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Care Working Conditions: The Ethics and Politics of Social Reproductive Labor from Aristotle to Marxist Feminism

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CARE WORKING CONDITIONS:
THE ETHICS AND POLITICS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTIVE LABOR
FROM ARISTOTLE TO MARXIST FEMINISM

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Andrew R. Van't Land

Lexington, Kentucky

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2020

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

CARE WORKING CONDITIONS: THE ETHICS AND POLITICS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTIVE LABOR FROM ARISTOTLE TO MARXIST FEMINISM

The spectre of an inescapably divided working class has haunted every generation of marxist theorists, including the latest wave of marxist feminists engaged in the research programme known as Social Reproduction Theory (SRT). In this dissertation, I will explain how Marx's clear theoretical debt to Aristotle extends into the marxist feminist analysis of social reproductive labor and of the exploitation, class interests, and normative demands which condition such care workers. I will demonstrate how SRT can follow Marx's own example in reading Aristotle, critically yet charitably, in order to resolve three problems. First, Aristotle's original concept of use value (built upon by marxist feminists) can help to clarify how exploitation is mediated through hierarchical sub-classes. Second, one version of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, which borrows from feminist care ethics, can offer marxist feminism a 'dialectical ethic': as contexts change, so too should one's requisite actions and feelings in order to keep a balanced character exemplifying liberatory virtues (e.g. care and justice) rather than reactionary vices (e.g. neglect and complicity). Third, Aristotle's nuanced concept of the common good (despite its problematic hierarchicalism) can inform marxist feminism's liberatory strategy, which involves transforming and aligning both the external goods (e.g. material necessities) and internal goods (e.g. virtuous capabilities) of each subclass in a patriarchal racialized class system.

KEYWORDS: Feminism, Marxism, Aristotle, Virtue Ethics, Exploitation, Common Good

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DEDICATION

To Julianne, whose endless care work has made this all possible.
To Evelyn and Rowan, who continue to teach me how to care for them.
To all who have cared for me: teachers, colleagues, family, & friends.

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Although the following dissertation is an original work in the technical sense of the term (i.e. fulfilling the academy's criterion of scholarly ingenuity), in a metaphysical sense it is very obviously dependent on the intellectual labor of many scholars and teachers.

I'm grateful to a number of faculty members at the University of Kentucky, especially my committee. Dr. Arnold Farr taught me marxist critical theory, inspired me by his extra-academic political *praxis*, and offered me guidance in my idiosyncratic research project. Dr. Eric Sanday taught me ancient philosophy within a rich context of poetry and religious texts and offered extensive feedback from careful readings of my work. Dr. Julia Bursten taught me the philosophy of science, helped me think through the ontological issues in marxist materialism in an independent study, and gave detailed notes on my work. And Dr. Srimati Basu generously agreed to assist me (a departmental outsider with no formal training in gender or women's studies) and shared both her knowledge and concerns about using class analysis to situate gendered oppression.

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INTRODUCTION

The text you are reading is mine, but it is not my own; it was bought with a price. No, not bought—stolen: a product of exploitation, oppression, and alienation. It represents hundreds upon hundreds of hours of unpaid care work by my wife Julianne, who (due to our nation’s infrastructural failures) had to put her own life projects on hold to solo-parent and homeschool our children full time, in order to allow me to complete the research manifested in this project. It represents all the graduate school rejections, college loan denials, high school expulsions, and underfunded elementary school experiences which conspired to keep an unknown student of color from receiving the graduate assistantship that instead allowed me—a middle class white male—to earn a higher degree. But it also represents the frankly unliveable wages which even the best among neoliberal universities offer to ‘privileged’ graduate student workers such as myself, in exchange for teaching the same number of classes as their senior colleagues among the tenured faculty (not including the additional moonlighting jobs which only slightly offset the requisite student loans). These are social problems which far outstrip the agency of any individual, myself included. And yet, to varying degrees, we are all complicit. But these gradations of complicity indicate the lurking presence of social structures which sort us into different positionalities. While social interactions need not be zero-sum dynamics, hierarchy produces anergic (rather than synergic) conditions. When the needs and abilities of some are overvalued, they become privileges and powers at the expense of the marginalized and powerless. This antagonism even manifests fractally within segmented subaltern groups.

The specter of an irreconcilably divided working class has haunted every

generation of marxist theorists. This includes the latest wave of marxist feminists engaged in the research programme known as Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), who examine how identity-based hierarchies (with materialist roots) undermine working class solidarity and revolutionary potential by partially privileging and empowering some workers at the expense of others. In this dissertation, I will explain how Marx's clear theoretical debt to Aristotle extends into the marxist feminist analysis of social reproductive labor and the exploitation, class interests, and normative demands which condition such care workers. I will demonstrate how SRT can follow Marx's own example in reading Aristotle critically yet charitably in order to better theorize: (1) how exploitation is mediated through hierarchical sub-classes, (2) how the interpersonal virtue of care functions as an exploitative vice from the perspective of marxist feminism's justice ethics, and (3) how a democratic common good might be constructed to resolve the conflicting interests of productive and reproductive sub-classes within the great chain of exploitation which constitutes a patriarchal class society, whether ancient slavery or contemporary capitalism.

The past decade of late capitalism has constituted a breaking point in the post-Cold War neoliberal consensus. The Great Recession of 2008 dispelled the bourgeois myth that class status is an insignificant factor of social injustice compared to identitarian oppressions on the basis of gender, race, sexuality, ability, etc. The 2016 and 2020 U.S. presidential elections featured a self-declared socialist candidate, who drew both mass coalitional support and also criticism for being yet another white male supposedly peddling white male grievance (itself a major force driving Trump to an electoral victory).

Yet the Trump era has shown clearly that the working class is not (and never has

been) a predominantly white male demographic, but is instead a highly gendered and racialized pool of exploitable—and thus organizable—labor. Women, especially women of color, have organized a wave of public school teachers' strikes, occupations of ICE detention centers filled with imprisoned immigrant laborers, the #MeToo feminist movement against sexual assault (primarily in the workplace), and Black Lives Matter protests, marches, and uprisings. The latest generation of marxist feminists have viewed these developments not as disparate advancements for women and non-binary people, but rather as different fronts in a class war against patriarchal capitalism. And increasingly, they explain this system with the conceptual tools of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT).

Although marxists feminists have made great strides in theorizing the social reproductive labor which preconditions exploitable wage work, several significant contradictions have surfaced within social reproduction theory (SRT) which I will enumerate below. I argue that SRT might resolve these tensions by engaging with Aristotle's social and political insights not in spite of but because he remains perhaps the foremost theoretical proponent of patriarchy and slavery. Since Aristotle is a significant influence upon Karl Marx (and by extension marxist feminism), SRT has the opportunity to consider how social reproductive care work functions within Aristotle's understanding of his own patriarchal class society.

Firstly, I argue that Aristotle's economic concepts of *use value* and *exchange value* (especially as different modes of surplus value) can elucidate the nature of mediated exploitation which appears to characterize the relationship between an indirectly exploited social reproductive worker and directly exploited productive worker. The idea of use value

is particularly important for understanding how the post-industrial U.S. has shifted to a service economy. The emotional labor and care work which has often characterized home life and a secondary sector of the labor market (consisting of disproportionately Black, Latina, and Asian women) in the process of becoming the predominant type of wage work. While this type of labor is more concrete in certain ways, insofar as service work directly provides use values, it is abstract in others, insofar as its use values are largely consumed by other workers, who produce surplus exchange values to be extracted by the ruling class. Survival and subsistence are once again the primary life-functions for a majority of citizens and residents in the ‘developed’ world. This deliberate historical regression invites economic insights not only from Marx’s 19th-century capitalist society but also from Aristotle’s patriarchal slave society in ancient Greece. In the first chapter, I draw an analogy between mediated exploitation in the ancient world (viz. the wife’s positionality between the patriarch and the slave) and in contemporary capitalism (viz. the productive laborer’s positionality between the capitalist bourgeoisie and the growing ranks of social reproductive workers). I conclude that the privileged and marginalized layers of the working class are both exploited, and that class-based solidarity is possible between them.

Secondly, I argue that Aristotle’s ethical concepts of *virtue* and *vice* (in dialogue with some feminist care ethicists who frame care as a virtue) can be used by marxist feminists to articulate a ‘dialectical’ personal ethics which can resolve theoretical contradictions through praxis over time. Because marxist feminism focuses on macrostructural injustices which can be rectified only through collective action, it leaves the individual moral agent without a substantive moral imperative deeper than avoiding

microaggressions on the one hand or supporting collective struggles against macrostructural injustices on the other. While these conditions are necessary for embodying marxist feminist values, they are insufficient. The former prefigures liberation as an inherently good end but only at an interpersonal level, while the latter configures liberation as a means to eventually construct goodness at the social level. The connection between these two scales is the individual moral agent (e.g. a radicalized care worker) who faces both concrete relational commitments and abstract social duties. Social reproductive labor illustrates this tension: care work functions as a benevolent virtue when viewed at the interpersonal scale, but as an exploitation-enabling vice when viewed at the socio-systemic scale. Although marxist feminism is consequentialist (valuing ‘impact over intent’), the most controllable factor in the liberation struggle to abolish patriarchal racialized capitalism is each political subject’s character motives. Although marxist feminism has not produced a properly normative ethical theory, it has a long tradition of prescribing character growth to its adherents. For instance, communist organizer Rosa Luxemburg exhorted class-conscious workers to cultivate self-discipline and ‘socialist civic virtues’. Bolshevik feminist Alexandra Kollontai called upon the men and women of the working class to develop egalitarian relationships to replace the hierarchical relations exemplified in traditional marriages and families. Black Panther Shirley Williams drew up a moral code of revolutionary discipline for the movement’s children (as well as adults) who were drawn in by the Party’s famous breakfast program. And the Black lesbian socialists of the Combahee Workers Collective called for different but (hopefully) convergent modes of self-criticism and self-discipline for radicals of color and their (often chauvinistic) white fellow travellers. The specific nature of

character-building varies according to the moral community's hierarchical positionalities (along the axes of class, race, gender, sexuality, etc). I argue that marxist feminists must articulate a dialectical ethic which can account for such undertheorized norms. I conclude that a combination of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics and the feminist ethic of care can provide marxist feminists with a theory which balances between the particular and universal, the relative and the absolute, motives and consequences, and egoism and altruism.

Thirdly, I will argue that marxist feminism implicitly endorses Aristotle's political concept of the *common good*: even though this appears to function ideologically to justify exploitation, it actually functions dialectically as the shifting horizon of shared interests between different (sub)classes. In the wake of the 2008 financial crash and subsequent government bailout of only the wealthy ruling class, thousands of protesters in countless cities chanted "We are the 99%!" This rallying cry of the 2011 Occupy Wall Street demonstrations posited a common economic interest among nearly all sectors of the nation (in fact, a multitude of nations). However, after this mass movement was crushed by the state, leftists reconsidered its coalitional strategy. Some continued using this rhetoric and coalesced around the social democratic campaigns of Bernie Sanders. However, others criticized this movement as economistic and 'class reductionist,' claiming that it sacrificed the particular interests of oppressed subalterns to the 'lowest common denominator' interests of the (white) majority of the populace. Debates raged about whether, for instance, 'Medicare for All' or 'Black Reparations' was a more effective strategy for rectifying economic inequities (which vary according to the amount of wealth historically stolen by

the ruling class).¹ After two cycles of such disagreements, social reproduction theorists Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser published a book called “Feminism for the 99%.” Reflecting on their own political *praxis* in organizing the International Women’s Strike, Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser speculated what would take to create an intersectional movement which respects particular needs of the special oppressed while acknowledging the need for mass movements. Their nuanced approach toward coalitions (in light of class, gender, race, and sexuality) entails that a common good is not a given; instead, it must be constructed. I argue that, in order to account philosophically for a strategy of solidarity across the often gendered and racialized gap between productive and social reproductive workers, marxist feminists can re-appropriate the Aristotelian model of the common good.

¹ Gray, 1.

CHAPTER 1. MEDIATED EXPLOITATION: SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND LABOR ARISTOCRACY

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine how any class society—that is, a society striated by a ruling class and an exploited working class—relies on the creation of hierarchically organized and mutually antagonistic subclasses. This often takes the form of a division of labor between *production*, which is the human generation of use values or exchange values, and *social reproduction*, which is the regeneration of the capacity to produce value. Social reproduction is both a specific type of production and also the precondition for all types of production. It may seem odd to counterpose a genus (production) with a species (social reproduction). However, this distinction is meant to convey the difference between that labor which is the cause of human labor power (i.e. reproduction) and that labor which is the effect of actualized human labor power (i.e. production). According to marxist feminists, this division of labor is a major cause not only of gender differentiation and the patriarchal power structuring but also of class formation and the opposition of economic interests.¹

Marxist feminists maintain that the main obstacle to solidarity among subclasses (a phenomenon referred to as ‘dividing the working class’) is not the identitarian protests of marginalized subalterns, who are often super-exploited.² Rather, it is the temptation for

¹ Vogel, 170.

² While the term “super-exploited” lacks rhetorical sophistication, it is a technical term used since the 1970s by marxist feminists such as Marlene Dixon and anti-imperialist such as Ruy Mauro Marini.

those workers inhabiting relatively privileged socio-economic positionalities to identify with their exploiters rather than with their fellow workers.³

These subclass functions are often indexed to identity markers, such as race, nationality, and especially gender, which produce the multiply-oppressed subjects studied by intersectionality theory.⁴ However, this proliferation of compound identities (including aspects such as race, sexuality, ability, nationality, etc.) has revealed a new theoretical problem. If these aspects cross-cut one another, then the result is a sparsely populated absolute subaltern category (e.g. disabled, undocumented, working-class lesbians of color), a sparsely populated absolute dominant category (e.g. abled, documented, wealthy cis het white men), with a massively populated intermediate category consisting of those oppressed in some aspects and dominant in others. In theory, if enough (hierarchalized) identity aspects and subgroupings are introduced, the exponential result would be a global population entirely atomized according to micro-positionalities and totally differentiated interests. Such individuals would have no material or ideological basis on which to strategically organize themselves to produce systemic change, because nearly all of them would benefit in at least some way from the status quo. Such subdivisions can make solidarity—the confluence of interests—nearly impossible. Tithi Bhattacharya presents the apparent problem experienced by marxists who are marginalized by gender or race:

³ The marxist tradition contains an ongoing debate about the status of privileged members of the working class. The more pessimistic view contends that they constitute a ‘labor aristocracy’ who inescapably share interests with the ruling class against those of more oppressed workers (E.O. Wright, 115; Delphy, 15; Barbalet, 133-34; Sakai, 25).

⁴ Collins, 28.

“[B]ecause white workers in the Global North typically earn more than workers of color, there can never be common grounds of struggle uniting them, as the very real, material, empirically documented difference between them will always fuel white racism. The same can be said about the real material differences between men and women. What is interesting about these very real situations is that to try to challenge them within the context set by capitalism—or capitalist reality—would have two consequences: either *failure* (for example, as in the numerous historical instances where sexism and/or racism overwhelm or choke the workers’ movement) or a political strategy that seeks to overcome such differences of race/gender between workers by *moral appeals*, asking people to ‘do the right thing’ even if it is not in their immediate interest to do so.”⁵

Yet Bhattacharya ultimately rejects this pessimistic dilemma by calling for workers from all different strata to join forces in solidarity to overcome both the competitive individualism of the labor market and the oppressive hierarchization of social identities. As she writes, “Strategic organizing on the basis of such a vision can reintroduce the idea that an injury to [one] is actually an injury to all.”⁶ However, this theoretical basis for *praxis* assumes a convergence of interests which is not yet sufficiently provided by the branch of marxist feminism known as Social Reproduction Theory (SRT). In my third chapter, I will elaborate on the requisite conditions for such solidarity. In this chapter, I will articulate the socio-economic obstacles which preclude it.

There has recently been a critical reappropriation of second-wave marxist feminist analyses of the domestic division of labor and the unwaged labor which preconditions wage work. This has involved revisiting the 1970s ‘domestic labor debate’ between the orthodox dual systems theory (DST) and the heterodox unitary system theory (UST).⁷ The DST school insisted that feminine-coded domestic labor reproduces use values which are

⁵ Bhattacharya, 14-15, emphasis added.

⁶ Bhattacharya, 89-90.

⁷ Vogel, 152; Weeks, 118.

extracted directly by a gendered ruling class (viz. men as husbands). The UST school disagreed: such feminized housework does produce use value in the specific form of labor power (e.g. the capacity of a husband to work his waged job), but the ultimate form of actualized labor power is extractable exchange value. For the purposes of my analysis, it is rather irrelevant whether DST or UST is true, because—unlike many of the theorists cited—I am not trying to explain the emergence of gender or patriarchy. Instead, I am trying to explain mediated exploitation and how it creates and hierarchically structures subclasses, often on the basis of identity factors such as gender, race, or ability. What is important about the UST-DST split is how each theory safeguards an indispensable value: DST insists on intersectional sensitivity and UST insists on intra-class solidarity.

Marxist feminists have used the theoretical insights of SRT to explain the hidden gendered (and racialized and sexualized) forms of exploitation beneath the wage labor market, and they have wielded SRT practically to strategize liberation through direct actions such as those organized by the Wages for Housework movement in the 1970s and the International Women's Strike in recent years.⁸

The first generation of SRT resolved the problem of intra-working-class solidarity by positing that although gender relations (like other identity-based dynamics) are indeed sites of economic value-extraction, this class conflict does not map neatly onto the male-female binary. According to Silvia Federici, the systemic function of the division of labor between masculinized production and feminized social reproduction is to

⁸ Although the same phenomena of domestic labor have been examined by other subfields (e.g. feminist economics), SRT's explanatory model is distinctive both for its historical materialist presuppositions and for its commitment to revolutionary *praxis* (including yet exceeding the policy reforms implied by more liberal research programmes).

hierarchically divide the working class to keep all wages low. The fact that marginalized and privileged laborers usually both seek higher pay implies that they share a common interest in resisting capital and therefore potentially have mutual solidarity.⁹

However, while the first generation of SRT dealt primarily with the nexus of capitalism and patriarchy, the second generation has compounded that intersection by foregrounding racism, colonialism, cisheteropatriarchy, and even ageism.¹⁰ The second generation of SRT has attempted to navigate “the rise of ‘identity politics’ [and] the decentering of class” which has characterized the “postsocialist” condition of leftist theory and *praxis* in the neoliberal era.¹¹ By wielding the key concept of social reproduction, recent SRT theorists have attempted to connect the political demands for economic redistribution and social recognition (i.e. civil rights). SRT insists that historical materialism exceeds intersectionality theory in its ability to account for overlapping oppressions—for instance, the positionality of a female care worker of color.¹² However, despite its major sociological contributions, the latest wave of marxist feminist SRT has not yet adequately explained the dynamics of *mediated exploitation*: i.e., precisely identifying the culpability for the extracted surplus value at each node of the economic hierarchy.¹³

⁹ Federici, 55, 73.

¹⁰ Inspired by the 2013 revised publication of Lise Vogel’s *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (1983), a recent collection edited by Tithi Bhattacharya called *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Classing, Recentering Oppression* (2017) illustrates the latest and more intersectional wave of SRT. In it, Susan Ferguson and Serap Saritas Oran focus on age, Alan Sears writes about queer sexuality, Bhattacharya herself examines nationality, and David McNally surveys different theories of intersectionality.

¹¹ Fraser (1997), 2.

¹² McNally, 108-110; Collins, 26.

¹³ While this materialist conception of socio-economic culpability may appear to be unduly structuralist (and thus deterministic), I will offer a complementary account of subjective agency in Chapter 2. Ultimately I follow Naila Kabeer in trying to navigate a *via media* between the individual-based voluntarism of liberal ethics or mainstream economics and the systemic determinism of structuralist sociology (Kabeer, 326-7).

This lacuna has implications for the theoretical possibility of cross-subclass solidarity. I propose that, in order to resolve the conceptual problem presented by working class hierarchical subdivisions, marxist feminists follow Karl Marx's own example by reading Aristotle's economic texts.¹⁴ In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle reflects on an abstract and derivative mode of value distinct from consumptive 'use value', a concept which becomes known as 'exchange value.' For Marx's own theorizing, exchange value becomes an integral component in the critique of capitalism, because capitalism is the only classist mode of production geared toward producing exchange values rather than use values.¹⁵ SRT marxist feminists have disagreed about whether social reproductive labor directly produces exploitable exchange value, or whether it produces those use values which enable others to produce exploitable exchange values. I propose that Aristotle's examination of a different mode of production—one in which use values are more visible—can illuminate the contemporary economic relationship between productive and social reproductive laborers. I argue that contrasting the Aristotelian model of a culturally embedded economy with modern capitalism's culturally disembedded economy can help SRT better understand the mechanism by which a division of labor produces a division of interests.

¹⁴ Roll, 20. George McCarthy writes: "Marx is repulsed by the despotic and authoritarian structure of this ancient economy based on the domination of women and slaves. However, Aristotle's economic theory does provide the foundation stone for his later economics in *Capital*" (McCarthy, 11).

¹⁵ The type of exchange value that Marx is most interested in is the *wage*, the supposedly equal transaction of some of a worker's labor power for a portion of a capitalist's wealth (Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 128). While wage labor existed in the ancient world, it was peripheral to the ubiquitous form of production: slave labor, which was (obviously) unwaged.

It is counter-intuitive (to say the least) to recommend that marxist feminist SRT looks to Aristotle's work for insights into the nature of mediated exploitation: Aristotle is one of history's most infamous ideological apologists for patriarchy and slavery.¹⁶ Yet I argue that, insofar as marxism is already theoretically indebted to Aristotle, Aristotle's analysis of the ancient hierarchical *oikos* can serve as a microcosmic model in which to track how mediated exploitation works in a patriarchal class society.¹⁷ In *Politics*, Aristotle depicts the ancient household (*oikos*) as a gendered class structure, which marxist feminists would analyze as consisting of productive and social reproductive domestic labor performed by slaves and wives.

I suggest that the Aristotelian role of housewife should continue to interest marxist feminists even in the post-nuclear-family paradigm of the 21st century. Even though the housewife is no longer the most relevant exemplar of social reproductive labor, historic variations of the housewife role have often occupied an intermediate positionality on the chain of extraction. I propose that the ancient *oikos* provides a compelling contrast case to first-generation SRT's model of the nuclear housewife: in another (older) mode of production, social reproduction can instead be performed by a man (e.g. the slave) for a woman (e.g. the wife). Precisely because the socio-economic positionality of the ancient

¹⁶ Coole, 19; Okin, 74; Saxonhouse, 63; Elshtain, 41.

