the worth of women.

One of the most troubling aspects of Gilligan's work is the way in which it does not directly challenge Kohlberg's initial findings that women are not as capable or inclined to engage in moral reasoning of the sort we take to be required for justice. One theorist who is not particularly troubled by this is Nel Noddings. Like Gilligan, Noddings (1984) has also concerned herself with women's relationship to care, drawing heavily on the work of Gilligan to develop a more comprehensive theory of care based on what she takes to be the moral virtues of women. In particular, Noddings is drawn to Gilligan's claim that women think and so act in terms of the particular rather than the universal, and are more inclined to comprehend the concrete rather than the abstract. In Noddings view, this is precisely what makes women better able to properly care for others, and thus why a "feminine" approach to caring and moral education is the correct one. Noddings provides us with a concept of care that is rather narrowly conceived. Caring is not at all to be confused with engaging in the kind of rule-governed behavior we find in Kohlberg's moral stages of development. Noddings wants to draw a sharp distinction between abstract reasoning which teaches us to see impartially and

¹Okin (1990) provides an excellent critique of the assertion that women think differently from men and are thus less predisposed than are men for thinking about justice.

as distinct from others, and caring which demands a certain level of partiality and relationality. Caring is most often a natural act directed toward those whom we are closest to and who are most vulnerable, mostly children, for Noddings. The natural act of caring requires little thought and is indeed *prior* to ethics (80). Yet, Noddings believes natural care is the foundation upon which we must build a greater ethic of care, one that is beyond our immediate loved ones, but not too far beyond them.

The caring relationship, as Noddings sees it, requires reciprocal dependency, such that the cared-for has all of her basic needs met by the one-caring, and the one-caring maintains her sense of self through the act of caring (48-51). Women are ethical selves because they care for others. Noddings explains,

The ethical self is an active relation between my actual self and a vision of my ideal as one-caring and care-for. It is born of the fundamental recognition of relatedness; that which connects me naturally to the other, reconnects me through the other to myself. As I care for others and am cared for by them, I become able to care for myself. (49)

Given the intensely interpersonal dynamic of the proper care relation as she sees it, Noddings is highly skeptical of caring that extends too far beyond those who are close to us. Caring requires receptivity and total engrossment of the self, both of which significantly complicate rule-based norms (51). We assume rules of behavior are laid down for the benefit of others—the cared-for with respect to ourselves—but Noddings argues that if we consistently and automatically follow a rule, we cannot be said to care. We see this most clearly when commitments to personal relationships of care conflict with larger, abstract rules that govern society but may not be in the best interest of those we love and care for, and so are cared for by as well. Consider Noddings response to a dilemma that entails a woman who is torn between turning in her mafia neighbor because he is a criminal, and sparing him because he exhibits great tenderness to her own children, has respectability in neighborhood matters, and is a kind man in her eyes:

What should she do? The answer is by no means clear to me. Many of us would, in great relief, turn to a principle, but I am not going to suggest that. I am suggesting strongly that we have no ethical responsibility to cooperate with law or government when it attempts to involve us in unethical procedures. Spying, infiltration, entrapment, betrayal are all anathema to one-caring, and she cannot justify them on the basis of principle. The suggestion that she should participate in such activities is met by a firm, "This I will not do," delivered not in obedience to a principle but in faithfulness to the fundamental relatedness that induces caring (55-56).²

Here, we see caring starkly opposed to abstract moral reasoning, where caring for others outside of the woman's intimate circle who might be harmed by the mafia neighbor is not caring, at least not caring properly understood. What, then, can we say is our ethical responsibility? For Noddings, it is simply to do what is quite natural for women to do in her view: care for those whom we are closest too. Because she views the most important kind of care as almost always a complete giving over of the self to an/other whom one knows intimately, Noddings's is an extremely particularistic ethic of care and one that strikes me as profoundly apolitical. Although she does present us with a different conception of the (female) self, one that is radically different from the liberal self, there is no impetus to think seriously about that self here as a political being. She gives no thought to care as a practice, as something that requires negotiation, contestation, the drawing of boundaries, and the advancement of normative claims regarding the act of care. Not only does she rely on essentialist and universalist assumptions about "women," and femininity too for that matter, she is guilty of idealizing the world in which most of us live by assuming that we will all be cared for by someone. Empirically, we know this is not the case. There is little effort to respond to

²Paradoxically, Noddings is suggesting the exercise of rather rigorous moral reasoning in so far as she presumes we can and should distinguish between (what she constructs as) ethical and unethical governmental procedures (note the language she invokes to describe what some might conceive of as laws designed to protect the innocent: spying, infiltration, entrapment, betrayal) and then determine the costs and advantages of following or not following such procedures. This is not unlike the highest stage of Kohlberg's moral development.

the fact that many women, and certainly far more men, simply do not care, and are often politically, economically, and socially situated in such a way as to make it very difficult for them to do so in the way that Noddings advocates. “Caring” that is narrowly conceived of as a natural inclination that one either has or has not is not helpful for thinking about the political contexts in which care must occur in a well-functioning democracy concerned to live up to ideals like equality, freedom, and justice. For this, we must begin to think about care as an intentional practice.