¹⁷ Despite his obvious critique of the latter's hierarchicalism, Marx praises "the brilliancy of Aristotle's genius" (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 541) and refers to him as "the greatest thinker of antiquity" (Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 532). Even Marx's critique is blunted by historicism: "If a giant thinker like Aristotle erred in his appreciation of slave labour, why should a dwarf economist like Bastiat be right in his appreciation of wage labour?" (Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 175). In traversing intellectual history, it is not my intention to discover and defend a less sexist and less classist Aristotle (although there are scholars who have pursued such a hermeneutic project). Rather, I am simply reading Aristotle both as the most representative theorist of his era's class structure and as the first (proto)economist to articulate the two modes of value which explain the socio-material conditions of the *polis* (composed of *oikoi*).

housewife differs from contemporary female workers, it can illuminate both the different possible intersections of gender and class and the constant structure of mediated exploitation.

In the Aristotelian *oikos*, the obvious exploiter is the patriarch, whose freedom from the burden of labor is reliant on the exploitative work of both his slaves and his wife, who manages the slaves. I will employ the Aristotelian (and later marxist) concepts of use value and exchange value in order to explain how the managerial wife's own labor power depends upon the social reproductive labor of her slaves. As a domestic worker, the archetype of the housewife represents mediated exploitation—a primary obstacle to both working class solidarity and the possibility of constructing a classless common good. Yet I will demonstrate that even the privileged subclass of housewives in antiquity, which is reliant on the reproductive labor of slaves, is not itself technically part of the exploitative ruling class, which is composed entirely of patriarchs. I will propose that this conclusion has significant bearing on how to theorize about the possibility of shared interests and solidarity between the productive and reproductive subclasses, especially when they are oppressed according to gender or other identity aspects.¹⁸

1.2 Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism is a normative project dedicated to dismantling both class-based economic exploitation (i.e. capitalism) and gender-based socio-political oppression

¹⁸ Nancy Fraser points out that calls for coalition-building between different interest groups are hopeless so long as they merely advocate “additive combinations among already formed constituencies” rather than advocating “novel social arrangements that could transform the identities and harmonize the interests of diverse, currently fragmented constituencies” (Fraser [1997], 4).

(i.e. patriarchy). Its proponents are both empowered and imperiled by being situated at the intersection of two political traditions: marxism and feminism. Because these two traditions often have divergent understandings of concepts such as gender and class, they also employ different definitions of evaluative concepts such as patriarchy and exploitation.¹⁹ Following the practice of Communist parties, many marxist feminists distinguish between (*special*) *oppressions* and *exploitation*. In this framing, *oppression* refers to the socio-political, intersubjective conditions of an individual (regardless of class) who is mistreated on the basis of their identity (along the lines of gender, race, sexuality, ability, etc.).²⁰ The special oppression which marxist feminists have focused on primarily is patriarchy. This is a term shared with most feminists since the Second Wave that identifies their structural nemesis: the nearly universal tendency to privilege and empower men and/or males above women and/or females. Materialist explanations can take very different forms, insofar as they disagree on whether patriarchy and class society form two different systems or one single system.²¹

Marxists define *exploitation* as the objective, material condition of a working-class (i.e. property-less) individual whose labor produces surplus value which is appropriated by a ruling-class property owner. For Marxists, *capitalism* is simply the latest form of exploitative class society, which has become a nearly global tendency to distribute the means of production as private property, to organize production through markets (both of

¹⁹ This is because—as both traditions emphasize—observation is theory-laden, and ‘factual’ descriptions often presuppose evaluations.

²⁰ This distinction is a later development in marxism, as Marx and Engels use the two terms interchangeably to describe and explain class structures (Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 474).

²¹ Delphy, 75; Mies (1998), 7-8; Manning, 7-8. Delphy is a dual-systems theorist, while Mies and Manning are unitary-system theorists.

workers competing for jobs and employers competing for customers), and to organize consumption largely as the (re)investment of profit (i.e. the surplus beyond subsistence). While all other modes of production function to produce a surplus of use values (e.g. stockpiles of grain), capitalism functions to produce a surplus of exchange values (e.g. stock market gains on the price of grain).²²

Marxist feminists have taken up these key economic concepts in order to explain the same phenomena that interests liberal feminists—gender, sexism, and patriarchy. By framing these in historical materialist terms, marxist feminists have argued that economic conditions have influenced and even determined women’s social positionalities throughout history.²³ These materialist explanations—and their respective liberatory strategies—can differ widely, depending on whether they conceptualize patriarchy and class society as two different systems or as one single system.²⁴ Since the New Left era of the 1970s, dual systems theory (DST) and unitary systems theory (UST) have grappled with how the gendered division of labor maintains the antagonism between the interests of masculinized productive workers and feminized reproductive workers.

1.3 Dual Systems Theory and Unitary System Theory

SRT began as a unitary system theory explaining the homogeneity of class exploitation and sexist patriarchy (as opposed to dual systems theory which conceptualizes

²² These other modes of production include not only slavery and feudalism but also ‘primitive’ communism and modern state socialism. I elaborate upon the crucial distinction between use value and exchange value below.

²³ Arruzza, 12; Bhattacharya, 5.

²⁴ As Shulamith Firestone reiterates, “Before we can act to change a situation... we must know how it has arisen and evolved” (Firestone, 2).

them as separate social structures). UST offers an explanation of how mediated exploitation organizes class interests in a merely contingent way, which makes a cross-positionality coalition possible. However, this is challenged by DST's compelling explanation of how interlocking oppressions function in an exploitative class system. For DST, patriarchy is a separate social structure from capitalism. Although patriarchy and capitalism reinforce each other, they are distinct—and this distinction is not simply between a superstructural epiphenomenon (patriarchy) and a material base (capitalism), but also between two distinct types of economic infrastructures. In the DST model, patriarchy is its own separate mode of production (viz. unpaid domestic labor), operating in parallel to capitalism.²⁵ For DST theorist Christine Delphy, the key structure for womanhood is wifehood, which she defines as a socio-economic class that is distinct from and exploitatively subordinate to husbandhood.²⁶ As Juliet Mitchell argues, these two socio-economic structures are distinguished conceptually and functionally, if not materially: the woman's condition of being exploited and oppressed (perhaps by the same man) constitutes a "complex—not a simple—unity."²⁷

Among DST's most convincing premises is the fact that patriarchy historically precedes capitalism, which suggests that their relationship is not a necessary correlation (let alone identity).²⁸ The dual systems approach takes its cue from Marx's intellectual partner

²⁵ Delphy, 73; Hartmann, 3. According to Gibson-Graham, "Noncapitalism is found in the household, the place of woman, related to capitalism through service and complementarity... it appears as a pre-capitalist mode of production... [and] it appears as socialism" (Gibson-Graham, 7).

²⁶ Delphy, 72.

²⁷ Juliet Mitchell identifies the four overdetermining structures of this complex unity as: "Production, Reproduction, Sex, and Socialisation of Children" (Mitchell, 26).

²⁸ Arruzza, 11.

Friedrich Engels, who applied the methodology of historical materialism to the existence of patriarchy in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.²⁹ Engels explains how class property relations and the gendered division of labor are historical privations of an earlier matriarchal collectivism.³⁰ For DST adherents, even though modern women's domestic labor reproduces the entire class structure (i.e. capitalism), its chief beneficiaries are not distant capitalists but rather the local men of the house. DST proponent Heidi Hartmann warns that any 'marriage' between marxism and feminism will ultimately suppress women's liberation in favor of economic revolution, because women's exploitation (i.e. patriarchal oppression as an economic dynamic) is actually in men's interests.³¹

However, another current of theorists have upheld marxist feminism not only as a viable theory but as a praxis which can construct working-class solidarity across gender lines. Social Reproduction Theory developed primarily within UST, which holds that patriarchy and capitalism are simply two aspects of the selfsame social system, which oppresses and exploits women and gender non-conforming individuals.³² For UST, patriarchy is not itself a distinct gendered mode of production as with DST (let alone a self-reproducing ideological system, as asserted by certain liberal feminisms). The corollary claim is that not all men are exploiters and not all women are exploited.³³ UST insists that (in Hartmann's critical description), in spite of "the appearance that women are working for

²⁹ Bezanson and Luxton, 26-27.

³⁰ Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, 739.

³¹ Hartmann, 5. She famously warns that for marxist feminists, "marxism and feminism are one, and that one is marxism" (Hartmann, 2).

³² Mies (1988), 37-38.

³³ Arruzza, 9.

men privately in the home,” it is actually the case that “women work for capital” instead of for their male partners.³⁴ UST theorists MariaRosa Dalla Costa and Selma James describe the home as “a colony governed by indirect rule” of capital, and that the housewife “is the slave of a waged slave.”³⁵ This view implies that patriarchy is indeed a system of exploitation, but one which is internally essential for a class society’s dominant mode of production (e.g. capitalism).³⁶

Some unitary systems theorists helped to form the first generation of SRT, which offered its own explanation of mediated exploitation. In the 1970s, the international Wages for Housework campaign (launched by marxist feminists such as Dalla Costa, James, and Silvia Federici) attempted to demand payment for this unremunerated reproductive labor. Yet this demand was made not of their husbands and male partners (as DST might suggest), but rather of the capitalist state (which Marx and Engels call the executive committee of the ruling class).³⁷ Echoing Frantz Fanon, Dalla Costa and James warn that the exploited will fight each other if they do not fight their mutual exploiter.³⁸ Because it permitted inter-gender solidarity among male and female workers, WFH was described as the “most controversial” development of the women’s liberation movement.³⁹

Moreover, WFH activists in the first generation of SRT were criticized for a type of white feminism which does not address the experiences and interests of many multiply-oppressed people (e.g. working class women of color). By contrast, second

³⁴ Hartmann, 6.

³⁵ Dalla Costa and James, 56, 58.

³⁶ Arruzza, 7.

³⁷ Federici, 9, 12; Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 475.

³⁸ Dalla Costa and James, 57.

³⁹ Federici, 54. Yet even Heidi Hartmann (a DST proponent) applauded the WFH campaign for raising leftist consciousness about the significance of domestic labor (Hartmann, 7-8).

generation SRT examines the degree to which identitarian oppression and economic exploitation can be explained through the thematic of social reproduction (and especially social reproductive labor). This was seen in practice in March 2018 in the International Women’s Strike. This action (organized by SRT theorists Tithi Bhattacharya, Cinzia Arruzza, Nancy Fraser, and others) was a deliberate radicalization of the liberal feminist tendencies of the earlier Women’s March, which had been criticized for ignoring the classed, raced, and queered aspects of women’s oppression.⁴⁰ Because recent SRT proponents attempt to provide a more intersectional analysis than their Second Wave feminist foremothers, they may appear to endorse DST rather than UST. However, by wielding historical materialism’s dialectical understanding of oppressive systems as being internally contradictory rather than externally conflictual, recent contributions to SRT avoid the additive atomism of intersectionality theories such as DST.⁴¹

However, despite its improvements, recent SRT still shares DST’s main theoretical weakness: the fragmentation problem. Arruzza recognizes this, insisting that “diversity must become our weapon, rather than an obstacle or something that divides us.”⁴² Movements such as the International Women’s Strike demonstrate the possibility of building a multicultural united front against capitalism. However, because these aspects of oppression (e.g. gender identity, race, sexuality, ability, nationality, etc.) are explained by SRT at least in part by their economic roles in social reproduction, there is an exponential proliferation of possible positionalities within the great chain of extraction. The multiple variations within this “complex unity” deconstruct the binary distinction between the ‘labor

⁴⁰ Bhattacharya, 19; Arruzza (2017), 192, 195.

⁴¹ Arruzza (2017), 195-196; McNally, 99.

⁴² Arruzza (2017), 196.

aristocratic' privileged workers and the multiply-oppressed super-exploited workers.⁴³ Yet this analytical complication makes solidarity less, not more, possible: the model now contains countless minute differentials between the more exploited (and thus less exploitative) and the less exploited (and thus more exploitative).

In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that Aristotle's proto-economic insights can help SRT to reframe the value of social reproductive labor in order to determine the degree of complicity borne by a labor aristocracy (whatever its class boundaries may be). I will examine how the mode of exploitation—effectuated through the division of labor—hierarchically divides workers' interests according to how they consume in relation to what they (re)produce.

1.4 Social Reproduction

While 19th century orthodox marxism focused on manual labor and commodity production and 20th century Western marxism focused on desire and consumption, contemporary marxist feminists focus on the *social reproduction* of value-producing human labor power itself. Social reproduction is the most interesting type of production to marxist feminists, because it is classed and gendered (and often also racialized, sexualized, and 'able-ized'). Marxist feminists redefine Marx's philosophical anthropology by rendering human beings not primarily as the productive laboring animal, but the *reproductive* laboring animal.

⁴³ McNally, 110. This dialectical type of systems thinking (which is obvious in Marx's more Hegelian texts) gives the lie to critiques by anti-marxists such as Gibson-Graham, who insists that capitalism is not hegemonic but rather "at loose ends with itself" (Gibson-Graham, ix).

Although the concept of social reproduction is broader than that of *domestic labor*, it often takes the form of unpaid care work which is often performed by a woman in her family's home.⁴⁴ However, as Lise Vogel emphasizes, the essential attribute of social reproduction is *the replenishment of labor power*. Labor power, in turn, is the "capacity for useful labor" which is "consumed" via the process of production.⁴⁵ Social reproduction (using a broad definition) can take three forms: the daily replenishment of an individual's ability to work, the intergenerational replenishment of the workforce en masse, and the wholistic perpetuation of the mode of production of the entire society.⁴⁶ Federici narrows the concept to *social reproductive labor*: the set of tasks (typically performed in a familial home) which are necessary to sustain a productive laborer to return to their paid job. Such social reproductive labor was typically the role of a housewife who cooked, cleaned, and performed affective labor for her wage-working husband, and gestated, birthed, and cared for her children—the next generation of laborers.⁴⁷

Increasingly, however, these tasks have been deterritorialized and reterritorialized within the waged labor market.⁴⁸ Today, a woman's social reproductive labor often involves caring for additional productive wage workers: her elderly but still employed parent, her working adult child who still lives with her, and especially for herself.⁴⁹ This last

⁴⁴ Bezanson and Luxton, 32; Arruzza, 21. Laslett and Brenner provide a standard (though limited and contestable) definition of social reproduction: "the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally... includ[ing] various kinds of work—mental, manual, and emotional" (Laslett and Brenner, 382-83).

⁴⁵ Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 283; Vogel, 138.

⁴⁶ Hartmann, 6; Vogel, 27, 158-69; Federici, 5; Bhattacharya, 6.

⁴⁷ Federici, 49. However, the nuclear family as a unit of reproduction was never very stable: capitalism has historically maintained women as a reserve army of labor who are sometimes forced to work outside the home as well as inside it (Dalla Costa and James, 54).

⁴⁸ Federici, 49.

⁴⁹ The 'self-care' which this involves is not leisurely personal indulgence, but rather the unpaid

responsibility is due to the neoliberal expectation that working class women should work a ‘double shift’: the unwaged second shift of domestic labor is the necessary preparation for the next day’s first shift at a waged job.⁵⁰

Social reproductive labor is one type of social reproduction, which is in turn one type of production. However, at the micro-level at which workers live their lives, production and reproduction often take on opposed yet complementary roles—even though the latter is technically one specific form of the former. In SRT’s framing, social reproduction and commodity production are merely two phases of a single, cyclical process.⁵¹ It is the very continuity of these aspects which makes it difficult for the marxist analysis of exploitation to track surplus value upwards through the economic hierarchy.

Federici argues that the traditional domestic division of labor between productive and reproductive labor is a bourgeois strategy to divide and conquer the working class along gender lines.⁵² Despite the interdependence of producers and reproducers, capital deviously divides such laborers between the ‘productive’ and the ‘non-productive,’ pitting the latter against the former as dependents who must earn their keep indirectly off the market.⁵³ Even though the capitalist economy’s entire labor force is (re)created by social reproductive labor (often in the form of unwaged housework), it often goes uncompensated

off-the-clock disciplines which are *de facto* job requirements of every worker, in order to prepare them to work. A worker’s sleep regimen, personal hygiene routine, meal plans, and commute all revolve around their job and must be tended to as if they were officially parts of it (James, 21).

⁵⁰ This has been the case for Black women for much longer, dating back to the U.S.’s slavery era (Davis, 238). Likewise, as Maria Mies writes, the integration of Indian women lace workers “into a world system of capital accumulation has not and will not transform them [fully] into free wage labourers. It is precisely this fact—their not being free wage-labourers, but housewives—which makes capital accumulation possible in this sector” (Mies [1981], 500).

⁵¹ Bhattacharya, 3.

⁵² Federici, 8.

⁵³ Federici, 36.

because it is seen as not producing value.⁵⁴ Capital keeps its labor costs low by relying on such unwaged labor as a precondition for the labor which is officially recognized in the formal waged economy. This illusion can be sustained only because the *exchange values* circulating in the market are ultimately dependent upon *use values* which are (re)produced and consumed elsewhere—often at home.

1.5 Use Value and Exchange Value

Marxist feminists insist that the standard description of value production (shared by many bourgeois and marxist economics) is superficially misleading, and they challenge the claim that a productive worker produces his own means of subsistence by himself. Instead, they argue, the productivity of such an exploited worker is often offloaded onto other (unseen) workers who support him by performing social reproductive labor, which produces surplus value in the form of either use value or exchange value.

These concepts of *use value* and *exchange value* are so foundational to the marxist theory of exploitation that Marx begins his very first chapter of *Capital* Volume I with a section concerning these two “factors of the commodity.”⁵⁵ Yet the genealogy of this conceptual pair long predates Marx, extending back through the bourgeois classical economists (e.g. Adam Smith and David Ricardo) beyond Scholasticism (e.g. St. Thomas Aquinas) all the way back to Aristotle, who first articulated the distinction between value in

⁵⁴ Dalla Costa and James, 43. Within SRT there has been a further debate about whether or not social reproductive labor produces exchange value in addition to producing use value. Benston and Vogel posit that the product of social reproductive labor is simply use value, while Dalla Costa, James, and Federici insist that it is exchange value (Hopkins, 131).

⁵⁵ Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 125.

use and value in exchange.⁵⁶ According to Marx, ‘use value’ is an attribute of some good or service which “satisfies human needs,” either “directly as a means of subsistence, i.e. an object of consumption, or indirectly as a means of production.”⁵⁷ Use value is the qualitative property of a good or service which is directly consumed to fulfill some need or want. By contrast, ‘exchange value’ is the additional quantitative property of such a good or service which renders it capable of being equally traded for another commodity or commodities.⁵⁸ Because exchange value operates indirectly as a means rather than directly as an end, it represents the distribution of goods rather than presenting a good for consumption.

Marxism accepts the common view that use values are produced by material conditions and by human labor which can transform such natural resources.⁵⁹ However, marxism takes a more counter-intuitive stance on exchange values by claiming that they can be produced by only one cause: human labor.⁶⁰ While every product has a use value, not every product also has an exchange value: thus, only certain types of consumable goods or services are commodities.⁶¹ And among these types of exchange-valued commodities, marxists are especially interested in one particular type: the only one with the

⁵⁶ Haney, 47.

⁵⁷ Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 125.

⁵⁸ Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 138. Marx writes that “use-values... are only commodities because they have a dual nature, because they are at the same time objects of utility and bearers of [exchange] value” (Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 138).

⁵⁹ Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 133-34.

⁶⁰ Marx notes that the bourgeois capitalist (a member of a distinct type of ruling class) seeks “to produce not only a use-value, but a commodity; not only use-value, but value; and not just value, but also surplus-value” (Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 293).

⁶¹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 267-268; Benston, 14; Mandel, 10-11.

capacity to create a surplus of exchange value in excess of the sum of its inputs. This commodity is human labor power.⁶²

In any economic system, a worker consumes (i.e. uses or exhausts) their own labor power to produce a *surplus value* above and beyond their own *means of subsistence*: the necessary conditions for living to work another day.⁶³ In a class society (such as patriarchal slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and even state socialism), some property owner claims the right to extract this surplus from the worker: that is, to exploit their productivity. Under capitalism, surplus value takes the form of exchange value: the commodities are produced precisely to be sold for profits (part of which are reinvested as capital), rather than to be used or even exchanged merely at cost. But in pre- or non-capitalist societies, human labor power typically has only use value, not exchange value. Like other types of exchange, labor markets often still exist in such economies (e.g. ancient Athens), but they do not constitute the dominant relation of production as under capitalism.

Aristotle lays out the idea of exchange value in a discussion on distributive justice: “[A]ll things that are exchanged must be somehow commensurable... All goods must therefore be measured by some one thing.”⁶⁴ This concept is abstracted from the more intuitive notion of use value which he describes in a discussion of external goods: “all things useful are useful for a purpose, and where there is too much of them they must either do harm, or at any rate be of no use.”⁶⁵ Paradoxically, Aristotle has been regarded as the father of two conflicting theories of exchange value: the labor theory (that commodity

⁶² *Labor power* is the potential to transform material things into new use values, while *labor* is the actualization of such a capacity (Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 283).

⁶³ Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 284, 325.

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1133a19-26; Haney, 47.

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Politics* VII.i 1323b7-9; Haney, 47; Gordon, 11.

prices are determined by the amount of labor necessary to produce them) and the utility theory (that commodity prices are determined by consumer demand on the market).⁶⁶ While Marx (as the paradigmatic labor theorist) adopts the former theory, he argues that the ubiquity of slave labor in antiquity blinded Aristotle to the fact that exchange value is ultimately determined not by consumer demand but by socially necessary labor.⁶⁷

For both Aristotle and marxist feminism, the economic concept of “value” must ultimately—however indirectly—refer to *use* value.⁶⁸ Unlike the modern capitalist economic system, the ancient Athenian economy described and prescribed by Aristotle was powered by the production, distribution, and consumption of concrete use values rather than abstract exchange values.⁶⁹ Accordingly, Aristotle’s economic thought subordinates exchange value to use value: the former is valuable only as a means to justly re-distribute the latter to a consumer.⁷⁰ While such normative approaches to economic issues were hegemonic for millenia, the rise of capitalism and the value-neutral rhetoric of bourgeois political economy have suppressed the axiological depth of market phenomena.

However, the marxist tradition (echoing Aristotle) has insisted that primary economic functions possess not only descriptive but also normative aspects. Exploitation corrupts every phase of the economic cycle: production, consumption, and distribution (of

⁶⁶ Gordon, 115.

⁶⁷ Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 151-2.

⁶⁸ This means that exchange value is derivative: the financial attempt to reify it inevitably results in speculative bubbles and crashes.