Chapter 6

Caring as Politics: The Intentional Practice of Care

If care is tied to the “naturalness” of women’s caring, then it is either instinctive, or deeply social or cultural behavior, and therefore not part of the realm of moral choice. (Tronto 1994)

Thinking about care as a political practice, not simply a morality that women possess by virtue of their biology, psychology, or status as woman or mother, allows us to begin to think about the role of judgment in caring. Even though it may be helpful to think about the “naturalness” of care with respect to our self-understandings, a point we will return to a bit later, caring must also be thought of as something to be cultivated in society. This is precisely what Sara Ruddick sets out to do in *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989). In this work, Ruddick takes a materialist approach, developing a particular standpoint based on the work that mothers do. She suggests that mothers are engaged in the work of preservative love, fostering growth, and nurturing social acceptance. Viewed one way, Ruddick is quite similar to Gilligan and Noddings in that she takes for granted many foundational assumptions about women and mothering, assumptions that are certainly not universally practiced or desired, without acknowledging that she is constructing a particular view of what it means to be a mother. Yet, viewed another way, Ruddick’s work is instrumental in helping us to think about the *practice* of caring. She clearly believes that women (as mothers) are far more likely to be maternal thinkers and therefore already engage in

most maternal practices, and so she wishes to ground her theory in women's experiences. It is refreshing to engage with political theory that does not begin with men's experiences in the world or with a "neutral perspective" that is blind to important differences. Yet, her goal is also to extend the notion of caring rooted in mothering to a politics we can all take up. I like the way she helps us to see the value in honoring the work of mothers because doing so keeps us attentive to current injustices and differences with respect to gender, in a way that "even-handed talk of parenting" does not:

Since the maternal and womanly are politically and conceptually connected, a man who engages in mothering to some extent takes on the female condition and risks identification with the feminine. The fear of becoming "feminine"—more common in men but also evident in many women—is a motivating force behind the drive to master women and whatever is "womanly." Although I am not recommending that young boys be told they will be mothers, grown men should confront the political meaning of "femininity" and their own fear of the feminine. A man does not, by becoming a mother, give up his male body or any part of it. To be sure, by becoming a mother he will, in many social groups, challenge the ideology of masculinity. To a man taunted for "being a woman," talk of parenting may be temporarily comforting. But if he is undertaking maternal work, he is identifying with what has been, historically, womanly. What is so terrible—or so wonderful—about that? This is the question women and men might well sit with rather than evade. (45)

Drawing heavily on the work of Nancy Hartsock (1983), who points us toward the possibility of extending a uniquely feminist standpoint to all human beings, Ruddick hopes to extend maternalist thinking and practice to men, thus transforming what it means to be a father and a man. Although she is not an essentialist of the most troubling sort and she is careful not to ground her work in a notion of women's natural moral virtue, Ruddick assumes too much about the way most women mother, and she is largely inattentive to the plurality of parenting practices that go on within and across cultures. More important is Ruddick's failure to adequately attend to the relationship between an ethical politics of care and ontological claims about the self in political theory. The maternal practice she develops is certainly incompatible with the liberal

conception of the self, yet she does not adequately develop an alternative account upon which to construct an ethic of care.

In an effort to get us away from the association of women with care but keep the notion of care as political practice that Ruddick develops, Joan Tronto (1987: 1994) has argued that practices of care best describe the qualities necessary for democratic citizens to flourish and live well together in a pluralistic society (161-162). I think she's right. In *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (1994), Tronto argues that democratic citizens are best thought of as both dependent and autonomous, and they must be morally engaged in the sense that they must be willing to consider the political contexts in which caring inevitably occurs. The feminine morality approach elides moral engagement altogether and diminishes the role of autonomy far more than Tronto thinks wise. Too much dependency and too much autonomy can threaten democracy, and what we need is a theory that strikes a balance between the two (162-163). Finally, Tronto reminds us that if caring is to be a political virtue then the, "qualities of attentiveness, of responsibility, of competence, or responsiveness, need not be restricted to the immediate objects of care, but can also inform our practices as citizens," (167-169).