⁶⁹ Gallagher, 9-11.

⁷⁰ Aristotle denounces all interest-bearing investment as usury, which ‘unnaturally’ treats money as the end of an exchange rather than as the means of exchange (Aristotle, *Politics*, I.x 1258b2-7; Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 267). This is one instance of a more general Aristotelian principle: “Of everything which we possess there are two uses: both belong to the thing as such, but not in the same manner, for one is the proper, and the other the improper use of it” (Aristotle, *Politics* I.ix 1257a8-10).

which exchange is a type). Aristotle could not foresee the way that capitalism would reprogram the logic of production according to the marketplace language of exchange value. However, it would be wrong to conclude that Aristotle’s work therefore lacks any insight into the structural constants of how value functions within a class society. Indeed, Aristotle can be read as articulating an exploitative mode of production—patriarchal slavery—which produces a surplus consisting primarily of use values rather than of exchange values. Because marxist feminism (via Marx) employs these concepts in its critique of patriarchal capitalism, it will be helpful to understand how use value and exchange value function concretely in Aristotle’s classist, patriarchal lifeworld.

1.6 Home Economics in the Ancient *Oikos*

Under late capitalism, the term “economics” tends to signify unlimited (and, for Aristotle, unethical) profiteering through trading commodities which have abstract exchange values.⁷¹ While ancient Greek society certainly had markets, the dominant mode of production was not governed by labor market exchanges but rather by patriarchal slavery.⁷² Accordingly, the term “economics” is etymologically derived from *oikonomia*, the ancient Greek term for “household management.”⁷³

Oikonomia concerns the acquisition, production, and stewardship of goods and services with concrete use values within a hierarchical household, or *oikos*.⁷⁴ In ancient

⁷¹ McCarthy, 11; Haney, 45-6. For the sake of grammatical consistency, I will use the present tense throughout this chapter when referring not only to Aristotle’s writings but also to the social realities of his ancient Greek culture.

⁷² Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 172; Finley (1970), 24-25.

⁷³ This is Jowett’s translation of *oikonomikos*, which might also be translated as “household rule” (Aristotle, *Politics* I.ix 1257b19-22).

⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Politics* I.ix 1257b19-22, I.viii 1256b28-31; Marx, *Capital* Vol. I 253-54ff; Polanyi,

Athenian society, production and distribution were so deeply embedded in another social institution—the patriarchal family—that their domain could not be properly called an “economy” (in the modern disembodied sense of a reified, independent social institution called “the market”). Instead, economic functions were almost entirely embedded within this other domain: the *oikos*. Because such economies were functionally undifferentiated from family life, some recent social theorists hold that Aristotle and his peers do not think to conceptualize or explain it independently (at least not in any way which is significant by modern standards).⁷⁵ This interpretation provides additional historical support for SRT, which contends that even the disembodied economy constituting late-stage capitalism cannot divorce reproduction from production.

In inviting marxist feminists to revisit the ancient *oikos*, my intention is not to re-center the household as an economic unit of analysis; instead, I seek to analyze it as a microcosmic class economy which conditions (sub)class interests according to a particular mode of production and a particular mode of value-distribution. The ancient *oikos* displays all the socio-economic components of gendered class formation, sub-class antagonism, and mediated exploitation required for the application of SRT. (Moreover, because this oikonomic slave society has a class of social reproductive laborers who are not necessarily gendered feminine, this case can demonstrate how patriarchy is not necessarily coextensive with social reproduction).

68-69; Booth, 6. Aristotle writes, “The family is the association established by nature for the supply of men’s everyday wants” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b13-14).

⁷⁵ These include Karl Marx, Hannah Arendt, M.I. Finley, Joseph Schumpeter, and Karl Polanyi (Booth, 6-7).

As Aristotle explains in Book I of *Politics*, the archetypal Athenian *oikos* is a hierarchical household whose members include a husband, father, and master (or ‘patriarch’, for simplicity’s sake), his wife, his slaves, and his children.⁷⁶ Atop the chain of command, this free male patriarch serves multiple social roles—as citizen, as husband, as slave-master, and as father.⁷⁷ His wife (whom Engels calls the “chief housemaid”) serves as the second-in-command over their slaves, who perform the majority of productive and reproductive work.⁷⁸

As an empirical theorist, Aristotle develops his account of slavery (as of all other phenomena) based on his observations of the world as he finds it, which in ancient Athens is permeated with unfree labor.⁷⁹ His society prospers on the backs of slaves, many of whom serve craftsmen or the city-state, but some of whom serve private households.⁸⁰ Because the ancient *oikos* is a unit of production, and most of its constituent laborers are slaves, their work is undoubtedly productive of surplus use value. However, slaves also perform social reproductive labor in order to replenish not only their own labor power, but also that of the wife in her productive function as household manager.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Aristotle writes that “the first and fewest possible parts of a family are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children” (Aristotle, *Politics* I.iii 1253b5-6). It should be noted that although slaves and even wives were often purchased by the patriarch, the exchange value of this initial ‘investment’ pales in comparison to the surplus value extracted from their labor.

⁷⁷ Aristotle, *Politics* I.iii 1253b1-11.

⁷⁸ Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, 738. When Aristotle writes of women in the *oikos*, he is referring primarily to the free (i.e. not enslaved) wife of the patriarch, because “nature has distinguished between the female and the slave” (Aristotle, *Politics* I.ii 1252b1). Of course, this ‘free woman has multiple social roles: she is often also a mother, sister, and daughter. However, it is her role as housewife which is most economically significant. Accordingly, I will refer to her socio-economic positionality as ‘wife.’

⁷⁹ Schofield, 11; Millett, 193.

⁸⁰ Ambler, 391-3. Aristotle would be the first to remark that the ideal types in his economic theory are not necessarily accurate descriptions of historical Athenian society, since there are always exceptions to the rule of nature (*Politics* I.xii 1259b2-3, I.vi 1255b2-3).

⁸¹ Other marxists may take issue with this characterization of managers as producers of value. I

In Aristotle's philosophical anthropology, the free wife—unlike the slave—has not only the capacity to be ruled, but also to rule (at least to some degree). Although she is exploited and oppressed by her patriarchal husband, she is nonetheless the superior of her slaves. For Aristotle, it is the wife's capacity for practical reason (shared by all rulers) which allows her to organize her subordinates, because she understands how to wholistically coordinate all the 'moving parts' into a functional system.⁸² Despite also possessing such intellectual capacity, the patriarch himself does not engage in such rational central planning: instead, he authorizes his wife to oversee household activities and production in his stead.⁸³ The wife is functionally in charge of the household much of the time while her husband is gone engaging in public affairs. While Aristotle depicts the patriarch as the household's provider, this is only in a formal sense: his "provision" amounts to private property rights (secured via trade or conquest) over resources which generate surplus use value through the production process performed by his household's workers.⁸⁴

Hannah Arendt depicts the ancient Athenian aristocracy as scorning labor as it represents necessity, which is the antithesis of freedom.⁸⁵ Even physical proximity to

respond that insofar as managerial oversight is a necessary function of the production process, it contributes to the stock of created value. This fact can be seen more easily if the oppressive conditions of domination are removed: in a worker-owned cooperative, management does not disappear—instead, the workers must manage themselves.

⁸² Aristotle, *Politics* I.xiii 1260b12-14; Millett, 187.

⁸³ Aristotle claims that free men have rationality with authority, while free women have rationality but lack authority (Aristotle, *Politics* I.xiii 1260a9-14). While this last property is ambiguous, it is clear that, as household manager, the wife exercises power derived from the patriarch (Stauffer, 937; Saxonhouse, 74).

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Politics* I.viii 1256a10-11. Although it is anachronistic to redescribe the Aristotelian *oikos* with marxist terminology (or even the language of bourgeois economics), I believe that it is conceptually warranted because of Aristotle's intellectual impact on such discourse in the first place.

⁸⁵ Arendt, 12, 81. Finley notes that while all citizens were free (i.e. not slaves), not all freemen were citizens. For example, certain male laborers were considered free, yet not citizens (Finley [1982], 122). Additionally, although no women were citizens, some women were understood to be free—namely, the wives of property-owning citizens (F.A. Wright, 212).

necessitarian labor is seen as tainting the patriarch's liberty; therefore it is regarded as unnatural for masters to be relationally close to their slaves.⁸⁶ Accordingly Aristotle argues that a managerial wife should mediate between her husband and the slave to avoid contaminating the former's ability to freely leave the *oikos* to participate in the public life of the *polis*.⁸⁷

For Aristotle, leisure is a necessary but insufficient condition for *eudaimonia*: the good life of human flourishing.⁸⁸ Technically speaking, anyone who is not enslaved—craftsman, merchant, even housewife—is free; yet only the ruling class of citizen patriarchs are empowered to enjoy their freedom *leisurely*.⁸⁹ Unlike the modern conception of leisure (which associates free time 'off the clock' with one's private life at home), leisure in the ancient world is expressly a function which can only be fulfilled outside of the home.⁹⁰ Aristotle writes that the teleological good life of a privileged minority (viz. free male citizens) involves contemplating scientific and philosophical truths (*theoria*) or applying practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in deliberation about political decisions.⁹¹ But the patriarch's leisurely freedom is only made possible by the exploitation of the other household

⁸⁶ Millett, 206-7.

⁸⁷ While Aristotle's prescriptions for the relational proximity between master and slave are occasionally inconsistent, he repeatedly counsels every patriarch to deputize his wife to rule in his stead, whether the patriarch is present or not (Aristotle, *Politics* I.xii 1259b2-8, I.xiii 1260a40-1260b8, II.v 1264b2, III.iv 1277a5-7, III.iv 1277b24-26; Millett, 204).

⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Politics* VII.xv 1334a18-36; Booth, 27.

⁸⁹ Booth, 33.

⁹⁰ Owens, 716. Throughout his corpus, Aristotle vacillates in his view of *eudaimonia* (available only to the patriarch): while he explicitly privileges intellectual contemplation (*theoria*) as the *telos* of the fully human life, his virtue ethics implies the contrary position that *eudaimonia* involves of a certain type of action (*praxis*)—namely, exercising the virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) (Adkins, 311-312).

⁹¹ Aristotle writes, "[T]hose who are in a position which places them above toil have stewards who attend to their households while they occupy themselves with philosophy or with politics" (Aristotle, *Politics* I.vii 1255b34-36).

members.⁹² For these wives and slaves (and all other non-citizen persons), the *telos* of life is to excellently perform the social roles of production or social reproduction, in order to provide for the patriarch's basic needs (shelter, clothing, food, water, and above all *free time*) so that he can enjoy such leisure and the consumption of use values which it necessitates.

1.7 Modes of Consumption

In our modern capitalist system, the economic term “consumption” does not necessarily refer to the tangible use of goods and services, but merely to the commodified demand for them on a market. And the fact-value distinction presupposed by liberal ideology removes nearly all normative conditions from consumer desire and market demand. However, Aristotle (similarly to marxist feminists) rejects the value-neutrality of consumption, particularly when considering wealth.⁹³ The clearest criterion for discerning what constitutes vicious excess as opposed to virtuous moderation in the ownership of wealth is whether and how it is used.⁹⁴ Aristotle's teleological emphasis on the normative dimension of use values can illuminate the (sub)division of labor and the constitution of subclasses within the *oikos*. Unlike bourgeois economics, Aristotle's proto-economic account of (re)production and consumption is inherently normative (however classist and sexist those norms may be).⁹⁵ Therefore, I propose that it can offer conceptual clarification

⁹² Booth, 31.

⁹³ Aristotle writes that “the things that have a use may be used either well or badly; and riches is a useful thing” (*Nicomachean Ethics* IV.i 1120a4-5).

⁹⁴ Aristotle frames distributive surplus—which possibilizes either useless hoarding or excessive consumption—according to an ethical schema in which virtue is a mean between extremes (*Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics* IV.i 1119b25-26).

⁹⁵ Because Aristotle borrows his values uncritically from the hegemonic ideology of his patriarchal

to the marxist feminist SRT project which faces the problem of mediated exploitation and the division of interests.

In the ancient 'oikonomic' system, consumption has a much more concrete meaning, because most production is intended not for profitable sale but rather for immediate use in fulfilling some need or want. Yet the consumption of a use value can look vastly different depending on the class positionalities of the consumers, each of whom are teleologically differentiated from the others. Although the patriarch, the wife, and the slave may all consume the same *oikos*-produced goods or services (e.g. a meal), there are three different latent use values which are called forth by the different needs of each person. The patriarch consumes these products in the mode of leisurely freedom. By contrast, the slave and the wife consume them in the mode of necessitarian labor, in order to provide their own distinct services to the household.

For a historical materialist theory such as marxist feminism, it may seem as though the motives or goals of economic agents are irrelevant factors in determining whether or not they exploit other agents. After all, for vulgar marxism, all that matters are socio-material conditions, not psychological ones.⁹⁶ However, even in marxism, the evaluation of labor as exploitative presupposes that one is forced to produce surplus value (whether as use value or as exchange value) which does not benefit one's self. At least part of this surplus is

and slavery-based society, it is impossible for him to imagine marxist feminism's ideal social order in which necessary labor is both minimized and equitably distributed. This is most clearly demonstrated in his dismissal of the prospect of a fully automated classless economy as utopian: "if every instrument could accomplish its own work... the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre, [and] chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves" (Aristotle, *Politics* I.iv 1253b34-1254a3).

⁹⁶ There are often class traitors on both sides of a class war whose subjective commitments contradict their own objective interests. For example, Engels was a factory owner who used his wealth to fund the revolutionary socialist movement.

extracted by the ruling class in order to provide for their (and their managers') necessary means of subsistence. The teleological purpose of the worker's labor is to help eliminate the need for the ruling class to labor. This means that the worker's *telos* is really an instrumental and subordinate purpose—a means to another's end. For Aristotle as well as for marxist feminists, the ultimate purpose of necessary labor must ultimately be freedom (or liberation), conceived as a substantive notion of flourishing. So the real question is: who exactly enjoys the freedom made possible by the worker's necessary labors?

In the Aristotelian economic model, the aristocratic wife enjoys certain rights and freedoms (like her husband and unlike her slave). However, these largely take the form of her privileged duty to oppressively oversee the slave. She is similarly confined to this private worksite, deliberately walled off from public life because, Aristotle insists, her capacity to reason is “without authority” (*akuron*) and she herself must also be supervised.⁹⁷ Unlike her enslaved subordinates, she is ‘free’... but only insofar as she is not herself enslaved.⁹⁸ She is not socially enabled to autonomously live the good life (*eudaimonia*).⁹⁹ Instead, her privileges are wasted. Rather than consuming use-values produced by the slave to enable her own freedom, she consumes them merely to enable her own exploitation. She in turn labors to ensure that the entire *oikos* fulfills its purpose, which is to enable the patriarch—liberated from the realm of necessity—to live a public life of freely developing

⁹⁷ Aristotle, *Politics* I.xiii 1260a10-14. One interpretation takes this notion of *akuron* to be an internal psychological weakness. However, another takes it to be an external social constraint, which is not only in line with reality but also with Aristotle's account of the wife's ability to rationally coordinate household activities (Levy, 415)

⁹⁸ Karbowski, 326.

⁹⁹ Aristotle defines *eudaimonia* as consisting of “complete excellence” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.xiii 1102a5-6). Unfortunately, as Inglis argues, Aristotle limits the wife to possessing only an “approximation of paradigmatic virtue” (Inglis, 186). Therefore, she is also prevented (in theory or in practice) from access to the good life.

his own potential.¹⁰⁰ For the wife (as for the slave), the final cause (*telos*) of her household role—her life’s meaning—is reduced to effectively producing household use values, thereby reproducing her society’s mode of production. Although Aristotle describes these economic conditions as ethically ideal and socially harmonious, this depiction takes on very dark tones when viewed instead through marxist theory. Under exploitative and thus alienating working conditions, such workers atrophy in body and mind, and their creative potential fails to “develop freely.”¹⁰¹

Extracted surplus value—whether it is the direct service of slaves and wives or the profits indirectly stolen from wage workers—is potential use value. And this potential is not only denied to super-exploited social reproductive laborers; it is also denied to aristocratic productive workers. Accordingly, while a privileged worker necessarily acts as an efficient cause in value extraction, she does not ultimately share in its final cause. Neither the wife nor the slave are recognized as having the teleological potential for the good life of liberation beyond necessity. Thus, it is possible that the real interests of the labor aristocracy may align with those of the super-exploited rather than with the ruling class.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have engaged Social Reproduction Theory in a dialogue with a problematic but important influence from economic history: Aristotle. I have presented his articulation of the key concepts of use value and exchange value and his theory of the class structure and economic function of the hierarchical *oikos*. I have argued that Aristotle’s

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle, *Politics* VII.xv 1334a36-39.

¹⁰¹ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 74.

insights constitute a simplified model of the complexly unified system of sexism and classism theorized by marxist feminist social reproduction theory.

I have also noted how the most recent works of SRT bridges the gap between two earlier schools of marxist feminism. The first, Dual Systems Theory, stresses how the gendered (and raced) division of labor is caused by independent yet intersecting vectors of oppression and exploitation which call for distinct liberation struggles to avoid sexist class reductionism. The second school, Unitary Systems Theory, stresses how this situation is caused by an overarching pattern of class-based exploitation which is always-already internally subdivided according to a division of labor which reproduces special oppressions, and calls for a coalitional class-first strategy. However, even though 21st century SRT has drawn from both schools to develop a socio-economic model which foregrounds feminism, anti-racism, and other progressive movements in terms of the classed division of labor, this materialist approach to intersectionality entails the conceptual impossibility of solidarity across varying strata of the working class. Even though SRT proponents disprove this fragmentation problem in their rhetoric and their political *praxis*, their theory itself appears unequipped to address the mediated exploitation of a putative labor aristocracy (whatever its gendered or racialized characteristics).

In order to better understand the structural constants of exploitation (particularly the causal culpability of an intermediary worker in a chain of value extraction), I considered the function of the privileged strata of the working class—the managerial housewives—in the ancient mode of production: patriarchal slavery. Although, for obvious reasons, marxist feminist SRT focuses on contemporary capitalism (as did Marx himself in his magnum

opus *Capital*), its research programme is robust enough to critique exploitation in every mode of production, globally and historically. I have demonstrated that SRT can be applied to the ancient socio-economic system in order to understand who is—and who is not—responsible for the extraction of surplus value.

The example of Aristotle's 'oikonomic' wife demonstrates that it is possible for a privileged worker (among the 'labor aristocracy') to depend on another worker's unpaid social reproductive labor without intermediately exploiting them (in the technical sense). Even though the wife *oppressively dominates* her slave, strictly speaking it is the ruling class patriarch who indirectly *exploits* the subordinate social reproductive worker as well as the intermediate labor aristocrat. This nuance is significant because it possibilizes solidarity between the reproductive lower working class with the productive upper working class. By recognizing their joint opposition to the ruling class, these different socio-economic tiers can share radical aspirations to systemically transform the exploitative structures which constitute the material basis of patriarchal oppression.

CHAPTER 2. THE DIALECTICAL VIRTUES (AND VICES) OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTIVE CARE WORK

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will consider the contradictory dimensions of interpersonal ethics and social ethics. I will propose that marxist feminism requires a *dialectical ethics* which connects short-term and micro-scale interpersonal norms with long-term and macro-scale social imperatives. I will take up the analysis of care work by social reproduction theory (SRT) in order to show how its ethically ambiguous nature exemplifies a more general problem for marxist feminism in reconciling interpersonal and social normativities.

As a type of marxist feminism, SRT provides a clear *social ethic* (condemning systemic exploitation, particularly of the most vulnerable workers). Yet its theorists (like marxists generally) require a clearer articulation of normative ethical theory at the *(inter)personal* scale.¹⁰² Of course, marxist feminist Simone de Beauvoir penned the philosophical classic *The Ethics of Ambiguity* at the height of French existentialism.¹⁰³ However, her meta-ethical insights into relativism and existentialism do not readily translate into the discourse of normative ethics, which remains an open question for marxist feminism. An adequate personal ethics for social reproduction theory and *praxis* must be dialectical in nature, addressing the tension between these values of immediate interpersonal care and those of strategic social justice (oriented toward a “communist horizon”).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² This parallels Lise Vogel’s insistence that feminists who have demonstrated excellence in their political *praxis* still require the deeper theoretical grounding which marxism provides (Vogel, 32).

¹⁰³ de Beauvoir (1948), 10.

¹⁰⁴ Dean (2012), 2.

I argue that deontological and contractualist theories are insufficient for this role of dialectical ethics because their reliance on rights and universalizability are too static and individualistic for marxist feminism's historical materialist methodology. Utilitarian theories are also insufficient because they can justify the sacrifice of the interests of vulnerable minorities (e.g. working-class women of color) for the interests of privileged majorities (e.g. the white male labor aristocracy). This leaves marxist feminists with two possible normative ethical theories: feminist care ethics and virtue ethics (Aristotelian or otherwise). I will ultimately argue that virtue ethics—specifically, a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethic revised by feminist care ethics—is the best candidate for a marxist feminist dialectical ethic. I will ultimately demonstrate this by applying it to the moral imperatives which would be faced by a care worker who has been radicalized by marxist feminism.

2.2 Dialectical Ethics: Between (Inter)Personal Ethics and Social Ethics

Marxist feminism is the theory and praxis which, according to the Black communist revolutionary Claudia Jones, holds that “the inequality of women is inherently connected with the exploitation of the working class.”¹⁰⁵ However, its normative discourse typically

¹⁰⁵ Jones, 4. This intersectional approach is often positioned as a new development in feminism's third wave, following the struggle for rights of “formal equality” in the first wave and the struggle for material rights (concerning labor and sexuality) in the second wave (Vogel, 3). However, there were already marxist feminists in the early 20th century fighting these struggles in the 2nd and 3rd Communist Internationals, but they tend to be written out of the ‘feminist waves’ narrative. This call to redistribute social reproduction is hardly new—it is the same demand made over a century ago by marxist feminists Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai, and Rosa Luxemburg in the communist Second International (Smith, 1). Unfortunately, this tradition has been ignored by even the most socialist of major FCE theorists, Joan Tronto ([1993], 176).

gets framed as political and not as ethical.¹⁰⁶ It remains to be seen what marxist feminists want in a strictly moral theory.¹⁰⁷

The branch of moral philosophy concerned with issuing imperatives (based on a criterion for right and wrong in reference to the good and the bad) is known as *normative ethics*.¹⁰⁸ Its injunctions are often addressed to a single individual moral agent. This subfield, known as *personal ethics* (or *individual ethics*), is difficult to reconcile its counterpart *social ethics*.¹⁰⁹ Social ethical theories (such as marxist feminism) are often classified disciplinarily within sociology rather than moral philosophy, because the methodological individualism of much ethical discourse presupposes a degree of personal agency which marxism's structural analysis is reticent to acknowledge.¹¹⁰ Although modern liberalism has attempted to institute a rigid divide between the individual and interpersonal level of ethics and the social level of politics, other political theorists—from Aristotle to Marx—have viewed them as shading into each other.¹¹¹

While marxist feminism clearly has a social ethic, its corollary personal ethic is much less clear.¹¹² Marxist feminists implicitly uphold the values of liberation, autonomy, equality, and equity, and they condemn oppression, exploitation, domination, and

¹⁰⁶ Dalla Costa and James, 47-8.