Mary Dietz (1998) in "Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking," expresses some similar concerns about maternal thinking, or "social feminism," arguing that it is not women's role as mothers but rather their role as citizens that we ought to nurture and cultivate in feminist political discourse. Dietz is troubled by social feminism because it too often employs an essentialist and narrow conception of motherhood as a model for relationships between people who are not intimates, but who are instead supposedly equals, which contrasts with the mother-child relationship. For Dietz, maternal thinking cannot inform democratic political relationships and practices because it addresses relationships among unequals, rather

than caring relationships between citizens who are equals. I think Dietz misses an important point that many ethics of care theorists want to make: equality is a problematic concept in any society, even in a democracy. While we may strive for the ideal of equality in a democracy, it is elusive and it certainly isn't the only ideal with which we are concerned to uphold there. I think it's appropriate to dismiss maternal thinking on several grounds, some of which Dietz acknowledges but quickly moves past. Yet, she misses what's useful about maternal thinking, mainly that it helps bring into focus varying degrees of vulnerability, dependence, and care as parts of the human condition that must be considered when developing our practices and constructing our political institutions.

Finally, Dietz fails to give us any explicit conception of personhood, but instead focuses on political practices of care between equals. Political practices only make sense if they are informed by self-understandings that serve as their basis. To suggest, as Dietz does, that the ideal of equal participation in self-governance should be the basis for democratic practices (of care), doesn't help us to see what kind of self we must govern.

In contrast, Tronto's arguments for the need to theorize and put care into practice depend on a conception of the self that is both autonomous and dependent. We display varying degrees of autonomy and dependence over time, though there is still sense in which autonomy is the goal, while dependence is a natural fact we must face with care. Her arguments are far more rich and nuanced than those made by other ethics of care theorists, but there is not enough attention given to bodies. This strikes me as odd, since her project is about the redrawing of moral boundaries to encompass different practices of care, which she sees as fundamental to a well-functioning democracy. Vulnerability and dependence, as Tronto occasionally notes, is a necessary condition of the bodies, which partly constitute our personhood. Indeed, bodies are more than something

we inhabit, they are a part of who “we” are. Tronto emphasizes the moral boundary between politics and care, but she leaves the relationship between care and corporeality untouched. Her work logically leads us to take up the body’s relationship to politics. In order to correct the lack of attention given to care and dependency in political theory, we must do more than redraw the boundaries of politics to incorporate “acts of care” into democratic practice. Those acts will not be widely accepted if they do not comport with our understandings of (political) personhood. I argue that the body will have to figure more prominently in terms of how we conceive of the self if we are to see care and mutual dependence as important democratic practices. Before moving on to the embodied self, I’d like to briefly explain why I think we need a conception of the self at all.

The question of whether or not good political theory needs to formulate a coherent account of what constitutes the political subject has been a controversial one in contemporary political theory. This debate has taken many forms, and perhaps one of the most fruitful areas of discussion on the subject has taken place within feminist political theory. Questions about what “woman” means, and how useful a category of analysis this is given the multiplicity of women’s experiences that exist have produced provocative insights about what the stated goal of feminism can and should be.

I think it is important for political theorists to proceed with caution and under certain conditions whenever we make claims about the self, and I want to be very clear about what we’re doing when we make claims about shared characteristics that we think are politically important. A conception of the self is related to the realization of a certain kind of political freedom. Specifically, we might think about the act of articulating a conception of the self as an act of political freedom, the act of naming oneself. Such an act can be experienced as freedom both in the sense of acting as an agentic being in the world who is capable of defining and negotiating one’s own identity

and also in the construction of practices and institutions that are intended to allow one to flourish as a human being. We cannot know what it means for “us” to flourish, if we do not first understand who and what “us” is. Again, the intentional practice of conceptualizing and articulating a conception of the self is also important because claiming an identity can be an act of freedom. This is true, even as that foundation is open to contestation by others who have a different vision of the self. But conceptions of the self also serve another important purpose, which is to give us guidance as we think through the politics of the world in which we live. Developing and articulating conceptions of the self is one of the many processes whereby political theorists help us to make meaning and order our political world.

Developing a political ethic of care that takes into account our corporeality will allow us to better reconcile our political practices in the context of our materiality. I believe we need a model that more accurately captures what it is that makes us human. I propose that we explore taking up the pregnant subject as a new model of personhood. The pregnant subject cannot meet Rawls’ criteria for political personhood, and is thus rendered invisible in his theory of justice. Yet, its exclusion, as we shall see, may be what opens it up as a potential site of resistance to the particular conception of (the purely rational) self at the heart of his theory. In addition to convincing the reader that taking up the pregnant subject as a model for rethinking personhood is the best solution to the lack of consideration for care and dependency in liberalism and to the lack of attention to the body in the ethics of care literature, I hope to show that it helps us to see those aspects of our humanity, regardless of one’s sex or one’s status as pregnant or not pregnant, that are made invisible in everyday political life. Finally, I believe taking up the pregnant subject in this way allows us to transgress some of the moral boundaries presupposed by traditional political theory.

If possible, I want to avoid making the kind of essentialist and universalist claims

about “our” material existence that we see in the feminine morality type of ethics of care, as well as the Rawlsian theory of justice, while also holding fast to my belief that constructive and interested political theory must begin with some kind of conception of the self. In order to do this, we will need to come to terms with the fact that every claim about the body is ultimately a claim about how we ought to *think* of our bodies and how we should negotiate the moral boundaries we think most appropriate for them. For this, we turn to the work of Judith Butler, who can be credited with some of the most provocative and insightful contemporary political theory on the body.

Chapter 7

Contesting Bodily Boundaries

The central claim of Butler's book *Bodies that Matter* is this: a person's sex does not exist prior to culture and is not a natural thing, but rather is materialized over time through socially and culturally regulated practices. Sex is understood as an ideal construct we have compelled into existence, not a truth we have discovered about our biological "nature." The idea, of course, isn't that we have the mental power to think physical bodies into existence, but rather that we have the political power to determine what exactly will count as a body or, more specifically, a body that matters. The claims we make about the self have real effects in the world. Butler is also careful to point out that she is not denying the realness of the body or the fact that it is "fully material," only its status as naturally given and beyond the realm of power. She is arguing that materiality must be rethought as the effect of power rather than the conditions that give rise to sex/gender inequality (2). This has profound implications for how we understand our body and embodied experiences.

This is difficult for most of us because we live and act within a rights- based liberal society that fosters the view that our bodies are fixed and finite, the precise space that we as rational beings are supposed to inhabit. We do not typically question the accepted view of the boundaries of the body. We also ascribe to the view that "our" bodies are fairly easy to distinguish from other bodies. So long as we do not harm other

bodies, we have an inalienable right to do with our own bodies as we see fit.¹ Liberalism conflicts with Butler's claim because it forecloses the possibility of any account of the discursive and regulatory practices that give rise to the way that we conceive of the self, or the bodies we inhabit. Those things which constitute personhood are believed to be self-evident and in need of little defense.

Butler suggests that the unnaturalness of nature has implications beyond sex, and I think it will be useful to explore liberalism as a regulatory process that operates to produce the radically individual self we find in modern liberal societies, a self that is enclosed and defined by a body with clear and determined boundaries. I would like to use Butler's framework to interrogate the processes involved when the liberal self, as a rational, self-sufficient individual, is constructed as both natural and self-evident. I'd also like for us to think further about the effects those processes have on human beings who are unable to ever assume, or at least maintain, the status of "rational individual," specifically, pregnant persons.

As we have seen, critics of liberalism and liberals who criticize Rawls often point to a conception of the self that fails to give an account of the ways in which individuals are embedded in cultures or traditions that inevitably shape them. As a contractarian in the Kantian tradition, Rawls suggests that all people, once removed from cultural or social life, are best conceived of as both autonomous and rational, and that this particular conception is most useful for determining political principles. While it may be the case that we enter into voluntary associations, our identity is never so entangled with those associations as to prohibit the possibility of imagining ourselves without them. If we take this view, it seems obvious where I stop as a physical being and you

¹This view is grounded in a Lockean conception of the self, which presupposes we have property first and foremost in our person. Although liberalism has come to deemphasize the body over time, the boundaries of the individual's body are still intricately linked to all liberal theories of rights in contemporary liberalism.

begin; the limits of my material body are readily apparent to me, and I am acutely aware of when those boundaries have been crossed and, hopefully, when I have crossed yours. Butler's project, for better or worse, leads us to question the naturalness of such a self-understanding, of how this particular body with which we are so intimately familiar might actually be materialized through a powerful liberal discourse that dominates both political theory and practice. Butler's work urges us to consider the following question: Is the individual as described by Rawls a natural and true thing that gives rise to an obviously appropriate and even intuitive form of political organization, or is it the effect of regulatory practices invoked in order to impose a particular form of politics on human beings? I think the latter is worth at least taking seriously for a moment.