¹⁰⁷ This echoes Annette Baier's famous essay "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?" She insists that a sufficiently feminist ethics must incorporate yet exceed the contributions of prior male theorists (Baier, 266). I hope to expand this question to account for class.

¹⁰⁸ Following Hegel, de Beauvoir claims that normative ethics exists only as long as *is* differs from *ought*; the entire goal of ethics is to close this gap and therefore dissolve normative potentiality into one's actual state of being (de Beauvoir [1948], 10-11).

¹⁰⁹ Armstrong, 119-20.

¹¹⁰ Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, 144.

¹¹¹ Tronto [1993], 6-7; Fraser and Honneth, 4; Fraser, 33; Groff, 314.

¹¹² Recent feminist ethicists have been deliberately connecting the gap between personal and social ethics; however, this continues to remain an open question for specifically *marxist* feminists (Dillon, 378).

alienation.¹¹³ Accordingly, they demand the historical transformation of the social structures of production, reproduction, socialisation, and sexuality.¹¹⁴ This communist horizon must necessarily involve women's liberation, yet its details cannot be determined in advance without impeding the process with static ideals.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, a marxist feminist personal ethic must orient its norms to this ultimate yet unclear end. In so doing, it must also resolve several additional philosophical contradictions.

First, a dialectical ethic must be objectivist enough to ground a universal call to social liberation, yet relativist enough to account for different moral situations involving individuals and groups of varying positionalities (according to class, race, gender, sexuality, etc.).¹¹⁶ Second, it must avoid the fatalism of social determinism without succumbing to a metaphysical libertarianism which is individualistic and voluntaristic—in a word, *bourgeois*.¹¹⁷ Third, its liberatory strategy must avoid the idealist expectation that moral agents (i.e. political subjects) can be consistently motivated by rational principles rather than embodied affects, even as its particular version of consequentialism must seek to produce a more logical social order where fear-based heteronomy is transformed into a naturally communistic impulse.¹¹⁸ Fourthly, it must neither demand endlessly self-sacrificial altruism from its subaltern moral agents, nor permit the selfish egoism of crude anarchism. A marxist feminist ethic must resolve these contradictions in historical materialist terms.

¹¹³ Its primary opponents are imperialists, capitalists, fascists, and patriarchal reactionaries, whose ideologies have often been internalized by working class men (Jones, 4-5).

¹¹⁴ Mitchell, 43.

¹¹⁵ de Beauvoir (1948), 153; Mitchell, 54.

¹¹⁶ Leon Trotsky writes that “elementary moral precepts exist... but the extent of their action is extremely limited and unstable. Norms ‘obligatory upon all’ become the less forceful the sharper the character assumed by the class struggle” (Trotsky, 165).

¹¹⁷ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 595.

¹¹⁸ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 726.

Such a methodology is known as *dialectics*: the dynamic by which unstable structures work out their internal contradictions over time.¹¹⁹ In order to judge which normative theory is most suitable as a dialectic ethic, I will compare how each applies to the particular case study of social reproductive care work.

2.3 Case Study: Social Reproductive Care Work

In order to determine the normative ethical theory that is most coherent with the marxist feminist project, it will be helpful to identify a particular subject as a moral agent. The moral agent with whom marxist feminists concern themselves must also be a *politically revolutionary subject*.¹²⁰ There are many candidates for the revolutionary subject beyond “working class” (which has often strangely been coded as cisheteronormative, white, and male): women, racial subalterns, queers, etc.¹²¹ One of the most promising figures is the *social reproductive care worker*, whose ‘super-exploitative’ socio-economic role is laden with intersecting identitarian oppressions.¹²² Following social reproduction theory, I will take as my case study a working class woman (i.e. someone who faces both structural oppression and structural exploitation) who performs care work. Perhaps this moral agent is also disabled, queer, and a woman of color, though for simplicity’s sake what is conceptually significant is her economic role as a social reproductive care worker.¹²³

¹¹⁹ McNally, 103-4; Bhattacharya, 4.

¹²⁰ Sargent, xxi; Federici, 7.

¹²¹ Bhattacharya, 68. Following in the footsteps of Black marxist feminists like Lucy Parsons, Claudia Jones, and Angela Davis, the Combahee River Collective has called for a revolutionary socialist movement which is “particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex, and class are simultaneous factors in oppression” (Combahee River Collective, 26).

¹²² Federici, 7. According to Tronto, “In most societies, care work is distributed by gender, by caste and class, and often, by race and ethnicity as well.” (Tronto [1993], x).

¹²³ McNally, 109.

Care work is the paradigmatic type of social reproductive labor and thus a useful point of comparison for marxist feminists considering different normative ethical theories.¹²⁴ It can be defined as physical or emotional labor which provides direct service to others in order to decrease their pain or increase their pleasure, or to supplement their disability or increase their capacity. Social reproductive labor—the often unremunerated replenishment of labor power—is the paradigm case of care work for marxist feminist inquiry.¹²⁵

Because the subject of marxist feminism is the working class woman, the primary (though not only) social context of her oppression and exploitation throughout much of global history is in the domestic sphere: this often extends beyond her own housework to performing domestic labor for another.¹²⁶ However, even though these nearly universal patterns have produced a gendered (and often racialized) class *in-itself*, it remains to be seen whether this demographic can become a gendered racialized class *for-itself*.¹²⁷ Marxist feminists have hoped that feminized care workers can move from passively experiencing oppression in isolation and exploitation to actively and collectively working against patriarchal capitalism as revolutionary subjects.¹²⁸ It is clear that each social reproductive laborer (hereafter “care worker”) is a *moral patient* who experiences the immoral actions

¹²⁴ Dalla Costa and James, 54.

¹²⁵ Fraser, 23. Combining class struggle with the women’s liberation movement, SRT was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by marxist feminists such as Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, Christine Delphy, and Lise Vogel. It has undergone a recent resurgence by theorists and activists such as Nancy Fraser, Susan Ferguson, Tithi Bhattacharya, Cinzia Arruzza, and Kathi Weeks. SRT examines service institutions whose end product is the labor power of workers themselves, for example: hospitals, schools, restaurants, and especially families.

¹²⁶ de Beauvoir (1952), 113-14.

¹²⁷ Dalla Costa and James, 58. This is a refinement of Marx’s original formulation of class consciousness, which mostly ignores the gendered and racialized contours of the working class (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 218).

¹²⁸ Federici, 60.

by others within the oppressive and exploitative conditions of a patriarchal class structure; the manifold wrongs against her are obvious. However, such a care worker is also a *moral agent*.¹²⁹ The particular form of moral agency which is most relevant to marxist feminists is the revolutionary potential of a subject who becomes ethically bound to a particular political project. Marxist theorist Louis Althusser refers to the process whereby such an individual is 'subjectified' as *interpellation*.¹³⁰

The first obstacle keeping a care worker from becoming a revolutionary subject is ideological false consciousness: she has already been interpellated as an acquiescent subject by the patriarchal capitalist system. Marxist theory suggests that many workers wrongly identify their interests with those of their exploiters.¹³¹ Such a care worker may be working against her will, and suppressing her own self-interested values and feelings. And even when the care worker does not suffer subjectively from ideological false consciousness, her acquiescence to abusive working conditions can help to reinforce oppressive social patterns. A marxist feminist moral theory must reckon with these problematic dynamics, especially in light of the fact that many women are already interpellated as care workers. Such a dialectical ethic must be able to sift through their existing attitudes and skills (cultivated through their care work), affirming those tendencies which are liberatory while

¹²⁹ Dalla Costa and James, 56, 59.

¹³⁰ Althusser explains that "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way as to 'recruit' subjects among individuals (it recruits them all) or 'transform' individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) through the very precise operation that we call interpellation or hailing... 'Hey, you there!'" (Althusser, 190).

¹³¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 154. This phenomenon is not necessarily irrational, but a rational calculation of which alliance (along the axis of class, race, or gender) has the highest probability of serving one's own interests (Ferguson and Folbre, 333). The danger of an agency-erasing paternalistic critique can be mitigated by temporalizing conflicting interests: one may be aware of their long-term interests even as they pursue compromised short-term interests. Accordingly, marxist feminist strategy must mediate between short- and long-term goals (Federici, 55).

rejecting those which are reactionary. Unfortunately, the two primary normative theories—deontology and utilitarianism—are unable to interpellate moral agents into liberatory struggle as political subjects, because these theoretical lenses are themselves at least partially veiled by false consciousness.

2.4 Deontology and Utilitarianism

Several normative theories immediately reveal themselves to be untenable for marxist feminism: those which feminist care ethics refers to as *justice ethics*. Contractualist approaches (such as Kantian and Rawlsian deontological theories) are too formalist and universalist to adequately interpellate the individuals situated within the social systems of patriarchy and capitalism as political subjects.¹³² Even though marxist feminists may use the language of “women’s rights” or “worker’s rights”, the deontological framework of rights and correlative duties has traditionally been associated primarily with property rights, which have been systematically denied to women, BIPOC, and the working class for millenia in the West.¹³³ Whatever normative rights and duties may eventually obtain in a ‘kingdom of ends’, they are at best utopian abstractions (and at worst ideological mystifications) if one does not historicize their injunctions to the current moment’s social conditions.¹³⁴

As a historical materialist theory, marxist feminism must therefore embrace some form of consequentialist ethics in order to make such ‘rights’ substantively available to all

¹³² However, Blackledge admits that “to the extent that Marxists articulate ethical critiques of capitalism they tend to revert to one or other form of modern bourgeois morality: typically either consequentialism or deontology.” (Blackledge, 41).

¹³³ Bhattacharya, 69. As Carole Pateman and Charles Mills point out, the idea of a ‘voluntary contract’ within a racist patriarchal class system is a farce, because power dynamics skew the voluntariness of the parties’ consent to the terms of agreement (Pateman and Mills, 2, 7).

¹³⁴ Brenkert, 428.

subalterns.¹³⁵ The most popular version of consequentialism is utilitarianism, but marxist feminists also face several problems with this model of the right and the good. The qualitative objection of utilitarianism is that the desires of individuals of different classes or identity groups should not be weighted equally; there should be a preference for the needs of the oppressed.¹³⁶ The quantitative objection is that utilitarian theories are too majoritarian to adequately protect the rights of minorities (in the literal sense of a quantitative subset constituting less than 50% of the whole population). Even though the workers in a class society compose the vast majority of people, approximately half of them are women or non-binary workers. This fraction drops further into minority status upon specifying ‘working class women of color.’ It clearly seems wrong to sacrifice subaltern interests for the greater good (i.e. the interests of males, white people, and the ruling class), yet utilitarianism would seem to demand exactly that.¹³⁷

Having ruled out deontology, contractualism, and utilitarianism, marxist feminist dialectical ethics must look for its normative roots in either—or both—of the remaining approaches: feminist care ethics or virtue ethics. Because SRT is a feminist project concerned with care workers, its theorists might be expected to adopt some version of *feminist care ethics* (FCE).

¹³⁵ Communists facing difficult conditions have not only erred on the side of sacrificing means to ends (Blackledge, 41), but also sacrificing ends to means and making a virtue of necessity (de Beauvoir [1948], 125). Marxist feminist ethics must follow her injunction to strike “a balance between the goal and its means” (de Beauvoir [1948], 148).

¹³⁶ Brenkert, 433.

¹³⁷ Arruzza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 13.

2.5 Feminist Care Ethics

In the 1980s, several moral philosophers developed a new normative ethical theory known as a feminist *ethic of care*, which they distinguished from what they term masculine *ethics of justice*.¹³⁸ Feminist care ethics aimed to resolve major problems in both utilitarian and deontological paradigms.¹³⁹ This novel normative theory's key value of care is often in tension with the value of justice.¹⁴⁰ According to this schematic, marxist feminism is a (social) justice ethic and therefore lacks robust interpersonal norms. This theoretical deficiency can perhaps be rectified by valorizing care. However, while feminist care ethics must inform marxist feminist SRT, it cannot alone serve as an adequate personal ethic. In order to determine which normative theory is most dialectically appropriate for marxist feminism, I will examine the feminized and racialized role of the *care worker*, who figures prominently in both social reproduction theory (SRT) and feminist care ethics (FCE).¹⁴¹ In doing so, I will close the gap in the literature separating these closely related yet disciplinarily independent fields.

¹³⁸ FCE was initially sketched out by Carol Gilligan in a critique of unduly androcentric accounts of moral development (which culminated in Kantian rationalist absolutism), which focus on the independent self and its work—not on its relationships (Gilligan, 151, 160). Similarly, Nel Noddings writes that whereas women's feminized experience often results in a concrete emotional moral approach, men's masculine experiences tends to lead to rationally abstract moral approach (Noddings, 8).

¹³⁹ Noddings explicitly contrasts her FCE with the contractualist school (Noddings, 4).

¹⁴⁰ Held, 15. In FCE's schema, any moral context can be framed through either the masculinized value of justice (i.e. universal obligation) or the feminized value of care (i.e. particularized love), neither of which should be absolutized over the other (Gilligan, 167; Noddings, xiv, 11, 18; Benhabib, 180; Baier, 266, 271, 273).

¹⁴¹ Just as SRT has been used to reinterpret marxism's materialist analysis along gender and racial lines, Maurice Hamington proposes that FCE's attunement to the common situation of embodiment can discern universal norms while acknowledging identitarian differences (Hamington, 80).

Care, as defined by FCE theorist Joan Tronto, is the “on-going responsibility and commitment” for some other subject (or, more broadly, object).¹⁴² FCE values relationships not merely as instrumentally good means, but also as inherently good ends.¹⁴³ The philosophical anthropology undergirding FCE assumes both that human beings instinctively engage in “natural caring” and also that “ethical caring” must be prescribed under conditions in which natural care is insufficient (or even impossible).¹⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the imperative to care has often been imposed upon women externally by patriarchal social structures, rather than internally according to their own conscientious judgments. Sarah Ruddick argues that even though caring practices were conditioned by millenia of women’s oppression, they nonetheless contain valuable elements and can be repurposed by feminists.¹⁴⁵ Joan Tronto is less sure, warning FCE not to make a virtue of feminized caring because of its oppressive historical conditioning.¹⁴⁶ I will examine these complex contributions in turn, noting both their attractive and problematic elements for marxist feminists.

First, FCE seeks to position itself between moral objectivism and relativism. It views care both as manifesting in unique ways in different relational and social contexts, yet it also posits care as a universal phenomenon across human societies.¹⁴⁷ Marxist feminist strategy requires tactical flexibility, and this is no more apparent than in an organizer’s treatment of individuals from differently-privileged social positionalities.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Tronto (1989), 173.

¹⁴³ Held, 17; Noddings, 5.

¹⁴⁴ Noddings, xv. Ethical caring is thus only auxiliary to natural caring.

¹⁴⁵ Ruddick, 359. Herbert Marcuse makes a very similar argument (Marcuse, 283).

¹⁴⁶ Tronto (1989), 185.

¹⁴⁷ Held, 3, 20.

¹⁴⁸ Arruzza, 196.

However, even if care is descriptively a universal value (found in all societies), care which does not extend beyond the particularity of its proximate relations can justify xenophobic attitudes toward more distant others.¹⁴⁹ For instance, marxist feminists might lapse from their internationalist commitments into ‘social imperialism,’ caring for subalterns domestically in the imperial core while ignoring those in the colonial periphery. Thus, while care may be a value among other values (such as justice), it should not be elevated above them.¹⁵⁰

Second, FCE attempts to avoid the extremes of both determinism and libertarianism by highlighting both the agency of care workers and their social constraints and compulsions. FCE valorizes actions which are performed (voluntarily or involuntarily) by oppressed moral agents, and which are wrongly recognized only as a natural ‘given.’¹⁵¹ However, FCE’s affirmation of the historically feminized (and thus denigrated) practice of care has prompted accusations that it reinforces patriarchal gender norms and consigning women to subjugational roles.¹⁵² Critics claim that FCE mislabels relational care work as a labor of love, thereby making a virtue of necessity.¹⁵³ By assuming that care workers have

¹⁴⁹ Tronto (1989), 183. In fact, the classical definition of corruption, dating back to Aristotle, is the privileging of private interests (relational as well as individual) over public interests.

¹⁵⁰ Positioning care over and against justice degrades the value of the latter and undermines resistance to oppression (Sander-Staudt, 27-8).

¹⁵¹ Annette Baier criticizes masculine moral theory for omitting duties to care for the young and to perpetuate morality intergenerationally. Such androcentric liberal theories tend to amoralize feminized care practices and take for granted conditions such as being raised by a loving parent—which assume not merely parental duty but the parental virtue of loving care (Baier, 267-8).

¹⁵² Held, 12; Ruddick, 346; Groenhout, 173. Groenhout expands this point: “traits identified as ‘feminine’ are common to many people who are raised under oppressive circumstances, and are perhaps better understood as survival mechanisms than virtues” (Groenhout, 185).

¹⁵³ Kittay attributes this to oppressive background conditions such as poverty which “undermine the possibility of love’s labor” (Kittay, 174).

more agency and autonomy than may be the case, FCE risks fixing the care worker more firmly in the grasp of social determinism which marxist feminists are trying to pry open.

Third, FCE strives to attend to moral motives (particularly acting out of a feeling of care) as much as to consequences (particularly the ends of mutually caring relationships).¹⁵⁴ Although FCE values natural caring (i.e. that which proceeds from instincts and affects), it also prescribes caring in contexts where an insufficient emotional motive cannot effectively provide for the needs of moral patients. By respecting the moral significance of emotional affects, FCE challenges the masculine rationalism of both deontology (which absolutizes reason) and utilitarianism (which instrumentalizes it). Even though care ethicists tend to focus on actions over psychological states, the moral ideal is healthy relationships of mutual care and affection. The stereotypically altruistic connotations of care also may ideologically legitimize the economic extraction of the surplus value produced by the care worker.¹⁵⁵ Even if she subjectively enjoys her role in the caring relation, it may be objectively exploitative.¹⁵⁶ The motivation of the care worker (whether love or duty) is not the only relevant moral factor: the consequences of one's care practices may combine with those of others to constitute detrimental social patterns.¹⁵⁷

Fourth, FCE attempts to deconstruct the false dichotomy between egoism and altruism.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, in focusing on interpersonal relationships, FCE seeks to evade the individual-versus-society dilemma which utilitarianism and deontology have been fighting

¹⁵⁴ Held, 20.

¹⁵⁵ Held, 16; McLaren, 105.

¹⁵⁶ Ruddick, 354; Baier, 269-70.

¹⁵⁷ Benhabib questions the moral significance of an individual “‘woman’s voice’ independent... of race and class differences, and abstracted from social and historical context” (Benhabib, 191).

¹⁵⁸ For Held, caring relations are “neither egoistic nor altruistic” (Held, 12).

since the 19th century. By valuing care over individual rights, FCE challenges the egoistic values motivating capitalist exchange (“the paradigmatic relationship of modern society”).

¹⁵⁹ However, although FCE has widened its focus to include the moral role of the cared-for as well as that of the carer, the theory still tends toward a self-denying heteronomy.¹⁶⁰

Feminist care ethics tends to be normatively altruistic, to the point of being criticized for valorizing self-sacrifice (especially that of female care workers) for the interests of cared-for others.¹⁶¹ While marxist feminists acknowledge the importance of self-sacrifice in a liberation struggle, altruism is a limited principle for radical organizing.¹⁶²

All of these problems make FCE unsuitable for a marxist feminist ethic, along with the other major ethical theories of deontology and utilitarianism. This leaves virtue ethics as the final probable contender for a dialectical personal ethic which can complement the social ethic embodied by marxist feminist politics.

2.6 Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

I will argue that immediate interpersonal demands and long-term social demands are connected both in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the works of some recent feminist care ethicists who frame (interpersonal) care as a virtue alongside (social) justice.¹⁶³ Over

¹⁵⁹ Tronto (1989), 178. FCE emphasizes the substantive value of equity (a “recognition of differences in need”) over the formal values of liberty or equality (Gilligan, 164).

¹⁶⁰ Tronto (1989), 180. Noddings describes care as “a move away from self” (Noddings, 16).

¹⁶¹ McLaren, 107. Tronto cautions other care ethicists to avoid romantically idealizing selflessness in caregivers (Tronto [1989], 178).

¹⁶² This is not only because of the finitude of self-sacrifice, but also because micro-ethical (inter)personal care does not scale up to macro-ethical social justice (Tronto [1989], 182). While Nel Noddings gestures toward systemic thinking (calling her society to “transform...the conditions that make caring difficult or impossible”), she is primarily interested in interpersonal actions rather than social praxis (Noddings, xxii).

¹⁶³ Sander-Staudt, 21.

the past several decades, the oldest tradition of normative ethics has undergone an intellectual renaissance, spearheaded by the theory known as neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (NAVE).¹⁶⁴ Although such theorists are committed to the general structure of Aristotle’s moral thought and regularly cite and comment upon their intellectual godfather, their hermeneutic project has reconstructed a rather idiosyncratic Aristotle. This neo-Aristotelian approach has at times detached the concept of character excellence from its original context in fixed social roles, which may seem immutable from the perspective of Aristotle’s other works (such as *Politics*).¹⁶⁵ Virtue ethics is rooted in the Aristotle’s ancient culture of patriarchy and slavery, yet 20th- and 21st-century NAVE has rightly rejected Aristotle’s denigration of women and slaves, recontextualized his normative theory, and revised his catalog of virtues to address the lifeworld(s) of contemporary society.¹⁶⁶

As NAVE theorist Rosalind Hursthouse correctly predicted, this development has increasingly merged virtue ethics with other normative theories, including feminist care ethics.¹⁶⁷ Several neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists have borrowed the value of care from FCE and designated it as a virtue alongside justice, prudence, self-control, courage, etc.¹⁶⁸ I

¹⁶⁴ Hursthouse (1999b), 2; Nussbaum, xxiv. Although there are of course many varieties of virtue ethics (some of which have very diverse intellectual lineages, including Confucianism), Halwani insists that Aristotle offers the only plausible version of virtue ethics (Halwani, 14). Philippa Foot similarly argues that Aristotle’s version is the most systematic (Foot, 1). In Benhabib’s definition, “‘neo-Aristotelianism’ refers to a hermeneutical philosophical ethics, taking as its starting point the Aristotelian understanding of *phronesis*,” i.e. the cardinal virtue of practical reason (Benhabib, 25).

¹⁶⁵ Aristotle’s traditional virtue ethics focused on patriarchal virtues and ignored or denigrated female virtues, such as care (Dillon, 381).

¹⁶⁶ McLaren, 113; Sander-Staudt, 21-22; Halwani, 17-18; Snow (2015), 51; Hursthouse (1999b), 2, 8; Dillon, 381. Groff writes that Marx himself has an implicit but underdeveloped ethical theory which is “recognizably Aristotelian” (Groff, 325).

¹⁶⁷ Hursthouse (1999b), 5; Snow (2018), 321.

¹⁶⁸ Slote, 127; Sander-Staudt, 24-5. Although Aristotle does not explicitly discuss the value of care, he dedicates the Books VIII and IX of *Nicomachean Ethics* to explaining the concept of ‘friendship.’ He treats this term so broadly and multifariously that FCE could translate it simply as ‘caring relationship,’ albeit one with problematic features (Halwani, 7; Groenhout, 193).

propose that such a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is well-positioned for marxist feminism's dialectical thinking.

The core of any normative theory is not its practical application but its posited source of moral obligation. The key issue for virtue ethics is ultimately not about how one should *act* (let alone how one should feel)—it is ultimately about why one should *become* a certain type of person.¹⁶⁹ Rather than focusing on rules or actions, virtue ethics attends primarily to character states: habitual dispositions toward acting and feeling in certain ways rather than others.¹⁷⁰ These character states of virtue or vice are not necessarily fixed, but can change over time. Through 'self-work' on one's character, the accidental nature of virtuous but out-of-character actions can become an essential aspect of one's 'second nature.'¹⁷¹ Through practice, bad habits can become good habits, and unhealthy and destructive irrational desires can become healthy, constructive, and more rational.¹⁷² Accordingly, virtue ethics stresses personal moral development more than perhaps any other normative theory.¹⁷³

Accordingly, Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics has a clear definition of the good for human beings: it is a complete life of virtuous activity.¹⁷⁴ Virtue ethics is fundamentally concerned with the moral agent's soul, which is not separable from the body but rather its animating principle.¹⁷⁵ The moral agent's soul is always characterized by virtue, vice, or

¹⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.i 1103b12-21; Anscombe, 1275; Groff, 334.

¹⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.v-vi 1106a11-15; Hursthouse (1999a), 105; Kosman, 105.

¹⁷¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.iv 1105a18-20; *Politics*, VII.i 1323b30-31, Snow (2018), 334; Burnyeat, 78.

¹⁷² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.i 1103b7-21; Burnyeat, 86, 88.

¹⁷³ Burnyeat, 70.

¹⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.vii 1098a16-18. Whereas utilitarianism and deontology concern themselves with particular moments of principled action, virtue ethics concerns itself with the entirety of one's life (Russell, 2).

¹⁷⁵ In this interpretation (contra that of Hardie), Aristotle and his NAVE successors are value monists,

both.¹⁷⁶ The excellent character habits called the virtues are taken to be both instrumentally and intrinsically valuable: they are simultaneously causal means to and partially constitutive ends of the good life.¹⁷⁷ Aristotle refers to this condition of flourishing amid both internal and external goods as *eudaimonia*.¹⁷⁸

Of course, the exact list of virtues is disputable, as it is unclear which character states should count as virtues and which should count as vices.¹⁷⁹ What is relatively consistent across the different tables of virtues, however, is the structure of what constitutes a virtue: it is a mean between opposing *vices* (destructive character habits) which manifest either as a defect (too little of a given action or passion in a given context) or an excess (too much of either).¹⁸⁰ Therefore, correcting one's habits requires both knowing whether one is predisposed toward too little or too much of a particular passion, and consciously willing against one's 'natural' impulses.¹⁸¹ As Aristotle counsels, "We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme" and thereby "get into the intermediate state."¹⁸² Some NAVE

who posits a single value (or "supremely desired activity," in Ackrill's formulation) as the ultimate end of human life (Ackrill, 58).

¹⁷⁶ Aristotle characterizes virtues and vices not as first-order psychological faculties for passion or action, but rather as second-order *states* of those psychological capacities (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.v 1106a11-13).

¹⁷⁷ MacIntyre (1981), 149; Snow (2018), 321; Broadie, 344. In the 'ergon argument', Aristotle considers what the distinctive capacities of the human being must be (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.vii 1097b22-1098a19; Ackrill, 69-70). One interpretation has him positing a combination of thought and action—practical rationality—as the uniquely and essentially human function, as opposed to those of gods or animals (Nussbaum, xxvii; Ackrill, 70; Groenhout, 179).

¹⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.xii 1102a1-4; Ackrill, 64. The Greek term '*eudaimonia*' has often been translated as 'happiness.' This choice has been criticized for conveying a shallow external end rather than a deeper internal end (Kraut [1979], 169; Ackrill, 67;).

¹⁷⁹ MacIntyre (1981), 162. Even Aristotle's clearest presentation of his table of virtues and corresponding vices is not exhaustive (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II.vii 1107a28-1108b10).

¹⁸⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.vi 1107a2-5. Of course, the same character state can change its nature as a virtue or as a vice as conditions change (Foot, 14, 16; Murdoch, 113).

¹⁸¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.ix 1109a24-1109b4; MacIntyre (1981), 190.

¹⁸² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.ix 1109b4-5; Foot, 8, 11; Hursthouse (1999b), 107.

theorists have described the relationship between virtue ethics and feminist care ethics in precisely this way, proposing that a collaboration would be mutually corrective and beneficial.¹⁸³

First, NAVE has the potential to rectify the threat of subjectivism in FCE.¹⁸⁴ For instance, a virtuous care worker is not always *actually* engaged in care work (whether active *praxis* or emotional *pathos*), but she has cultivated the virtuous character state (*hexis*) with the constant desire to *potentially* provide the right type of care, to the right person, in the right context, to the right degree.¹⁸⁵ Because care work has been demanded of women for millenia, patriarchal class societies habituate women in developing this disposition.¹⁸⁶ While in the abstract such an altruistic character trait may be laudable, the oppressive conditions of working-class women entail that this comes at the expense of their opportunities to realize their undeveloped potential—to cultivate other virtues. NAVE is able to both relativize the criterion for excellent feeling and action to the oppressive constraints of the care worker’s specific positionality, yet also to recognize the virtues which she has been forced to develop as objective and universalizable virtues which should also be expected from vicious oppressors.¹⁸⁷ NAVE thus balances elements of relativism and with those of absolutism.

Second, NAVE has a greater potential than FCE to counter the socially deterministic force of fixed internal and external conditions with the possibility of

¹⁸³ McLaren, 15; Groenhout, 172.

¹⁸⁴ Ethical naturalists such as Aristotle, Hursthouse, and Foot treat the virtues as objectively good even as they are relatively indexed to the specific nature of the moral agent and other conditions.

¹⁸⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.vi 1106b16-24; Hursthouse (1999b), 92.

¹⁸⁶ Slote, 36; Dillon, 386.

¹⁸⁷ Davis, 11.

cultivating freedom. Even though the virtuous agent's actions are not absolutely determined, neither are they nor absolutely free. Her will (*prohairesis*) is always under compulsion—not only by external conditions, but also by the state (*hexis*) of her character.¹⁸⁸ Yet because her present character is conditioned by her past actions, it is also possible for her to willfully transform her own *hexis* by acting according to her reason (*logos*) until her emotions (*pathē*) align with her rational judgments.¹⁸⁹ Virtue ethics characterizes the transformation of vice into virtue not only as moral development of one's will, but moral development of one's emotions and one's intellect.¹⁹⁰ Moral development, for Aristotle, involves growing from a psychological state in which experiencing the right passion and performing the right action are unlikely (if not impossible) to occur, to a state in which their occurrence becomes probable (or even necessary).¹⁹¹ Such a moral agent moves from 'incontinent; vice, to 'continent' vice, to virtue.¹⁹² For example, a care worker should train herself both to enjoy and to 'work on' a difficult caring relationship if she knows it will increase her ability to thrive. Conversely, she should train herself to despise and to 'go on strike' from a difficult caring relationship (literally or figuratively) if she knows it will oppressively constrain her. By attending to the dynamics of both external and internal conditions, NAVE situates its philosophical anthropology between social determinism and libertarianism.

¹⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.v 1114a32-1114b3.

¹⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.ii 1139a22-25; *Politics* VII.xiv 1333a17-19.

¹⁹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III.v 1114a19-22; III.x 1118a24-26; Murdoch, 115; Sherman, 236.

¹⁹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.iv 1105b5-11; II.ix 1109a20-1109b6. Of course, one's character transformation can also be regressive. Character habituation is inherently dynamic, whether in the direction of growth or of atrophy (MacIntyre [1981], 189).

¹⁹² Burnyeat, 86.

Third, in theorizing both the motivating source and the consequential end of ethical action, NAVE attends (perhaps more than other normative theories) to the complex relationship between intellect, affect, and will.¹⁹³ While virtue ethics (like other normative theories) judges a moral agent's behavior as right or wrong, this first-order evaluation of her actions is superseded by its second-order evaluation about her character *hexis* (which has been conditioned by her past actions and also determines her future actions). Her *hexis* should be both rationally principled (insofar as she is intellectually attuned to ends and their means) and emotionally affected (insofar as she is embodied in a material form subject to passions and desires).¹⁹⁴ Because of its temporal sensibility, virtue ethics appears to be consequentialist: one's repeated actions have the consequence of making one's character state either virtuous or vicious. Yet it also appears to be deontological (or perhaps simply 'motivist'), since one's character state is also the motive for virtuous or vicious actions.¹⁹⁵ For instance, a moral agent who performs exploitive care work (whether waged service labor or social reproductive labor) does so for one of two reasons: either she finds the forced labor of love intrinsically desirable (due to ideological conditions), or she fears the threat of losing her job (i.e. her means of subsistence). Yet in consequentialist terms, the artifice of her paid affective labor is not actually vicious: in fact it may well be virtuous, insofar as it exhibits no more (and no less) emotional labor than necessary to achieve her ends given

¹⁹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.ii 1139a17-1139b5.

¹⁹⁴ Aristotle writes that "the irrational passions are thought not less human than reason is" (*Nicomachean Ethics* III.i 1111b1-2).

¹⁹⁵ MacIntyre (1981), 149.

such relational coercion.¹⁹⁶ NAVE offers a way to value motives and consequences simultaneously.

Fourth, virtue ethics appears to be egoistic, insofar as it privileges caring for the individual moral agent's own soul and whether or not she receives what she needs to flourish (physically and psychologically).¹⁹⁷ However, unlike in crude egoism, the object of the moral agent's desire is not pleasure *simpliciter*, but rather self-transformation (which produces higher pleasures).¹⁹⁸ Virtue ethics is thus poised between the opposing vices of apathetic egoism (i.e. excessive self-interest) and hyper-altruistic self-negation (i.e. deficient self-interest).¹⁹⁹ For NAVE, the higher self of enlightened self-interest is a relational and social self.²⁰⁰ The virtuous care worker is neither asymmetrically codependent with others nor autonomously isolated from them, but rather she is inclined to both provide and expect the contextually appropriate type and amount of care for a given situation.²⁰¹ NAVE can offer a slight corrective to FCE's problematic altruism in the form of elevated egoism.

¹⁹⁶ In fact, this merely contingent (rather than virtuous) care is actually a necessary means to a greater care-filled end: the virtuous care worker undoubtedly has other relationships outside of work, possibly including dependents who call forth her care on a more consensual and affectionate basis. In Aristotelian terms, this involves maintaining merely a friendship (i.e. relationship) of utility rather than a friendship of pleasure or virtue (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.iii 1156a6-1156b24; MacIntyre [1981], 158).

¹⁹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.xiii 1153b17-18; Halwani, 13.

¹⁹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.vi 1176b25-32. Aristotle writes, "Therefore the good man should be a lover of self (for he will both himself profit by doing noble acts, and will benefit his fellows), but the wicked man should not; for he will hurt both himself and his neighbours, following as he does evil passions" (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX.viii 1169a12-15).

¹⁹⁹ Nussbaum, xviii, xxx; Mann, 204. Philippa Foot treats virtue ethics as elevated egoism, Bernard Williams treats it as a form of altruism, and Rosalind Hursthouse describes it as a combination of the two (Hursthouse [1999b], 169). I agree with Hursthouse, whose view entails (I propose) that NAVE should adopt care as a virtue.

²⁰⁰ Cooper, 296. Because care ethics treats relationships as ontologically basic, some of its proponents have accused NAVE of being inescapably individualistic in its philosophical anthropology (Sander-Staudt, 26). However, Aristotle views moral agents as *essentially* relational and social beings (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.iii 1253a26-30, McLaren, 110). Yet even if NAVE's ontology is insufficiently relational, Halwani argues that NAVE need only accommodate FCE's ethical commitments, not its ontological ones (Halwani, 40).

²⁰¹ McLaren, 114.

In each of these philosophical tensions, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics assists feminist care ethics in balancing important but opposed principles. In the next section, I will show how marxist feminist theory can weld the virtue of justice to the value of care. Such a nuanced ethic will aid the marxist feminist project of (re)creating social structures which make just care more possible and unjust care less necessary.²⁰²

2.7 A Marxist Feminist ‘Virtue Ethic of Care’

It is interesting to note that the renaissance of virtue ethics and the birth of feminist care ethics occurred simultaneously.²⁰³ It is even more significant that these developments began in the 1980s—the last decade of the Communist threat to the capitalist order, and the first full decade of global neoliberalism. NAVE and FCE can be seen as different ways of resisting the Reaganite-Thatcherite individualism which has permeated what Nancy Fraser calls the “‘postsocialist’” condition.²⁰⁴ I argue that the overlapping discourse of a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethic of care (VEC), as posited by McLaren, Halwani, Groenhout, and Mann, can prove beneficial to recently resurgent marxist feminism as manifested by the most recent wave of social reproduction theory, particularly Bhattacharya, Fraser, and Arruzza.

As the moral exemplar of marxist feminism, a radicalized care worker requires a whole spectrum of virtues to flourish in her political role, some of which flow from her

²⁰² In McLaren’s understanding, virtue ethics approaches “both care and justice as social capacities” which require institutional support (112).

²⁰³ Held, 24.

²⁰⁴ Fraser and Honneth, 94. The NAVE wave inaugurated by Alasdair MacIntyre was perhaps a belated response to (or even recapitulation of) G.E.M. Anscombe’s idiosyncratic virtue ethical treatise several decades prior.

work life.²⁰⁵ The most ready-to-hand virtue for a care worker would obviously be *care*, which marxist feminists can recognize not only as a skill required for an exploitative service job, but also as a pro-social character trait which readies one to serve others in the struggle for liberation.²⁰⁶ If care work is a practice consisting of beneficial actions, then care itself is a virtue (the balanced condition of one's psychological potential to act beneficially).²⁰⁷ Anyone can engage in the act of care work, but not everyone develops the *virtuous* disposition to meet another's needs (even at one's own expense).²⁰⁸ If care is a virtue, then it is not only a means to the good life, but also an essential part of what Aristotle calls *eudaimonia* and what marxists feminists call liberation or communism.²⁰⁹

In order to provide others with what they need and deserve, the care worker must neither meet too few of their essential needs (i.e. the vice of neglect), nor meet too many of their extraneous desires (i.e. the vice of overexertion).²¹⁰ Yet because she is interpellated as a marxist feminist, she recognizes that this balance is impossible to meet under the constraints of patriarchal racialized capitalism. Accordingly, her virtue of care also requires that she develop the complementary virtue of justice.²¹¹ Other radical virtues include

²⁰⁵ Virtue ethicists often portray the virtues as being mutually necessary (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.xiii 1144b32-33; Murdoch, 111-12; Groenhout, 183).

²⁰⁶ Mann, 201; Groenhout, 190. Just as there is no political strategy which guarantees liberation, the virtues are only the most likely means of achieving the good life (which includes external goods). There are no vices with a greatest probability of reliably providing the conditions of flourishing (Hursthouse, [1999], 176).

²⁰⁷ Groenhout, 190; Noddings, 9.

²⁰⁸ Sander-Staudt, 30; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.iv 1105a18-23. Noddings describes care as "a state of readiness" in which a moral agent 'availabilizes' herself to and for others (Noddings, 17, 19). Ruddick describes care as a virtue which is the actualization of the capacity of attention, the development of which "is a discipline that requires effort and self-training" (Ruddick, 357).

²⁰⁹ MacIntyre (1981), 148; Halwani, 4, Kollontai, 230. Cooper reads Aristotle as treating friendship in the same multivalent manner, both as a means and as an end (Cooper, 294).

²¹⁰ Schofield, 315-16.

²¹¹ Rachels and Rachels, 158; Tronto (1993), 168); Noddings, 6; Sander-Staudt, 37. Held insists that "an adequate, comprehensive moral theory will have to include the insights of both the ethics of care and the ethics of justice... rather than that either of these can be incorporated into the other"

practical wisdom (e.g. discerning when social conditions are or are not ripe for direct action), courage (e.g. confronting the bosses or the riot police), and self-control (e.g. refusing to cross picket lines for personal benefit).²¹² All these virtues, but especially care and justice, require a careful balance to avoid conflicting with one another.²¹³ Only through a virtue ethic of care can marxist feminists dialectically reconcile relativism with absolutism, libertarianism with determinism, motivism with consequentialism, and egoism with altruism.

First, marxist feminists would benefit from VEC's dialectical resolution to the tension between absolute universality and relativistic particularity.²¹⁴ Although virtue ethics is described with the language of balance and moderation, the virtuous mean between extremes is always contextually relative to particular subjective and objective conditions.²¹⁵ These determine which feelings and actions count as virtuous and which count as vicious; under different or changing conditions, a virtuous behavior can become vicious, and vice versa.²¹⁶ A historically-conscious attunement to concrete conditions is vital for a radicalized care worker in discerning the helpful and harmful tendencies which her working conditions

(Held, 16). Groenhout accordingly views FCE and NAVE as capable of correcting one another's deficiencies (Groenhout, 173, 187).

²¹² Kathi Weeks also treats hope as a political virtue, similar to how medieval Christian scholars framed hope as a theological virtue by extending Aristotle's moral schema (195).

²¹³ Snow [2015], 57. Jean-Paul Sartre (the life partner of Simone de Beauvoir) famously offers an example of this contradiction. In WWII, a student of his had faced the choice of staying home to care for his ailing mother or of leaving her to join an anti-fascist militia. Sartre describes this dilemma as opposing "two kinds of morality: a morality motivated by sympathy and individual devotion, and another morality with a broader scope, but less likely to be fruitful" (Sartre, 31).

²¹⁴ Groenhout, 186.

²¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.vi 1106b19-23.

²¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III.vii 1115b24-1116a7; MacIntyre (1981), 154. Unlike modern utilitarian and deontological ethicists, neo-Aristotelians insists that only the *phronimos*—one with the virtue of practical reason— can decide what counts as a right (or wrong) action in a particular context (Broadie, 352-3). The individual conditions of each moral agent determines which practices they should take up to correct for the specific vices (some more destructive than others) which tend to accompany their social positionality (Snow [2018], 324).

have instilled in her. A radicalized care worker would be committed to overturning modern patriarchy and capitalism, and she would valorize her character traits as virtues only insofar as they make liberation more possible.²¹⁷ A virtue ethic of care would ensure that she and her subaltern peers are not alone in being called to a liberation struggle. The obligatory force of VEC must impose on a rich white male as much as on a working class woman of color, even if the latter is much more likely to be interpellated as a liberatory agent than the former.²¹⁸

Second, VEC resolves the marxist feminist tension between libertarianism and determinism. On this theory, a radicalized care worker's character state is neither absolutely determined by their social positionality (within the system of patriarchal racialized capitalism) nor absolutely free (to act justly or caringly in any situation). The good life also requires certain external and internal goods which involve some degree of moral luck.²¹⁹ However, this situation is precisely what the marxist feminist project is set up to transform. The structural impacts of capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy make it impossible for many people to live well—not only the oppressed who are denied external goods, but also their oppressors who fail to develop internal goods.²²⁰ Yet marxists insist that the

²¹⁷ According to Dillon, a feminist ethic of character would simply redefine virtue as any liberatory character trait and vice as any submissive characteristic (Dillon, 384).

²¹⁸ This is not to deny the moral significance of the virtues for those not interpellated by leftist political commitments—merely to argue that they are indispensable to (and evidence for) the latter. Although I have focused on the moral agency of a very specific character (a female care worker who has gained a leftist political consciousness), this exemplar represents a universal moral situation which applies to everyone with the capacity for care and justice.

²¹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.viii 1099a32-1099b8; VII.xiii 1153b16-18; Nussbaum, xiii. Given the historical *a priori* which habituates both social conditions and the moral agent's own character development, it is often the case that the right action is not always available to freely make (and perhaps that the right emotions are not always available to feel) (Kosman, 113). Moreover, social conditions can make it unlikely if not impossible to develop the fully human virtues and thus to achieve *eudaimonia* (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.viii 1150b29-1151a8; MacIntyre [2011], 15-16).

²²⁰ MacIntyre (2011), 13-14; Mann, 212. As Dillon points out, the privileges of being an oppressor

historical forces which produce seemingly deterministic systems also dialectically produce the possibility of their demise: oppression and exploitation eventually drive some subalterns to resist so forcefully that they liberate not only themselves but also the material and ideological structures which reproduce social hierarchies.²²¹

History shows that an exploited care worker can attain gender, race, and class consciousness; such a transformation will motivate her to act according to the liberatory demands of social justice as well as the demands of relational care. For instance, Alexandra Kollontai was radicalized by reading Marx while mothering a newborn; Claudia Jones became a Communist after working in a segregated laundromat, and Selma James developed her marxist feminist views while performing domestic labor as a housewife.²²² Such frustrating working conditions can accelerate a care worker's realization of both the structural impediments to genuine care and the imperative to join with others in bending the arc of history toward justice. A marxist feminist VEC recognizes that any such movement which is committed to overcoming deterministic social structures will be not able to liberate itself through virtuous actions without cultivating durable virtuous character.