Liberalism is a complex and diverse tradition that is best thought of as a family of theories instead of just one overarching theory, so it is difficult to generalize too much about the ideals of liberalism. Some liberals choose to emphasize autonomy, some rationality, others focus on tolerance, and still others privilege equality. All liberals, however, take the individual to be the primary moral and ontological unit of politics. Most liberals believe strongly in some version of the protection of individual rights, which, again, requires a strong account of what exactly the individual is. The material boundaries that define a particular individual are not a product of power for the liberal, but rather are thought to be natural. The immaterial criteria for political personhood, again, are rationality, autonomy, self-determination, and mutual disinterest outside of one's associations. As stated earlier, rationality is typically understood in the liberal tradition as the ability to possess one's own particular plan of life and to articulate the necessary means by which one will achieve their desired ends. This assumes, of course, that the "truly human" being is a coherent, single self who is primarily concerned with only one plan of life, though that might itself include a number of different and

conflicting possibilities. This self is signified by the body, which marks its boundaries and signals most clearly the moment where *inviolability* would otherwise occur. Inviolability presupposes coherent limits to my/self as an embodied creature. Even when developing as children or aging as aging adults, the boundaries of the human body are clear enough for most liberals. If bodies are not clearly identifiable, they must be made clear because liberalism declares that we have virtually unlimited dominion over them.²

Does this understanding of the body and its relationship to individualism resonate with everyone's experiences of their body, as it purports to do? Another understanding of materiality might speak to the fact that one's bodily boundaries are constantly shifting, never fully crystallizing in any concrete way. We see this most clearly in bodies that are primarily defined by their maternity.³ Rebecca Kukla (2005) opens her book *Mass Hysteria* with this insightful passage:

Female bodies, and especially pregnant and newly maternal bodies, leak, drip, squirt, expand, contract, crave, divide, sag, dilate, and expel. It is hard not to see why such bodies have long seemed to have dubious, hard to fix, permeable boundaries. And to the extent that we take the integrity and boundaries of the body as integrally intertwined with the integrity and boundaries of the self—and we have done so, at least throughout the history of Western culture and probably beyond—these dubious boundaries have been a source of various species of intellectual and visceral anxiety. (3)

Although the shifting boundaries of bodies are most apparent in those bodies centrally defined by their maternity or reproductive function, the ethics of care and dependency literature also points us to the fact that our continued existence as human

²Again this is grounded in a Lockean conception of the self and our relationship to our bodies as property. It is a peculiar relationship, however, and one that also implies that our bodies are not entirely ours. Locke argues we cannot take our own life because we did not make it, God did. We see a carryover from this Judeo-Christian principle in contemporary liberal societies where we can generally do all sorts of things to our bodies, but only up to a certain point. Specifically, it is not considered an acceptable choice by most governing bodies to take one's own life or to aid another in the process.

³The term 'maternity' is here meant to refer to pregnant bodies and the bodies of new mothers. Maternity, in this context, relates to bodies defined primarily by their reproductive function, though I recognize that bodies can be maternal in a variety of ways.

beings is often made possible through the care we receive from other bodies. Our bodies depend on what are sometimes very strong relationships of dependence on other bodies that care for us. Some bodies are primarily defined by the care they receive, while others are defined by the care they give, though this dichotomy is in some ways a false one since most of us are always already both caring for *and* receiving care from people in our lives, whether we readily acknowledge this fact or not.

All of this is perhaps not lost on liberals who ascribe to a particularly strong version of the coherent, separate, and autonomous physical and metaphysical self. Indeed, the inability to always see clearly where one physically ends and another begins might be the very reason why there is such a calculated effort to define and mark out the boundaries of the self. For liberals, it is most often the case that we *choose* to become physically entangled with other bodies and this is generally understood as a result of both our biological needs and social desires, though the latter is emphasized, with Nussbaum as a notable exception. Caretaking and dependency is typically seen as contingent and something that can always be refused if the individual chooses. The denial that mutual interest, dependence, and connectedness partly constitutes our humanity is possible only if one sees the individual as coextensive with his fixed physical boundaries, boundaries that are generally thought to be natural. Within liberalism, the family, religion, race, and even gender, can all be conceived as unnatural and cultural constructs. The qualities that comprise the individual at his core, however, are thought to be natural, not cultural or political inventions.