Third, a dialectical VEC seeks a balance between the motives and the intended consequences of a moral agent's actions.²²³ Motivist changes in desired ends and consequentialist changes in strategic means affect one another. As Paul Blackledge argues,

²²¹ can at most secure external goods, and not a virtuous balance of internal goods (Dillon, 391). Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 483. Working class radicals strive to abolish class as well as capitalism; Black liberationists strive to abolish race as well as white supremacy, and feminists strive to abolish gender as well as patriarchy

²²² James, 13. Even the occasional white male capitalist like Friedrich Engels has been radicalized by observing and learning to detest the oppression and exploitation of others (Brown and Fee, 1248-49).

²²³ de Beauvoir (1948), 146, 148.

socialist practices have followed the trajectory of “Marx’s implicit Aristotelianism, by which the goods internal to working class struggles are both the means and ends of virtuous activity.”²²⁴ As a political project which favors the action noun *liberation* in designating its means and its ends, it seems that marxist feminism requires a consequentialist ethic.²²⁵ Paradoxically, however, it must also be deontologically motivist: even though marxist feminists are willing when necessary to force their values upon reactionaries—whether by reform or revolt—the ultimate end (and optimal means) of their struggle is a change of “hearts and minds.”²²⁶ It is possible to retrain one’s character motivations as the desire to liberate and the proper fear of complicity acquiescing to injustice.²²⁷ A social movement engaged in a liberation struggle must rely on an emotionally committed yet rationally principled rank-and-file. Accordingly, the marxist feminist tradition demonstrates how VEC can value both the motives and the consequences of individual and social acts as different phases of a causal cycle.

Fourth, a dialectical VEC can help marxist feminism to avoid falsely dichotomizing altruism and egoism. On the one hand, any socialist ethic must valorize feelings and actions which subordinate self-interest to the common good: no one should thrive at the expense of others (especially those oppressed by race, gender, class, etc).²²⁸ Yet on the other hand, a marxist feminist ethic should not reinforce sexist and racist demands of obligatory altruism, especially for a care worker who is habituated into putting other’s needs ahead of her

²²⁴ Blackledge, 43.

²²⁵ Combahee River Collective, 23.

²²⁶ Kollontai, 230-31.

²²⁷ James, 75.

²²⁸ Kollontai, 230, 256.

own.²²⁹ If the care worker develops too much of an attachment to an oppressive or alienating caring role, she may stray into the vice of deficient self-love (or “self-care” in modern parlance).²³⁰ This has been demonstrated by recent strikes, when teachers, nurses, and other essential service workers have been chastised for withholding their labor because such direct action supposedly violates the rights of their charges (patients, students, and customers).²³¹ Of course, striking is a form of collective self-advocacy, but when such care workers refuse to perform their economic roles, it is often as altruistic as it is egoistic. Poor care-working conditions lead to poor care, so by standing up for their own interests, striking care workers also stand up for the interests of the cared-for people whom they serve.²³² It is certainly possible a care worker could perform the virtuous act of striking without being motivated by virtue (e.g. care or justice).²³³ It is also possible that she could find herself in struggle together with fellow travellers (who may have reactionary vices) to secure life’s necessities.²³⁴ In fact, labor organizing proceeds on precisely the assumption that less virtuous comrades are necessary to building the rank-and-file, even as the best unions refuse to tolerate explicitly chauvinistic behavior.²³⁵ This rather Aristotelian strategy of shared struggle will help workers’ character motives to improve as they habitually practice just and caring actions (alongside comrades such as the exemplary radicalized care

²²⁹ James, 75; Mann, 204; Noddings, xvii.

²³⁰ Groenhout, 194. Even Aristotle does not treat self-love and love of another as zero-sum, because they are ideally identical: for virtuous people, “friend is another self” (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX.iv 1166a27-32; Biss, 125; Cooper, 280).

²³¹ McAlevey, 136-37.

²³² McAlevey, 30.

²³³ Aristotle writes that “some men are called good in respect of a state, others in respect of an Activity” (*Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.v 1157b5-6).

²³⁴ Aristotle, *Politics* I.ii 1253a3-4, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.iv 1157a16-19, VIII.ix 1160a9-11. In Aristotelian terms, such a person would be considered a temporary ‘friend of utility’ rather than a long-lasting ‘friend of virtue’ (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.iv 1157a12-19; Biss, 126)

²³⁵ McAlevey, 31.

worker).²³⁶ Accordingly, a marxist feminist VEC would follow Aristotle in distinguishing between base egoism and elevated egoism, and in showing how moral growth can transform the reactionism of the former into the comradeliness of the latter.²³⁷ As one develops a more virtuous motive of solidarity, one's classist, racist, and sexist feelings and actions (which often correlate with selfishness under capitalism) at least begin to dissolve. Aristotle writes that "in loving a friend, [people] love what is good for themselves."²³⁸ A virtue ethic of care would be able to offer marxist feminists a dialectical ethic in which altruism and egoism need not ultimately be opposed.

2.8 Conclusion

My analysis has taken as a moral exemplar the figure of a radicalized care worker—a feminized social reproductive laborer who has joined the liberation struggle against racialized patriarchal capitalism. My methodology treats her not simply as a moral patient violated by injustices, nor even as a politically revolutionary subject, but as a moral agent. Rather than applying a normative theory to her context in order to determine her moral obligations, I have instead taken for granted her moral imperatives imposed by the liberation struggle in order to reverse-engineer a dialectically appropriate personal ethic. I have concluded that the optimal corollary to marxist feminist social ethics is some form of virtue ethics. I have proposed in particular a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethic which treats care as a cardinal virtue. However, the unequal distribution of care has limited the virtues of oppressor and oppressed (albeit in very different ways). An equitable redistribution of the

²³⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.i 1103a3-1103b4; (Kraut [1999], 101); Jimenez, 4.

²³⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.iv-v 1157a12-1158a2.

²³⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.v 1157b32; Kahn, 39; McAlevey, 207.

gendered and racialized social reproductive labor would compel socio-economically privileged moral agents (particularly white men) to overcome their vicious deficiency to care for others, and would also allow oppressed and exploited moral agents (particularly working class women of color) to relinquish their excessively caring habits. Such redistribution of care work is not only teleologically desirable as a condition of communist *eudaimonia*—it is also prefiguratively necessary as an immanent condition of marxist feminist liberatory strategy. All marxist feminist moral agents (both in the oppressive present and in the liberated age to come) should cultivate the virtue of justice and the virtue of care... and the virtue of practical wisdom which alone can determine the context-specific balance between the two.

CHAPTER 3. WORKING TOWARD A COMMON GOOD: ALIENATION, AUTONOMY, AND SOLIDARITY

3.1 Introduction

In my third chapter, I will present a political argument that fuses together the economic and ethical cases I laid out in my first two chapters. As I showed, social reproductive and productive workers both have conflicting concrete interests (especially on the basis of gender and race), but they share an abstract interest in opposing the ruling class whose power impedes the development of just and caring conditions (socially as well as personally). This ambivalence demonstrates the need for a more robust concept of the *common good*: the moral confluence of interests between self and others.²³⁹ I argue that even though modern capitalist society is divided by class structures (that are hierarchically intersected by gender and race), it need not be impossible for different classes, races, or genders to share a common good.²⁴⁰ Accordingly, even though marxist feminism is a conflict theory positing the necessity of competing interests, its dialectical goal is a social condition of voluntary cooperation and mutual aid.²⁴¹ However, the possibility of such a common good is contingent upon the abolition of class structures and the gender and racial hierarchies that they condition.

²³⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* III.vi 1278b36. In defining political action between citizens with varying interests, Arendt points out the linguistic fact that “interest” is literally “*inter-est*”—something “which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together” (Arendt, 182).

²⁴⁰ Dalla Costa and James, 49. Claudia Jones writes that “the fight the fight for the full, economic, political and social equality of the Negro woman is in the vital self-interest of white workers, in the vital interest of the fight to realize equality for all women” (Jones, 3).

²⁴¹ Marxist feminism is both a conflict theory (that assumes that in class societies, different classes have distinct and often competing interests) and a dialectical theory insisting that the point of class struggle (like gender liberation) is not simply to invert the hierarchical positionalities, but to ultimately abolish them.

Marxist feminists describe such a utopian state of affairs as *communism*, the ethos of which is articulated most clearly by Karl Marx: *from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.*²⁴² Such a “cooperative society based on common ownership of the means of production” (to use Marx’s terms)²⁴³ would not only heal alienation and exploitation, but also the material base of patriarchy and white supremacy.²⁴⁴ I propose that this communist principle is a particular vision of the *common good*. This concept, first extensively theorized by Aristotle, can be defined as the social condition in which the interests (i.e. needs and abilities) of all are served. By contrast, the condition of only the interests of some being served is *corruption*. This conceptual dyad serves as Aristotle’s principle of institutional legitimacy, gauging whether a given social structure is just or unjust. It seems to me that the marxist feminist project relies on precisely this schema, implicitly if not explicitly.

Of course, Aristotle undeniably constructs justifications of patriarchy and exploitation, the *bêtes noires* of marxist feminism. Yet Aristotle’s hierarchical assertions are actually misapplications of his own first principles: he invalidly draws chauvinistic implications from his hylomorphic philosophical anthropology and his functionalist social and political theories. I propose that Aristotle’s common good principle (which is grounded in those presuppositions), can help marxist feminists to connect the material and moral notions of the common good in a dialectical way, taking account of human development

²⁴² Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 531.

²⁴³ Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 529.

²⁴⁴ Benston, 13; Vogel, 2. Even Heidi Hartmann, despite rejecting marxism’s explanation and strategy for liberation, Hartmann admits that “Socialism is in the interest of both men and women” (Hartmann, 7).

and the internal and external conditions which enable or impede it.²⁴⁵ I will argue that marxist feminists should consider ‘expropriating’ and ‘liberating’ Aristotle’s nuanced and dynamic theory of corruption and the common good.²⁴⁶

For marxist feminists as much as for Aristotle, material needs and moral culpabilities are co-constitutive: external goods are necessary to develop internal goods, and internal goods are necessary to secure and distribute external goods. For instance, in both theories, the internal good of practical reason (*phronesis*) is necessary for ruling in the interests of all. While Aristotle restricts citizenship to only those elite who supposedly possess this intellectual virtue of harmonizing means and ends, marxist feminists subversively insist that subalterns possess a more informed *phronesis* whose efficacy is limited by structural oppression and exploitation. Through collective *praxis*, they can empower themselves and others to create the possibility of a solidaristic common good which serves the diverse needs and abilities of all social positionalities.

3.2 The Ideological Function of ‘Common Good’ Rhetoric

As sociological conflict theories, marxism and feminism are inherently suspicious of “common good” discourse.²⁴⁷ Any purported confluence of interests might actually be ideological cover for power relations and privilege structures.²⁴⁸ I argue that this is an

²⁴⁵ Depew claims that Marx himself reads Aristotle through a historicist hermeneutic which reveals true insights in a dialectical rather than absolute fashion (Depew, 70).

²⁴⁶ In so doing, I am not proposing an “Aristotelian marxist feminism,” but rather using Aristotelian language to explicate the tacit commitments of marxist feminism concerning the conflict and confluence of interests between men and non-men, the ruling class and the working class, and whites and people of color.

²⁴⁷ Marx, “After the Revolution: Marx Debates Bakunin,” 545.

²⁴⁸ Coole, 34; Arruzza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 45-46; Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 172). However, Aristotle implicitly supports this critique in claiming that “a common interest... [which] rests merely on convention and force” is unnatural and unjust (Aristotle, *Politics* I.vi

instance of what Aristotle describes as *corruption*, whereby a particular interest substitutes itself for the interests of the whole.²⁴⁹ Class, patriarchy, and racism divide groups which could otherwise unite in solidarity to cooperatively achieve common goals.²⁵⁰ In fact, ruling class ideology (like patriarchal and white supremacist ideology) is so insidious that it can take hold even among the workers, women, and/or people of color who come to identify their oppressor's interests as their own.²⁵¹

Indeed, Aristotle justifies exploitation and oppression within the ancient *oikos* by claiming that *all* household members ultimately have shared interests, despite the hierarchy of authority (i.e. domination: patriarch over wife, wife over slave, and even slave over child.²⁵² Aristotle paternalistically insists that 'father knows best' as to what will truly benefit the patriarch's subordinates.²⁵³ Accordingly, Aristotle considers it to be in these subordinates' own best interests to be ruled by ostensibly virtuous free males: both directly in private economic role as patriarchal master and indirectly in public political role of

1255b14-15). The problem is that he refuses to acknowledge *all* hierarchical social relations (especially slavery) as products of power.

²⁴⁹ In its paradigmatic political sense, Aristotle defines 'corruption' as the condition of a ruling class which serves its own private interest rather than the public interest (Aristotle, *Politics* III.vii 1279a28-30). In a relational sense, corruption's basis as brute force becomes more obvious (*Politics* I.vi 1255b13-15; Frank [2005], 167). The concept of corruption can even be extended to other social phenomena, such as patriarchy or racist colonialism (Sankara, 341).

²⁵⁰ Joseph, 92.

²⁵¹ Parsons, 1; Lenin, 63; Luxemburg, 79; Delphy, 76; Snow, 59. Historically, the suffering and *alienation* of such social reproductive care workers are concealed and justified on the grounds that they are contributing to the common good of a family, a business, or even a society. For this reason, some theorists go so far as to say that marxist feminism is inherently corrupt because its class struggle will always eclipse the anti-racist struggle against white supremacy (Hartmann, 2; Joseph, 93).

²⁵² For example, the 'tyrannical' rule of master over slave is supposedly in the interest of the latter as well as of the former (Aristotle, *Politics* III.vi 1278b32-36).

²⁵³ Aristotle, *Politics* I.v 1254b12-21; Fortenbaugh, 261; Cole, 129.

citizen.²⁵⁴ Otherwise, he worries, their decisions will be marred by irrationality and therefore harm themselves and others.²⁵⁵

One of the capacities which the slave is prevented from exercising is *phronesis*: the practical reasoning which fuels participation in democratic deliberation.²⁵⁶ For Aristotle, only ruling class men are objective enough to judge what is good for each and for all. However, while this is clearly an erroneous assumption, marxist feminists must also reckon with their own spectre of paternalism which inevitably haunts even the most egalitarian of their socialist projects.²⁵⁷ Marxist feminist theory cannot avoid claiming that many oppressed and/or exploited people are ignorant of their own true interests (i.e. liberation), an ideological position referred to as *false consciousness*.²⁵⁸ This lack of liberatory consciousness can be found even among those various subalterns (racial, gender, sexual) who standpoint epistemology predicts would be most aware of their own oppression and whose particular interests are thought to represent the ultimate interests of all.²⁵⁹ Following Aristotle, I argue that it is not possible to levy a critique of corruption against a purported common good without also theoretically presupposing some true common good as a rubric of critical comparison.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Politics* I.xiii 1260a40.

²⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.xiv 1332b33-34.

²⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Politics* III.iv 1277b3-6, 1277b26-27.

²⁵⁷ Nussbaum (1990), 217.

²⁵⁸ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 172.

²⁵⁹ Combahee River Collective, 23-24; Jones, 3; Sankara, 339.

²⁶⁰ Marx argues that *every* ruling class “represent[s] its interest as the common interest of all the members of society” (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 174). Patricia Springborg observes that even democratic structures have been criticized as actually being “the rule of the most powerful under the guise of popular consent” (Springborg, 537).

3.3 The Good: Interests, Needs, and Abilities

In order to determine what is in the interest of all, it is necessary (though insufficient) to determine what is in the interest of each.²⁶¹ Unlike modern liberal political philosophers, ancient theorists and marxist feminists alike have proposed that the good of the individual is congruent with or even identical to the good of society.²⁶² Marxist feminism's implicit definition of goodness (or 'interest') must minimally involve not being oppressed, dominated, exploited, or alienated—in a word, *liberation*.²⁶³ However, “liberation” is a rectificatory concept, a ‘negation of a negation’ lacking in determinate content.²⁶⁴ Even though marxist feminism's (largely implicit) ethics schematizes goodness through the purely formal concept of ‘liberation’, its content must include at least a partial substantive good in the form of the socio-material conditions necessary for sustaining freedom.²⁶⁵ Therefore, the implicit concept of goodness endorsed by marxist feminists (especially Simone de Beauvoir) includes certain fulfilled needs and certain enabled capabilities.

Even though marxist feminism's normative project begins with the structural positionality of classed, raced, gendered, and sexualized subalterns, it has universalizing

²⁶¹ A common good is a synergic condition which includes yet transcends the aggregate interests of all individual members of a group. This is because the social system itself (whose condition can be either commonly good or corrupt) is necessarily greater than the sum of its parts: the whole and the parts co-determine one another (McNally, 110; Springborg, 545).

²⁶² MacIntyre (1981), 232; Cooper (1975), 290; Kollontai, 230-31.

²⁶³ Mitchell, 43.

²⁶⁴ de Beauvoir, 31. Marx typically avoids speculation about communist conditions, insisting minimally that they will involve “new social relations” (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 156; Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 91).

²⁶⁵ de Beauvoir, 78. While this definition of the good necessarily involves collective solidarity and the dismantling of oppressive social systems, it need not rule out personal excellence as an expression of the good (à la Aristotle). In fact, the marxist emphasis on humanity's creative capabilities might even suggest that excellence is the ultimate, albeit distant, good.

aspirations and an objective (though implicit and minimalist) concept of the good.²⁶⁶ This view is unexpectedly shared by Aristotle, who also approaches the universal form of goodness only through the hierarchical differentiation of types of soul (albeit from the top down rather than up from below).²⁶⁷ Aristotle treats the good not as an abstract form but as a *good for* some particular entity (whose material components are organized by a specific intelligible structure).²⁶⁸ For Aristotle, each entity has unique needs and latent capacities required to survive and to thrive.²⁶⁹ However, despite all the physical and psychological differences among people which Aristotle claims are natural grounds for hierarchical ranking (especially class, gender, ethnicity and even age), he still classes all human beings as sharing in some (if not all) of the conditions for human flourishing. Aristotle regards the specifically human function (which is essential for *eudaimonia*) as *acting according to reason*.²⁷⁰

This seemingly simplistic formulation of the distinctively human *telos* actually involves an integration of soul and body, of reason and emotion, and of external goods (which provide for needs) and internal goods (which produce virtuous action).²⁷¹ Moreover, although *eudaimonia* is often treated as an individual condition, Aristotle's political theory

²⁶⁶ For example, Claudia Jones argues that “the triply-oppressed status” of working class Black women is “a barometer of the status of all women” (Jones, 3).

²⁶⁷ Depew, 67-68.

²⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VI.ii 1013a24-33, V.xii 1019a33-1019b3; Lloyd, 291-292.

²⁶⁹ Nussbaum, 211. This Aristotelian approach to form and function is adopted and adapted by Marx (DeGolyer, 114).

²⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.vii 1098a12-15. Sherman notes that Aristotle cannot consistently claim that virtuous action is inherently valuable if the ultimate *telos* is contemplation (*theoria*) (Sherman, ix).

²⁷¹ MacIntyre (1981), 158. While Cooper and others read Aristotle as treating external goods merely as means to *eudaimonia*, Nussbaum and others read him as treating them as a part of *eudaimonia* itself (Sherman, viii).

makes it clear that it is necessarily a social condition: the combination of the requisite internal and external goods of all members of society.²⁷²

Likewise, Aristotle considers the internal goods of virtue to be insufficient for flourishing (*eudaimonia*); certain external goods are also necessary.²⁷³ Although goodness does not reduce to material conditions, the provision of basic necessities (e.g. food, water, shelter, and healthcare) are vital parts or preconditions for more complex abilities and needs.²⁷⁴ Marxist feminists claim that there are many unmet needs (and inhibited capabilities) caused by class structures which prevent the flourishing of all workers, but especially women and people of color.²⁷⁵ Marx suggests that the need which labor should fulfill is the ability to labor creatively as an end in itself, and he laments that alienating conditions deform labor into “merely a means to satisfy needs external to it.”²⁷⁶ As Marx puts it, capitalism reduces human freedom to merely “animal functions: eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing up.”²⁷⁷ Capabilities can be cultivated

²⁷² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.viii 1178b33-1179a12; Nussbaum (1986), xiv; Ahmed, 44, 47; Cooper (1975), 293.

²⁷³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.v 1095b32-1096a2; Annas, 35, 37. Aristotle technically distinguishes between ‘external goods’ and ‘goods of the body,’ but they are functionally identical when considering material use values in contradistinction to the internal goods he calls virtues (MacIntyre [1981], 190).

²⁷⁴ Nussbaum, (1986), xxii; Nussbaum (1990), 241; Annas, 46. Because *needs* are often distinguished from *wants* without a universally acceptable demarcation, I treat them as a continuum and use the term “need” to refer to those desires which are closer to material reality and thus serve as existential interests. People clearly have different material needs, due to differences in ability, age, biosex, and even race. However, for the most part, these are simply specific versions of basic material goods needed by (nearly) all.

²⁷⁵ Parsons, 1; Ferguson [2017], 120; Bhattacharya, 18). Although the concept of ‘race’ would not be invented for another two millenia, the ancient Athenian slave population was largely composed of foreign ethnicities (Aristotle, *Politics* 1285a19-22; Millett, 194).

²⁷⁶ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 74.

²⁷⁷ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 74.

and maintained only if certain needs are met, but those needs must be provided by—or through—certain capabilities (those of oneself or another).²⁷⁸

Needs are fulfilled by use values, which in turn are provided either directly by nature or indirectly by labor (upon nature).²⁷⁹ As Marx writes, “Any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production.”²⁸⁰ Workers control only the means of subsistence (the necessities of life), not the means of production (the ability to generate surplus value).²⁸¹ This provides workers with their labor power, which (as Ferguson writes) “is a capacity of concrete, potentially playful individuals whose needs and desires come into conflict with the capitalist impulse.”²⁸² For marxists, the maturation of needs varies directly with the development of creative potential.²⁸³ Conversely, as Marx writes, alienated labor “does not develop freely [one’s] physical and mental energy but mortifies [one’s] body and ruins [one’s] mind.”²⁸⁴

On one marxist feminist theory, even unique capabilities (e.g. unique biological functions such as pregnancy) can serve as the basis for oppression and exploitation, if they are absolutized to the detriment of other possible capacities.²⁸⁵ As marxist feminists have theorized, social reproduction is the type of labor which reproduces only the basic needs of

²⁷⁸ Marxists also describes this cycle of need-emergence and need-satisfaction with the economic terminology of production and consumption (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 156). However, Marx privileges production as the human species-essence, and views “consumption as a phase of production” rather than vice versa (Dalla Costa and James, 50).

²⁷⁹ Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 525.

²⁸⁰ Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 531.

²⁸¹ Bhattacharya, 77.

²⁸² Ferguson, [2017], 129.

²⁸³ In Herbert Marcuse’s reflections on “Marxism and Feminism,” he defines liberation as a “subversion of the established hierarchy of needs” (Marcuse, 285).

²⁸⁴ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 74; Sayers, 164.

²⁸⁵ S. Smith, 4.

life: those necessary to replenish the ability to labor.²⁸⁶ While this certainly involves relational capabilities (“care and socialization”), it is rooted in fundamental material needs (“food, clothing, and shelter”).²⁸⁷ The most illustrative social reproducer is a care worker who is exploited on the basis of class and likely oppressed on the basis of their gender or race or ethnicity.²⁸⁸ If they are classed as a (service-providing) producer, their labor provides for the needs of a member of the ruling class in order to enable their leisure activities (which may be higher-order in nature).²⁸⁹ By contrast, if they are classed as a social reproducer, their labor provides for the needs of other workers, rejuvenating their labor power in order to enable necessitarian activities. Of course, a worker might simultaneously inhabit both positionalities, such as the slave in Aristotle’s depiction of the ancient *oikos*.²⁹⁰ In the slave’s capacity as a care worker, they require the ability to meet the needs of another (viz. the cared-for subject of their job).

One of the important needs is having the time and resources to develop one’s abilities, such as (minimally) a worker’s requisite job skills. Of course, their needs and abilities are severely limited under the exploitative conditions of class society (whether slavery or capitalism). Because the most basic needs are not reliably provided to all and

²⁸⁶ Federici, 5; Dalla Costa and James, 50; Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 156.

²⁸⁷ Laslett and Brenner, 382-383.

²⁸⁸ Social reproduction is a broader field than domestic labor and care work, but these are the most concrete representations of the general phenomenon, even if at times they conceal more than they illuminate (Arruzza, 21; Bezanson and Luxton, 26).

²⁸⁹ Cuffel, 338. de Beauvoir writes that the ‘leisure’ of the exploited “is just about sufficient for them to regain their strength; the oppressor feeds himself on their transcendence”—that is, their ability to surpass their present internal conditions (de Beauvoir, 83). Meanwhile, the worker’s needs and abilities become a mere means to one other, resulting in a vicious circle rather than a spiral dynamic of personal and social development.

²⁹⁰ Because the gender of slaves in ancient Athens (as in the colonial U.S.) was largely irrelevant to the class structure, I will refer to the individual slave with gender-neutral “they” and “them” pronouns (Cole, 129; Davis, 5). This has the additional benefit of grammatically distinguishing the slave from the male patriarch and the female wife.

most workers' abilities are harnessed to benefit only the few, the social system neglects their higher-level needs and arrests the growth of their higher-level abilities.²⁹¹

I suggest that this situation of working class alienation can be framed in Aristotelian terms, because Aristotle proposes that 'the good' (whether private or common) must involve both *internal* goods (i.e. virtuous capabilities) and *external* goods (i.e. socio-material conditions).²⁹² For Aristotle, humans are conditioned by both their material context and their transformative activity (political, economic, or otherwise). Accordingly, contra Plato, certain external goods are necessary to enjoy the good life (*eudaimonia*).²⁹³ However, one's external goods must often be supplied by other people.

The *oikos* is the social site responsible for mere survival, as opposed to the *polis* which attends to actual flourishing.²⁹⁴ Accordingly, Aristotle writes that it is the "duty of the manager of a household... to order the things which nature supplies."²⁹⁵ However, this is a truncated description: the responsibility of the household manager (officially the patriarch, but technically the wife) is actually *ordering those who provide order* to nature's raw materials (i.e. the slave). In Aristotle's analysis of the division of labor, in which management is a second-order capacity (i.e. a form of intellectual labor), he refuses to

²⁹¹ This is implied by Aristotle himself: "For many necessities of life have to be supplied before we can have leisure" (Aristotle, *Politics* VII.xv 1334a18-19).

²⁹² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.viii 1098b11-19. Aristotle also indicates a third type, bodily good, but he does not distinguish it significantly from external good. He appears to denigrate external goods by claiming that one's *telos* is only internal to their soul, but shortly thereafter he indicates that external goods are necessary means of such teleologically virtuous action (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.viii 1099a32-1099b1).

²⁹³ Aristotle suggests that external goods are so morally significant that the deprivation of necessities can exonerate working class crimes against the ruling class (Aristotle, *Politics* II.vii 1267a13-16).

²⁹⁴ Arendt, 24.

²⁹⁵ Aristotle, *Politics* I.x 1258a25-26.

imagine that manual laborers could exercise sufficient practical reason to order their own working conditions.

3.4 *Phronesis*: Practical Reason

Aristotle justifies the *oikonomic* hierarchy on the basis of a supposed gradation of intellectual ability among the patriarch, housewife, slave, and child.²⁹⁶ As I discussed in Chapter 2, there are two moral virtues (justice and care) which are clearly social in nature. But in order to theorize the common good, it is necessary to turn (perhaps unexpectedly) to Aristotle's examination of intellectual virtue. Even though Aristotle is ambiguous about whether the nature of *eudaimonia* consists of action or of contemplation, there is one character trait which is valorized in both interpretations as both a moral and an intellectual virtue: *phronesis* (practical reason or prudence).²⁹⁷ Whereas mere skill consists of knowing how to produce (i.e. the means to a material end), *phronesis* consists of knowing how to *act* (i.e. the means to a social end).²⁹⁸ Even though a given deliberation takes an end for granted, a prior or subsequent deliberation can put this end-goal up for debate: "it is that which has been decided upon as a result of deliberation that is the object of choice... desired after deliberation."²⁹⁹ At times, Aristotle describes *phronesis* as merely the

²⁹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, I.xiii 1259b47-52. Aristotle lays out an is-ought distinction between the conventional slave and the natural slave—the former of whom has the capacity for *phronesis*, and the latter of whom supposedly does not (Ambler, 391).

²⁹⁷ Ackrill, 57. The soul's virtues can be divided between intellectual and moral excellences (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.i 1138b36-1139a1).

²⁹⁸ Whereas skill is amorally indifferent about its ends, *phronesis* must align with other virtues in pursuing morally good ends; otherwise one would have to ascribe wisdom to a vicious person who deliberately chooses effective means toward harmful ends (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.xii 1144a36-37).

²⁹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III.3 1113a3-5. Aristotle views all moral decisions as deliberate choices, but in intuitive action (which is the sense stressed by Martin Heidegger) one's choice might simply be what one *might have* decided upon deliberation (Cooper [1986], 9-10). Simone

intellectual process of strategically working backward from a given end to determine the appropriate tactics and initial steps.³⁰⁰ But rational deliberation and willful decision-making about working conditions (i.e. the politics of labor) must involve considerations of ends as well as means, if only because nearly all practical ends can also serve as means to deeper ends. At other times, Aristotle acknowledges that *phronesis* also involves being “able to deliberate well” about the conditions of “the good life.”³⁰¹ By mediating between the universal level of theoretical knowledge and the particular level of lived experience, *phronesis* enables one to make judgments and to determine courses of action.³⁰² This condition of the intellect enables one to make judgments in light of wholistic knowledge—in this case, knowledge concerning the conditions and aims of the entire city-state and its constituent households.³⁰³

de Beauvoir demonstrates the reciprocal nature of ends and means in practical reasoning, which dialectically scrutinizes not only means according to given ends, but also ends according to their proposed means (de Beauvoir, 149, 155).

³⁰⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III.3 1112b15-19. Aristotle appears to define *phronesis* as in part the deliberation of means toward a given desirable end; however, this seems overly technical; truly moral judgment would include choosing actions which, as instances of a rule, have intrinsically value and are inherently good (i.e. virtuous), not merely instrumentally and extrinsically good (Cooper [1986], 1-3).

³⁰¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.v 1140a24-28. *Phronesis* provides the virtuous person with the moral perception and situational awareness to determine which factors in a given context are ethically significant in relation to the good life (Annas, 39; McDowell, 162). This is

³⁰² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.vii 1141b15-16; Fortenbaugh, 242; McDowell, 156, 161. It is clear from Aristotle’s corpus that practical reason (*phronesis*) is not the most absolutely valuable form of reasoning: that accolade is reserved for purely theoretical reasoning. But whereas Aristotle understands such contemplative reasoning as the unique function of the gods, practical reasoning is the most appropriate function for the entity whose hylomorphic nature fuses mind and matter: the human being (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.vii 1098a12-15; Ackrill, 70, 74; Nussbaum [1986], xxvii). Therefore, while reason is not reducible to *phronesis*, the latter is the exemplary manifestation of the former *given the finitude which marks off the human condition*.

³⁰³ Schofield, 318-19; Heath, 251.

By contrast, Aristotle proposes that the slave and the wife require only the virtue of skill: practical reasoning concerned with the production of objects.³⁰⁴ He insists that only free citizens in their function of political rule require the practical virtue of *phronesis*.³⁰⁵ According to Aristotle, nature provides the male child of the wife and the patriarch with the intellectual potential for *phronesis*, which will eventually be required by him to rule the supposedly ‘irrational’ slave.³⁰⁶ By contrast, the slave is taken to lack *phronesis* not only as the second-order voluntary choice but even as a first-order capability.³⁰⁷ Aristotle considers the ‘natural slave’ to be intellectually disabled, deprived of the ability to exercise practical reason; in fact, this is precisely his justification for classifying a slave as a slave.³⁰⁸

Aristotle correctly recognizes both the necessity of a socio-material basis for political freedom and citizenship (i.e. natural resources and others’ labor) and the moral significance of knowing how to rationally control production (because of its effect on human potential).³⁰⁹ However, Aristotle is drastically wrong to assume that *phronesis* is impossible for subalterns to develop: what he takes to be a natural disability is actually a social *disabling*.³¹⁰

³⁰⁴ Heath, 247.

³⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.i 1094a3-4, VI.v 1140a31-1140b2, VI.v 1140b20; *Politics* III.iv 1277b26-28; Schofield, 320; Tabachnik, 1000.

³⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III.xii 1119b5-8; *Politics*, I.xiii 1260b19-20. However, this capacity requires growth and education in order to truly become available for use.

³⁰⁷ Murphy argues that the recursive complexity of Aristotle’s “nature, habit, and reason model” renders it superior to his simple “potency-act model” (Murphy, 225).

³⁰⁸ Aristotle, *Politics* I.v, 1254b20-23.

³⁰⁹ Swanson, 3-4.

³¹⁰ Snow, 53.

3.5 Regime Types: Systemic Social Goods

Just as individuals' character states (internal goods) are affected by their external conditions, social systems are conditioned by the characters of their members, who are typically not equal in stature but differentiated by privilege and power.³¹¹ Just like individuals, every social system (including the entire society as a whole) has both passive needs and active abilities to sustain itself. The most politically significant ability is political legislative authority.³¹² The representative nature of authority is synecdochal: there is some part 'standing in' for the whole by standing 'over' it.³¹³ In order to determine the nature of political representation, Aristotle classifies regimes according to the quantity of rulers (who ostensibly represent the interests of the populace back to them), which has implicit qualitative (i.e. class) features.³¹⁴

Aristotle inaugurates the discipline of political science by canvassing the governments of regional nation-states and developing an institutional typology. There are three basic regime types (or constitutions or polities), differentiated on a quantitative basis (rule by one, by some, or by all) and further subdivided on a qualitative basis (rule for the

³¹¹ Social reproduction theory explains these subclass oppressions according to the (gendered and racialized) *division of labor*. Iris Marion Young argues that marxist feminists should wield this concept (rather than 'class') to account for "specific cleavages and contradictions within a class" (Young, 51). However, Marx actually agrees, claiming that "the division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labour" (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 151).

³¹² Marx writes that "the State is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests" (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 187).

³¹³ Aristotle ambiguously uses the same term (*polis*) to refer both to the entire society and its dominant institution, the state (Mulgan, 17). In Book V of *Politics*, Aristotle explicitly frames politics as class struggle for such state power (Austin and Vidal-Naquet, 22). Marx agrees, using this Aristotelian model of state power to explain how the ruled revolt: "The class making a revolution appears... as the representative of the whole of society; it appears as the whole mass of society confronting the one ruling class" (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 174).

³¹⁴ Finley, 5. de Ste. Croix argues that for Aristotle, the difference between political constitutions is not actually the number of rulers, but rather their class. However, this is simply a function of class society's necessarily pyramidal sorting of a population. (de Ste. Croix, 72-73).

common good or only for private interests).³¹⁵ Aristotle actually treats democracy as a *corrupt* constitutional form of rule by the many (i.e. the poor working class).³¹⁶ He assumes that the masses, like all classes, are tempted to rule viciously according to their own interests. However, marxist feminists might resonate with Aristotle's complementary concept of *politeia* (a social democracy, according to Martha Nussbaum) whereby the governing many rule in the interest of all (i.e. the common good).³¹⁷ This accords with marxist feminism's mereological insistence that the interests of a particularly exploited and oppressed subclass can actually represent and rule in the interests of all.³¹⁸

Marxist theory actually accords with Aristotle's model: a particular class can only gain power by claiming to represent the will of the whole society (the common good) and by scapegoating another particular class (the common enemy).³¹⁹ The ideologies legitimizing both ancient slavery and modern capitalism both purport to serve the interests of all (through paternalism in the former and trickle-down economics in the latter). Yet even though Aristotle errs in his reactionary grading of social positionalities, marxists agree with him that the primary question of the common good is whether or not the needs of all are

³¹⁵ Aristotle, *Politics* III.vii 1279a26-30; Ambler, 398; Mulgan, 60.

³¹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics* III.vii 1279b5; Strauss, 36. Mulgan points out that Aristotle's quantitative approach to determining constitutional regime types is actually a proxy for qualitative class analysis, because "the wealthy are usually few and the poor usually many" (Mulgan, 63).

³¹⁷ Nussbaum interprets Aristotle's assignment of resource provision to the government as a form of "welfare state" (Nussbaum [1990], 204).

³¹⁸ However, even though Aristotle assumes that practical judgment inevitably tends to one's own affairs, he does not limit *phronetic* decisions to self-interest at the expense of others' interests (Cherry, 1409). Intersectional marxist feminists extend this belief even further: for instance, the Combahee River Collective proposes that a political project which liberates Black lesbian working class women (such as themselves) would ultimately involve the freedom of all (less oppressed) people (Combahee River Collective, 22-23).

³¹⁹ Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," 62. In surmising how the state will transform "in communist society", Marx warns that "one does not get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousandfold combination of the word 'people' with the word 'state'" (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 538).

being met. The question of who has the institutional ability (i.e. power) to fulfill those needs is of secondary importance. It is much less likely that a subaltern group's needs will be met if they do not personally have the ability to meet them; however, it is not impossible. Aristotle considers ways in which one, some, or many rulers can achieve the common good by meeting the needs of all.

3.6 Scaling Down: From *Polis* Rule to *Oikos* Rule

Politics is not merely rule within the state, but rule within any power structure, including the workplace. Just as feminism insists that the personal is political, marxists insist that the economic is political.³²⁰ The *oikos* exists within all of these dimensions: ancient Greek society did not differentiate between economics and politics in the same way as liberal capitalist society.³²¹ Rather than treating them as two different domains in which each citizen (of any class, race, or gender) has power, Greek social life endowed patriarchs with political and economic power, and women and slaves with political disenfranchisement and economic subjugation.³²²

For Aristotle, the political decision-making capacity of the property-owning patriarch not only applies at the state level of the *polis*, but also at the workplace level of the *oikos*.³²³ He (or the manager who acts on his behalf) must exercise practical reason in deciding both *why* workers should labor (including which goods and services they

³²⁰ Hartmann, 13; Joseph, 97; Bhattacharya, 9.

³²¹ Aristotle, *Politics* I.i 1252b13-18; Austin and Vidal-Naquet, 10.

³²² Clark, 189; Elshtain, 15-16.

³²³ In Thomas Smith's reading of Aristotle, the degree of corruption in the *oikos* depends on the degree of corruption in the *polis* (T. Smith, 631).

produce) and *how* they should labor in producing them.³²⁴ These questions cannot be answered without reference to state-level political conditions, nor can these latter be addressed in isolation from the socio-material conditions of production and social reproduction.

While the rule of the *polis* itself is restricted to all, some, or even one citizen (a title which is already reserved for free, property-owning males).³²⁵ However, as with the macrocosmic *polis*, the microcosmic *oikos* is assumed to serve the interests (however underestimated) of *all* its members, not merely the head of the household.³²⁶ Aristotle examines how the common good (as a governing principle) functions in the *oikos*, as the key economic site of production and social reproduction in the ancient *polis*.³²⁷ As with the *polis*, the *oikos* is thought to be a just and legitimate institution insofar as it serves the diverse interests of its members (whose unique and varying natures feature different abilities and needs). By borrowing his own political terminology of the city-state, Aristotle analogically ‘scales down’ the evaluative political schema of the common good and corruption from the level of the city-state.³²⁸ The six types of relationships which constitute the *oikos* (patriarch-wife, wife-slave, slave-child, patriarch-slave, patriarch child,

³²⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.viii 1141b30-34; Cherry, 1409.

³²⁵ The right of citizenship (i.e. political participation in state power) is rooted in property relations: citizens must own property and the propertyless cannot be citizens (Austin and Vidal-Naquet, 23-24). Of course, as Marx writes the original type of property is “slavery in the family” (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 159).

³²⁶ Aristotle, *Politics* I.xiii 1260b9-14.

³²⁷ Insofar as Aristotle claims that “a state is a body of citizens sufficing for the purposes of life” (Aristotle, *Politics* III.i 1275b20-21).

³²⁸ Aristotle, *Politics* III.xiv 1285b31-33. The obvious critique here is that a microcosmic example commits the fallacy of composition, inductively inferring that the whole system shares the structure of one of its parts. However, several SRT theorists have emphasized that dialectics requires mereological thinking, whereby parts and wholes often reflect each other, co-constitute each other, and even pass into one another (McNally, 103; Ferguson [2016], 47).

wife-child) each have their own appropriate type of rule according to the allegedly inferior natures and virtues of the subordinates.³²⁹

Patriarchal rule involves policing both the rights and the duties of subordinate household members. The wife, slave, and child are all graded according to their supposed capacity to achieve a specific internal good: the intellectual virtue of practical reason (*phronesis*). Because (according to Aristotle) the patriarch alone has the capacity for authoritative *phronesis*, he is both free (i.e. not enslaved) and empowered with citizenship rights (i.e. enabled to rule).³³⁰ Because the wife lacks the social authority to exercise her potential *phronesis*, she is denied the right of citizenship despite being free (i.e. not enslaved).³³¹ The slave is doubly oppressed, being denied both freedom and citizenship rights (or, in marxist feminist terms, liberation and power) on the grounds that they supposedly lack even the psychological potential for practical reason.³³² The child is only temporarily subjugated on the assumption that they will eventually gain the practical reason to govern not only their own passions but also other ‘less rational’ subjects. For Aristotle, each of these power relations contain a common good which serves the differing interest of ruled as well as ruler.³³³ However, this would be a degraded and alienating form of

³²⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* I.xii 1259b2-4; I.xiii 1259b45-48.

³³⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, I.xiii 1260b28-31; III.iv 1277b14-28. Marx writes that until now, only the ruling class has been truly free, meaning that their freedoms are really just privileges (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 197-8).

³³¹ Aristotle, *Politics* I.xiii 1260a14; 1260b20; Wright, 212; Horowitz, 207. Of course, Aristotle’s claim that women lack sufficiently recognized authority can imply that men possess excessive and irrational authority (Nichols, 32; Levy, 405).

³³² Aristotle, *Politics* I.xiii 1260b13-14. As Frank explains, *phronesis* is “what Aristotle calls a second-level capability... an actualization of a first-level capacity” through deliberate choice (Frank [2004], 96). Anyone denied the opportunity to make such a first-level decision cannot fully exercise the second-level of *phronesis* (Schofield, 321).

³³³ Aristotle, *Politics* I.v 1254a24-28; Cuffel, 331; Swanson, 18.

community; even on Aristotle's own account, the purpose of rule is to instill not only obedience but virtue... which would delegitimize the grounds for hierarchy.

3.7 Alienation and Democratic Autonomy

The classed and gendered division of labor in the *oikos* is not only oppressive and exploitative (i.e. corruptly serving only the ruling class interests of the patriarch).³³⁴ It is also inherently *alienating*, estranging the wife and the slave from themselves, other people, the goods they produce, and even their own working conditions and productive processes.³³⁵ This dynamic is most clearly illustrated by the fact that the slave might be called upon as a tutor to educate the child who will become their future master.³³⁶ As Aristotle would have it, the slave has the capability to train another to eventually manage the slave's working conditions, but the slave lacks this capability themselves, requiring their own manager.³³⁷ A marxist feminist would reject Aristotle's justification of 'natural' slavery not only as reprehensible but also as obviously false: the extent to which a slave (or any superexploited worker) lacks capabilities is simply the extent to which they are being intellectually or physically stunted by political decisions made by more powerful others.³³⁸ Thus, the slave suffers from not only exploitation and ethnic oppression, but also *alienation*.³³⁹ In marxism,

³³⁴ Wright, 207, 214.; Nichols, 32.

³³⁵ Swanson is only partially correct in describing this condition as "diversified excellence" (19, 23). Marx views this condition of class-formation in a much more insidious light (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 74, 77).

³³⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, VII.xvii 1336a40-1336b3. Aristotle indicates a difference between the enslaved tutor and other slaves (who he says have a bad influence on the child) which suggests that even on his own classist model, at least some slaves possess a measure of virtue.

³³⁷ This contradiction is even stronger in Elshtain's reading of Aristotle, in which the family (and not the *polis*) humanizes people via education in reason and language (Elshtain, 49).

³³⁸ Murphy, 5. In case this sounds offensive, one need only consider the impact of the privatization of schools and hospitals upon the bodies and minds of the impoverished.

³³⁹ Marx insists that economic value and moral virtue should affirm one another, but alienation

this is the condition of the estrangement of the laboring producer from their produced object (or, more relevantly, reproduced subject). As Marx writes (both literally and figuratively), the “worker becomes a slave of his object.”³⁴⁰

All class-based modes of production (whether patriarchal slavery or patriarchal capitalism) alienate workers from themselves both in body and in mind.³⁴¹ Aristotle leaps from recognizing the psychological difference between intellectual activity and bodily productivity to positing a social division of mental and manual labor.³⁴² This is made even worse by his evident privileging of mind over matter, which entails a workplace hierarchy of management’s mental labor and workers’ concrete labor (producing either physical goods or relational services).³⁴³ Not only are these productive ends of their labor determined externally by their employers and managers, but their processual means of accomplishing these tasks are often governed by rules and best practices over which they have had no autonomous input.³⁴⁴

By contrast, marxist feminists suggest that if workers collectively took ownership of their means of production, they could also thereby take ‘ownership’ of themselves.³⁴⁵

entails that they oppose one another antagonistically (DeGolyer, 138).