When we concede that most of our characteristics are cultural constructions but still others are natural, we engage in what Butler calls “delimitation,” or the process whereby we signify some aspect of our/selves as beyond the limits of construction. Butler writes of this process and its damaging effects to the different beings it simultaneously produces and excludes:

This delimitation, which often is enacted as an untheorized presupposition in any act of description marks a boundary that includes and excludes, that decides, as it were, what will and will not be the stuff of the object to what we then refer. This marking off will have some normative force and, indeed, some violence, for it can construct only through erasing; it can bound a thing only through enforcing a certain criterion, a principle of selectivity.
(11)

For Butler, the subject cannot emerge without a repudiation, which inevitably produces a realm of abjection (3). I would like to suggest that the liberal individual could never fully emerge without the abject realm of pregnant persons, and we can see an example of the production of that abject realm most clearly in the work of Rawls. In the next section I will show that pregnant bodies are quite the opposite of the liberal conception of the self. To put it another way, the liberal conception of personhood entails a self that can never be pregnant. The pregnant self embodies a fundamental sociality, one that entails mutual dependence and interestedness, sometimes in concert with the desires of the mind (or “rational self”) but not always. The pregnant body is quite irrational by liberal standards, for it does not have a singular, coherent “plan of life” but is rather always already defined by its relationality. On the discursive formation of the sexed subject, Butler writes that the “materialization of a given sex will centrally concern *the regulation of identificatory practices* such that the identification with the abjection of sex will be persistently disavowed,” (3). Similarly, the materialization of the individual with clear and coherent bodily boundaries disavows any identification with the abjection of the self-the realm of pregnant bodies. In this realm of abjection we do not find only literally “pregnant persons,” for that is the place to which all bodies that are unable to meet the criteria of the liberal individual are relegated. If we were to use the pregnant self instead of the rational individual self as a model for thinking about the democratic self, however, we would have an entirely different lens through which to view and understand relationships of care and dependency. It is the pregnant

body that poses a threat to the self-grounding presumptions of the individual subject.

The pregnant body is completely unintelligible within liberal discourse. By virtue of its status of exclusion from that which is “truly human,” Butler’s framework suggests that it is a potentially powerful site from which to engage in the rearticulation of the human being. But that act will inevitably involve exclusivity and the potential production of another abject realm. Butler calls our attention to the importance of recognizing the particular foundations of the kind of bodies we lay down as mere contingencies. Indeed, we can never escape the concession of foundations:

To “concede” the undeniability of “sex” or its “materiality” is always to concede some version of “sex,” some formation of “materiality.” Is the discourse in and through which that concession occurs—and, yes, that concession invariably does occur—not itself formative of the very phenomenon that it concedes? To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. (10)

If conceding the materiality of sex or of the body operates to materialize sex, and if we are in fact the beings doing the conceding every time we resignify a regulatory ideal, we can imagine a different kind of concession, one that might be better than the previous foundation or ideal, though it will not be outside of power. Power is always present, for this is one of the most valuable insights Butler offers us, as does Tronto, who reminds us of the need to confront the political contexts of care. To construct and then concede a different kind of human being, one that is intelligible only within relationships of care and dependency is to undoubtedly produce still another realm of abjection, potentially, the rational, autonomous individual of liberalism. I acknowledge that I am arguing for a particular version of the pregnant body to be considered as an alternative to the liberal self, and there are risks in so doing. I would like to offer the following passage from Kukla’s books, which helps us to see what any of us do when we implicitly or explicitly talk about “the” body in political theory, as a guiding thought

for the final section of the paper:

Imaginatively, we put bodies to use as symbols, and our ways of imagining and representing bodies have ethical, political, practical, and medical repercussions for those bodies. In turn our understanding of and anxieties over those boundaries give form to our standards for caring for them. (4)

My claims about the pregnant body are contestable. The question of which claims best capture our experiences in the world and which are best suited for living well together in a democracy will have to be debated, but it is a debate I will leave to others. For now, let us explore how the pregnant subject might contribute to a superior model of personhood, one that allows for the corporeal necessity of dependence and care in addition to rationality.

Chapter 8

Getting Political Theory Pregnant: Conceiving an Alternative Model of Personhood

The pregnant subject explicitly problematizes the notion of a singular self. It is partly the delimitation of the body and the emphasis on rationality that allows us to see the pregnant woman as either a coherent, singular being with clear and fixed boundaries, or the woman and the fetus as two beings wherein one has the potential for rationality and thus constitutes a distinctly separate being. I am asking that we adopt a radically different view of pregnancy, a view that requires us to first get outside of this framework. Let us imagine that the pregnant body really isn't so clearly one or two beings. Kukla writes of the difficulties in determining the boundaries of the mother and the fetus and the complications involved in making claims about static bodily boundaries:

One needn't be any sort of radical social constructionist in order to notice and take seriously the fact that the fetus and, with it, the pregnant mother are not objects that come with ready-made stable boundaries. All romanticism and moral analysis aside, the maternal body incarnates one human being at the beginning of pregnancy and two at the end of it, and it is by no means clear how to tell a coherent story of this passage. Debates around abortion issues have made the contestability of any such story clear. But upon reflection, we can see that we need not be worried about when it is or is not acceptable to terminate a pregnancy, nor with pinning down a crisp moment at which the fetus transforms into a person, in order to notice that the story of this passage from one to two is a complex and murky story

to discern, involving negotiations of boundaries around and within persons that are contestable at every stage. (4)

Because it takes into account the physical processes involved in this particular aspect of the human condition, Kukla's image of the pregnant person disrupts the traditional view that it is relatively easy to disentangle the pregnant woman's plan of life from that of the fetus. Kukla also suggests that the pregnant body has boundaries around it that are not static or clearly defined. Similarly, Iris Young (1990) in "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation," writes the following about the physical experience of pregnancy as it relates to the subject's interaction with her environment previously thought to be beyond the boundaries of her (prepregnant) self:

Pregnancy challenges the integration of my body experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate. I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body. The integrity of my body is undermined in pregnancy not only by this externality of the inside, but also by the fact that the boundaries of my body are themselves in flux. In pregnancy I literally do not have a firm sense of where my body ends and the world begins. My automatic body habits become dislodged; the continuity between my customary body and my body at this moment is broken. In pregnancy my prepregnant body image does not entirely leave my movements and expectations, yet it is with the pregnant body that I must move. The belly is other, since I did not expect it there, but since I feel the touch upon it, it is me. (49-50)

If we begin to think of the pregnant body as a kind of fundamental sociality that entails the negotiation of a shared space by two beings, as representing the splitting of a subject, as well as the blurring of the boundaries between the self and what lies beyond it, then we can begin to see how difficult it is to set boundaries between both the fetus and the mother, as well as the mother and others with whom she interacts in the world. Most importantly, this picture of pregnancy precludes the coherency of a single "plan of life," as both the self and the other become blurred. This blurring does not only occur on the level of corporeality. As we have already seen, the mind is, in

part, shaped by our embodied experiences, and so rational choices that only effect the self and no one else become less and less coherent.

Rawls believes persons in a constitutional democracy can act autonomously when following the principles of justice because, “they are acting from principles that they would acknowledge under conditions that best express their nature as free and equal rational beings,” (1999: 452). Within the liberal tradition, to act autonomously is to look only to oneself for final authority and judgment. This is a rather impermeable position from which to act in the world, and it is not accessible to the pregnant subject whose worldview is partly shaped by the relatedness and mutual dependence of her particular corporeal existence. It will not be possible to look only to oneself for authority and judgment, to do only what “the self” desires, if that self is defined primarily by rationality. Authority and judgment invoke images of control and domination over the self that often seem impossible in the context of two beings who must share the same space, of a body that is doing the work of care whether the minds wants to or not, as well as another being who is primarily dependent.

A healthy pregnant body is quite the opposite of a being that is mutually disinterested, as Rawls suggests we must be in order to conceptualize the principles by which we should live together. Indeed, in order to be categorized as a healthy pregnant body, there must be both care and dependence simultaneously. The Rawlsian will likely charge that the pregnant woman can easily be disinterested in her fetus, for many pregnant women are uninterested or even hostile to the fetus they carry. Once again, however, that framework is partly what I am taking issues with here. Such a view depends on the assumption that the two beings are mutually exclusive. It is an atomistic conception of personhood that is already being assumed here (even by some pregnant persons), and it is precisely this view to which the pregnant model provides us with an alternative.

One Rawlsian defense of the disembodied subject in the original position is that the subject's ignorance of the particulars of her body does not prevent her from imagining what kind of embodied status she will occupy once the veil is lifted. This kind of rational knowledge is intended to allow for adequate provisions for pregnant persons, for example, thus making the outcomes the same as if some persons behind the veil were actually pregnant and had knowledge of their pregnancy. This, of course, is how we arrive at the difference principle. To presume that the general rational knowledge of the facts of life is sufficient for considering the needs and interests of pregnant persons amounts to claiming that the mental activity of imagining one's own pregnancy is essentially the same as *physically experiencing* pregnancy. Yet, as we have seen, these cases are not the same because we are embodied subjects, with minds that are shaped by bodily experiences and with bodily experiences and practices that influence our worldview.

The idea that there is purely mental capacity for imagining pregnancy is consistent with the idea of political personhood in the Rawlsian tradition. One can make an educated guess as to the needs of pregnant persons in this case, but what one is prevented from doing is making decisions based on the lived experiences of a pregnant person. When asked to consider what one thinks the principles of society ought to be, we can see that the subject who can only imagine they are pregnant can give an answer and still uphold the conditions of rationality and mutual disinterest.

However, the latter case, that of the *embodied* pregnant person, forces a transgression of the rules of the original position. Taking into account the corporeality of the pregnant person means coming to terms with compromise, being out of control, and considering the reality of shared space wherein more than one being must exist, where one being's actions inevitably effects the other's "plan of life". Such a view would radically alter current public policy and political institutions. We could no longer account

for carework, or dependency for that matter, as a mere preference or as an exception to the rule of autonomy. The ability to flourish depends on the care we receive from others, as well as the care we give to others, such that plans of life are inevitably intertwined. In a sense, we might say, there exists a shared plan of life in the pregnant subject. In the liberal tradition, communities and associations are often seen as rational choices we, as autonomous human beings, make about our lives. But we might also think of the pregnant body as a kind of community that, beyond the particular circumstances of conception, represents a more fundamental sociality. We begin to take form as human beings within a community of sorts, or in a kind of sociality. Given this fact, and the fact that pregnancy is a common experience for many people in the world, it doesn't seem preposterous to suggest that we are all relatively defined. Indeed we all begin life as a participant in the sociality of pregnancy. What is important here is that this is true by virtue of our corporeality, as well as the social conditions in which we live. If we incorporated this into a model of political personhood, the pregnant body could help us to rethink caring as an element of our humanity. The act of caring might then become more difficult to refuse; it would certainly be more difficult to devalue because it would be seen as a basic characteristic of what makes us human, rather than something we must do for those people who are somehow deficient and not able to care for themselves. By failing to take into account bodily knowledge and by requiring that all subjects be rational, autonomous, and mutually disinterested Rawls has necessarily placed a nonpregnant subject in the original position, thus obscuring certain (partly biological) human relationships of care and dependency that are fundamental to all persons in constitutional democracies.

Though I have just now been discussing the ways in which pregnancy is an exception to a rule and how the pregnant subject provides us with a particularly powerful position from which to challenge the Rawlsian conception of the self, I do think the model of

the pregnant subject explored here more closely approximates the existence of all of us, pregnant and nonpregnant alike, than does the rational individual model. In this way, I think it might be useful for us to begin to think of ourselves through that lens, exploring the ways in which our rational plans of life are complicated by both our social and corporeal reality.

Thinking of ourselves through that lens does not mean that we can all imagine ourselves as pregnant persons and thus can “know” what it is like to be pregnant. However, what I am suggesting we do is think about how the pregnant subject that I have articulated might better capture our corporeality, or might better capture how we should think of ourselves as democratic citizens. Perhaps care and dependency are not best thought of as means to our ends, but are instead better thought of as part of what makes us uniquely human. After all, what distinguishes human beings from animals is not that we are simply rational, but rather that we possess both rationality and animality (Nussbaum 2002: 189). Moreover, what is remarkable about personhood is that rationality and animality are interrelated. This fact seems particularly apparent in the pregnant body.

There are two ways in which the pregnant subject can help us think through care and dependency as fundamental aspects of our humanity. We can see the pregnant body as an entity that is constituted by both dependency and care; in this way, it can help us see how the continuation and flourishing of human life is made possible by the care we both give and receive.

The pregnant body can also help us to think about identities that are primarily defined by either care or dependence. We cannot say that there is equality between the pregnant woman and the fetus, though there is a level of reciprocity. But as Kittay shows us, equality in terms of capability, rationality, and autonomy, doesn’t exist in the real world either; dependence, especially severe dependence, is a fact of political

life that we must attend to in our political theories and practices.

Finally, taking up the pregnant subject as an alternative to the rational individual model of personhood allows us to transgress three primary boundaries found in Western political thought. First, as I have just stated above, the pregnant subject complicates the mind/body distinction. Second, maternity, as represented by the pregnant body, renders the boundaries between the self and the other blurred, contestable, and constantly shifting. Third, taking up the pregnant subject in this way helps us to interrogate the assumption that the body is not relevant to political theory, and it disrupts the boundary that currently exists between the two.

Practices and relationships of care and dependency must comport with our self-understandings if they are to be valued and not dismissed by society. An ethic of care is not likely to be adopted unless we have a conception of personhood that takes both the mind and the body seriously, such that the latter brings into view both power and vulnerability we have not yet explored. It may be the case that there are other models that can help us to see caring and dependency as it relates to our rational and our corporeal selves, and I certainly think other areas should be explored. I hope that I have at least convinced the reader, however, that the pregnant body is a site worthy of more exploration and possessing potential for bringing the mind and the body into a more intimate and equal relationship in our conceptions of personhood, as well as in the field of political theory.

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