³⁴⁰ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 72-73. Marx indicates four aspects to alienation: estrangement from one’s self (“species being”), one’s products, other people, and nature (75-77).

³⁴¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 150. Social reproductive workers are especially estranged from their psychological experiences, because much of care work and service work involves emotional labor.

³⁴² Murphy, 8. Moreover, the slave’s manual labor is the material condition of possibility for the master, whose intellectual ‘labor’ is the ordering principle for the slave (Aristotle, *Politics* Liv 1253b24-34; Swanson, 41). However, Sharkey points out that on Aristotle’s account, all human beings are constituted by both form and by matter, so it is erroneous of him to posit hierarchical binaries between different types of human being on such a basis (Sharkey, 120).

³⁴³ Aristotle, *Politics* I.vii 1255b34-35; Fortenbaugh, 243.

³⁴⁴ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 160, 191; Murphy, 226. Following Marx, Arruzza shows that the conditions of production and social reproduction (re)produce the worker as a particular type of subject, for better or for worse (Arruzza, 18).

³⁴⁵ Weeks stresses the importance of considering workplaces as political “sites of decision-making”

Historically, the working class has organized in two types of democratic institutions—*labor unions* and *worker cooperatives*—to mitigate the exploitation of labor and the alienation from workplace control.³⁴⁶ In labor unions, workers collectively unite against the owners and managers, while in worker cooperatives workers collectively unite to become owners and self-managers.³⁴⁷ Both labor unions and worker-owned co-ops call for prudence not only synchronically (at the micro-level of short-term self-interest) but also diachronically (at the macro-level of long-term altruism).³⁴⁸

While the short-term goal of radicals in both institutions is to meet the needs of themselves and their comrades, the long-term goal is to transition into a post-capitalist, post-racist, post-patriarchal society that serves the full spectrum of needs (varying according to positionality).³⁴⁹ These would include not only the lower-level needs of subsistent survival (i.e. labor power replenished by social reproduction), but also those higher level needs of the development of human capabilities. These can and should be enabled by the state, provided that it has been structured according to socialist principles (often through the pressure of liberation movements). Yet marxists hope that even the state will eventually wither away. This presupposes development of a social order in which the needs and capabilities of all are both socially supported yet not socially determined.³⁵⁰

(Weeks, 2). However, while Marxists call for the workers to own the means of production, it is unclear whether there should be direct ownership of these instruments, or rather representative ownership as a class.

³⁴⁶ Wolff, 174. These function as prefiguratively communistic social relations within the dominant class system, demonstrating that a common good is possible to cultivate, at least at the small scale (Sayers, 169).

³⁴⁷ Wolff, 3, 12.

³⁴⁸ However, Rosa Luxemburg warns that without more explicit political organizations: “Cooperatives and trade unions are totally incapable of transforming the capitalist mode of production” (Luxemburg, 50).

³⁴⁹ Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 537.

³⁵⁰ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 160.

However, there is one capability which would be normative for all citizens to develop: the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*. For economic institutions such as labor unions and worker co-ops, the condition of democracy at work is both the (partial) means and the (partial) end of the socialist movement in which they often participate. Democracy calls forth the practical reasoning of all participants. The collective habit of democratic participation can and should be practiced prefiguratively at the small scale as preparation for large scale socialist transformation.³⁵¹ Practical reason, therefore, is not only instrumentally valuable as a means of providing for the material needs of oneself or another. *Phronesis* is also an inherently valuable end in itself, a part of the set of virtues which constitute the good life.³⁵² Accordingly, marxist feminists cannot actually disagree with Aristotle's framing of the active citizen's *phronesis* as the necessary connection point between ethics and politics.³⁵³ Rather, they merely expand the pool of agents who are encouraged to develop the virtue of practical reason through experience in collective decision-making.³⁵⁴

For care workers performing social reproductive labor, a major impediment to democratizing their workplaces is their suppression of *phronesis* by their management (as local agents of the capitalist superstructure, or "ideological state apparatus"). It is no insult to the workers' technical intelligence to point out that their work life has been designed to

³⁵¹ Wolff, 148. However, small-scale prefiguration is limited: Aristotle claims that the microstructural *oikos* cannot flourish without the support of the macrostructural *polis* (Dobbs, 35).

³⁵² Ahmed, 47. The internal goods are virtues, which may possibly serve as partial means to causally achieve *eudaimonia*, but which must necessarily serve as the component parts of the whole *eudaimonistic* state (Ackrill, 61-2).

³⁵³ Nichols, 3, 5. This is not to simply identify marxist feminist communism with Aristotelian *eudaimonia*; rather, it is to treat them as necessary conditions for the emergence of one another (Ahmed, 32).

³⁵⁴ Nichols, 5-6.

prevent the development of class consciousness: the awareness of how their working conditions are connected to national and international political decisions, and how their interests and those of their bosses align with their counterparts elsewhere. Because alienated workers are not allowed to make deliberative decisions even about their own work life, they do not develop the particular kind of strategic judgment required for civic participation in state rule over the rest of their lives.³⁵⁵

3.8 Confluences and Conflicts of Interests

Even though there were no slave revolts or abolitionists in ancient Greece, Aristotle takes the possibility of revolution very seriously.³⁵⁶ He emphasizes the necessity of social stability for avoiding revolution by other strata of the working class. To theorize optimal social stability, Aristotle examines the material and moral interests of each major social positionality, including each member of the *oikos*.³⁵⁷ Because the wife appears to belong to her husband's class, she is a common enemy of all her slaves (who have a shared interest in her removal).³⁵⁸ As a labor-aristocratic manager, the wife would have no immediate interest in joining any slave rebellion against her ruling class husband.³⁵⁹ This is the case even if her

³⁵⁵ However, this by no means implies that the exploitative private realm of production impedes the development of *any* virtues; in fact, Swanson reads Aristotle as treating the private worksite as an "opportunity to actualize virtue" albeit at a degraded level (Swanson, 2).

³⁵⁶ Finley, 109; Mulgan, 43; de Ste. Croix, 73, 75 . A marxist explanation for the lack of slave revolts in ancient Greece would not likely point to any failures of the slaves themselves, but rather the historical conditions for overthrowing the ancient mode of production (slavery) which were not yet sufficiently developed to facilitate a wave of revolts.

³⁵⁷ Although revolution paradigmatically refers to an upheaval of a state's constitution, it also applies to the nature of the family, which has also changed from form to form throughout history, to the point where marxist feminists imagine its eventual obsolescence (Kollontai, 1-2).

³⁵⁸ In order to build a positive common good, the working class (along with the Black community, women, and other subalterns) first identify, rally against, and defeat the ruling class, who constitute a common enemy: the negative inverse of the common good (Davis, 142; Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 199).

³⁵⁹ In fact, as Finley shows, there is not even historical evidence of another segment of the working

slave is also female, and they might be expected (by non-marxist feminists) to share gender-based solidarity.

However, as previously discussed, the wife's managerial function is a type of labor (albeit privileged). Her physical well-being (a fundamental set of needs) is dependent upon her ability and willingness to perform her assigned duties. This implies that, strictly speaking, she is actually a member of the working class, who are not only economically exploited but who are also politically alienated as non-citizens. The wife is technically free (not enslaved) but, like the slave, she is also deprived of the right to governance (including political decisions affecting her workplace).³⁶⁰ Thus, it is not clear why the wife (despite her rational fear of retribution) does not also have an interest in becoming empowered to fully realize her potential (as a worker as well as a citizen).

While the wife's compromised positionality (as a class traitor to her enslaved co-workers) provides for her needs, it stultifies her abilities. Her husband strips her of the capacity to live a public life. Thus, the wife shares with the slave a common good (however negative) in the form of the possibility of overthrowing the rule of patriarch. In a vacuum, it is not inconceivable that the slave—or rather, slaves—could persuade her to join them in overthrowing the master's rule.³⁶¹

class, the “free poor... joining with the slaves in a common struggle” (Finley, 107).

³⁶⁰ On Levy's reading, Aristotle's only problem with including women in state rule is a lack of political education, which can and should be rectified (Aristotle, *Politics* II.vi 1264b37-1276a12; Levy, 407).

³⁶¹ Of course, this possibility is highly speculative: the only record of a coordinated women's movement is the fictional sex strike in Aristophanes' 5th-century comedy *Lysistrata* (Austin and Vidal-Naquet, 26). However, for present purposes, I am not interested in the implausibility of such a common struggle; instead, I am simply performing a conceptual analysis of the lode-bearing notion of 'interests' within marxist feminist theory.

Not only is Aristotle’s refusal to acknowledge the personal and social benefits of empowering the slave and wife appalling—it is also tragically unnecessary.³⁶² Although Aristotle assumes that necessitarian labor and freedom are mutually exclusive, this is directly at odds with his theory of human nature as bodies ensouled with the psychological potentiality for reason.³⁶³ Thus, as rational animals, all human beings should be able to both labor and to deliberate—and to deliberate about how to labor. If the wife and the slave were granted the ability to control their own working conditions, they would quickly develop (or, more precisely, expand) their *phronesis* through managing the means and ends of their own labor. And since Aristotle claims that women and ‘natural’ slaves are structurally unable to develop this virtue, any empirical demonstration of *phronesis* by these subalterns would undermine the normative force ensuring their paternalistic subordination.³⁶⁴ He is, to say the least, unwarranted in inferring a lack of ability based on continued coercion into degrading socio-economic roles.³⁶⁵

Such pseudo-meritocracy is not merely a relic of ancient patriarchal slavery; it persists even into late-stage patriarchal racialized capitalism.³⁶⁶ The problem is not merely that the class system ignores the intellectual needs of the super-exploited workers, nor even that it seeks to keep them from gaining the critical thinking skills required to overthrow the ruling class (e.g. by preventing slaves from learning to read).³⁶⁷ The ultimate problem is that when the most abject members of the working class do in fact exhibit the ability to

³⁶² Elshtain, 53.

³⁶³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.xiii 1102b29-31; Arendt, 72-73.

³⁶⁴ This has, unsurprisingly, been demonstrated historically, from Black Reconstruction to the Petrograd Soviet.

³⁶⁵ Elshtain, 43; Wright, 212.

³⁶⁶ Arruzza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 11.

³⁶⁷ Davis, 22.

autonomously control their own environment, it reveals them to have the same rational faculties as their would-be superiors.³⁶⁸ Such democratic participation in ruling their social institutions (including their jobs) would allow the working class—whether ancient or late modern—to expand their capabilities and to provide for the needs of all.

3.9 Virtuous Circles

In the long term, both the privileged productive laborers and the marginalized social reproductive laborers who constitute the working class share an objective interest in abolishing class society and pursuing a common good.³⁶⁹ But in the short- to mid-term, the exploitative status quo induces conflicts of interest between these sub-classes.³⁷⁰ Thus, solidarity between them is not a given—instead, such a common good must be constructed. The common good depends upon contingent conditions at the personal level of a moral agent whose character manifests virtues (e.g. care, justice, and practical reason) and/or vices (e.g. active injustice or passive complicity, whether out of ignorance or willful malice). The common good also depends on the social conditions determined in large part by property distribution according to political decisions (made by ruling bodies which can be more or less democratic in nature).³⁷¹ Because the populace contains fluctuating and

³⁶⁸ On Aristotle's own theory, they should be recognized as fellow citizens in a social democracy (Bradshaw, 557; Nussbaum (1990), 203, 208, 233. This is simply a positive reading of Aristotle's warning that changing the social functions of the alienated and exploitative *oikos* will negatively impact the whole social order (Coole, 29).

³⁶⁹ Arruzza notes that men, unlike capitalists, have nothing to lose if women's domestic labor is socialized (Arruzza, 8). In the abstract, this even extends to the uppermost tiers of the bourgeoisie—ultimately, a common good should be available to all. But revolutionary history shows that the ruling classes are extremely reticent to recognize this possibility.

³⁷⁰ Laslett and Brenner, 391; McAlevey, 158. Similarly, Hartmann writes that even though men's and women's interests may coincide "in the long run," they are opposed in the short term (Hartmann, 9).

³⁷¹ Yack, 3-4. Aristotle doubts that citizen-legislators can incentivize the common use of common

uneven levels of need-fulfillment and capability-development, the common good is inescapably a *provisional* confluence of interests.³⁷² For this reason, the citizen-rulers require context-specific *phronesis* to leverage existing goods (both internal and external) as means toward the end of achieving further ends and greater goods.

There is a cyclical relationship between the internal goods consisting of virtue-honed capabilities (such as *phronesis*) and external goods which provide for socio-material needs. Certain external goods are existentially necessary for an agent to even live long enough to develop virtues, while some internal goods (such as the virtue of *phronesis*) are necessary for them to even secure those goods at all.³⁷³ Analogously, each socio-economic system is reproduced by the dialectical connection between material base needs (the ‘lowest common denominator’ of shared interests) and the intentional strategic choices made by the ruling class of citizen-legislators (whose practical reasoning may be more or less virtuous in nature).³⁷⁴

Marxist feminists proclaim as a key article of faith that the privileged have a moral obligation to struggle on behalf of the oppressed—perhaps to the point of opposing their own interests. However, they also recognize that advocating such altruism among their

(state) property, so he counsels them to incentivize the virtue of benevolence among private property owners and indirectly enable its common use (Aristotle, *Politics* II.v 1263a16-39; Dobbs, 39-40). Yet even though this account may seem quite idealist by marxist standards, it is based on Aristotle’s empirical analysis of human behavior... within a distributive matrix that has already been concretely determined by the contingent decisions of citizen-legislators.

³⁷² This is merely the inverse of how oppressive modes of production (especially capitalism) may repeatedly reconfigure social positionalities to perpetuate ruling class corruption (Arruzza, 14).

³⁷³ Annas, 43. Aristotle writes that virtuous activity “needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or at least difficult, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.viii 1099a32-33).

³⁷⁴ Nussbaum (1990), 204.

privileged allies is clearly inadequate as their primary political strategy.³⁷⁵ After all, capitalist patriarchy is partially constituted by economic conditions, and Marx writes that every “radical revolution” is driven by “a material basis... the needs of the people.”³⁷⁶ But on the Aristotelian model of moral development, it is actually possible for prudent (*phronetic*) organizers to leverage economic self-interest into some degree of altruistic solidarity.³⁷⁷

The marxist feminist tradition has always had one foot in history and theory and the other in political *praxis*; training in both (via the experience of liberatory struggle) is required to make strategic judgments reconciling means with ends and particulars and universals.³⁷⁸ Through such practical reasoning (i.e. Aristotelian *phronesis*), marxist feminists can determine which people might share converging interests with them, even if those interests are purely egoistic material needs.³⁷⁹ Unlike bourgeois liberalism, marxist feminism leverages feelings of solidarity, whereby “an injury to [one] is actually an injury to all.”³⁸⁰ By appealing to such enlightened self-interest, marxist feminists can construct a common good within and across (sub)class divisions, building a culture of solidarity in which relational experiences can cultivate more altruistic motives and virtues.³⁸¹ The

³⁷⁵ Bhattacharya, 15, 17. This is the case even with perhaps the most famous articulation of intersectionality, the Combahee River Collective Statement. Even as they cite the need to center the multiply oppressed, they recognize the limits of altruism: “We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression” (Combahee River Collective, 19).

³⁷⁶ Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” 61. As Silvia Federici writes, “welfare buys women more autonomy from men” (Federici, 48).

³⁷⁷ Frank (2005), 153; McAleve, 56.

³⁷⁸ McAleve, 201, 11.

³⁷⁹ As Ruth Groff proposes, “Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* is a natural one for Marxists to endorse when it comes to theorizing the nature of ethical judgment” (Groff, 313).

³⁸⁰ Bhattacharya, 89-90.

³⁸¹ Luxemburg, 216, McAleve, 29; T. Smith, 628. Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes the inherently intersubjective dimension of liberation: to “will oneself free is also to will others free” (de Beauvoir, 73).

political decisions involved in building such coalitional common goods requires precisely the Aristotelian intellectual and moral virtue of *phronesis*.

Consider the example of a care worker who (along with her comrades in her labor union) has decided to go on strike from her (waged) social reproductive labor.³⁸² In self-interestedly pursuing her own individual good (higher wages, better working conditions, and greater job autonomy), each striking care worker pursues the good of her union. In pursuing the good of her union, she also pursues the interest of her class, race, and gender.³⁸³ And in pursuing the interest of her subordinate class, she pursues the true interest of her entire society.³⁸⁴ True political struggle—even for self-interested motives—does not leave its subjects untouched.³⁸⁵ In the process, it transforms them and elevates their interests and ends—not only the fulfillment of their individual needs, but their development of more sophisticated capabilities by which to serve (and expand) the interests of others.³⁸⁶ The common good—the *communist* good—is one in which abilities and needs cohere in a mutually reinforcing virtuous circle. Marx and Engels famously describe such a society as one in which “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”³⁸⁷

I conclude that within any class society, the common good which is actually shared by different classes, genders, and races (or ethnicities) is an interest in *constructing*

³⁸² These industries—highly feminized, highly racialized, highly social reproductive—such as healthcare, education, and food services—are the new sites of labor struggle in the 21st century (McAlevey, 20).

³⁸³ McAlevey, 158-9.

³⁸⁴ McAlevey, 204.

³⁸⁵ de Beauvoir, 128.

³⁸⁶ Frank (2005), 175-76.

³⁸⁷ Marx and Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party, 491.

solidarity.³⁸⁸ The harmonization of conflicting interests is, simply put, neither possible or impossible. Rather, the very possibility of a common good is contingent upon the internal and external conditions of multiple individuals in different social and economic positionalities. A solidaristic common good between different classes, genders, and races may well not *actually* exist, but it *can become possible*. Such an achievement will require the exercise of *phronesis*, the most essential capability for democratic deliberation about the just distribution of necessities and the means of accomplishing it.³⁸⁹ I suggest that Aristotle’s theory of moral character, especially the virtue of *phronesis*, can serve as a surprisingly effective model for marxist feminists to address power differentials in a strategic way which builds toward liberation.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyze the conditions under which a *common good* (a confluence of interests) would be possible between different strata of the working class, particularly across the gendered and racialized division of labor between productive and social reproductive workers. I consider critiques by marxists and feminists that ‘common good’ discourse (such as Aristotle’s foundational conception), when deployed under present conditions of domination, both ignores differences in need and ability (due largely to

³⁸⁸ As Maria Mies recounts her students’ slogan in the women’s movement, “Struggle unites us!” (Mies, viii).

³⁸⁹ *Phronesis* is an instrumentally valuable means, which is by no means exhausted in either liberation struggles or in statecraft. Yet it is also an inherently valuable end (Yack, 11-12). In both of these aspects, *phronesis* is a necessary—though not sufficient—condition for the good life, individually and collectively.

classed gendered and raced conditioning) and ideologically conceals domination by coercing the oppressed and exploited to substitute their oppressors' interests for their own.

I have responded that marxist feminism's socialist principle ('From each according to their ability, to each according to their need') is actually a specific version of the Aristotelian common good. Aristotle's hylomorphic theory conceptualizes the good in terms of both *external goods* (material use values for physical needs) as well as *internal goods* (the virtuous condition of rationally habituated affects). Similarly, marxist feminist analysis is primarily interested in certain basic needs (viz. food, water, shelter, security, healthcare, transportation, and education) which in turn empower and condition human capabilities. Thus, human life is not only *reproduced* through this cycle of needs and abilities, but is naturally *self-transcending*. By reducing such transcendence to subsistence, class systems alienate workers by debasing their needs and incapacitating their abilities, thereby all but precluding a common good.

I have shown that what marxists and feminists view as ideological pseudo-universality is precisely what Aristotle calls *corruption*, whereby a particular interest falsely asserts itself as representing the interest of the whole. Using these definitions, Aristotle develops a normative theory of regime types in which institutional legitimacy requires that each ruler serve the interests of all (i.e. the common good) rather than only their own interests (i.e. corruption). On this definition, patriarchal racialized capitalism does not merely permit, reward, or even cause corruption; instead, by definition, it is an *inherently corrupt* system.

I have recounted how Aristotle's common good schema, originally developed to evaluate the legitimacy of a political state, is also applied microcosmically to the economic worksite of the household (*oikos*). Within the ancient familial slave economy, Aristotle prescribes a specific hierarchical rule to each relationship: husband over wife, master over slave, wife over slave, father over child, and slave over child. These forms of rule are drawn from political regime types, which either function justly for the common good or function unjustly for corrupt private interests. Aristotle ranks the socio-economic positionalities of the patriarch, the wife, the slave and the child according to their (in)abilities to politically exercise *phronesis*: practical reason or prudence. Aristotle insists that this capacity (for rationally acting to benefit others and self) gives the patriarchal master the right to not only control the workplace but also participate as a free citizen in the autonomous rule of the state. While marxist feminists would reject as absurd the claim that women and the enslaved cannot exercise practical wisdom, they would acknowledge that the oppressed have (by definition) been prevented from developing *phronesis* (which is necessary for democratic collective autonomy) by being systematically denied the experience of ruling at any level beyond one's own workplace (e.g. the *oikos*).

I have argued that, as with his notion of the common good, Aristotelian *phronesis* is not merely a ruling class characteristic; it is also indispensable for working class liberatory struggles which must navigate socio-political contingencies with principled stances. The utopian goal of communism, in which democratic structures rationally coordinate the needs and abilities of all, would entail that all citizens cultivate this deliberative virtue of *phronesis* through participation in the governance structures responsible for fulfilling basic needs.

I have demonstrated that marxist feminists would agree with Aristotle's claim that only the practically wise should rule, because otherwise the common good—the needs and abilities of all—will not be served. Yet because marxist feminists are committed to actual democracy (at least in the long term), they must insist that everyone should develop *phronesis*. (Contra Aristotle's ideological circular logic, everyone must be said to have this potential). By building autonomous workplace institutions such as labor unions and worker-owned co-ops, workers (especially multiply oppressed care workers) can exercise practical reason in democratic deliberation over their own means of production. In the meantime, as the exploited and the oppressed struggle against their common enemy, their shared experience trains them in the virtue of practical reason and expands their capacity for collective autonomous decision-making. This shared capability increases the likelihood of providing for not only their own needs but also for those of others. The collectively deployed virtue of *phronesis* is both a strategic means toward—and an end prefiguratively manifesting—the good life which Aristotle calls *eudaimonia* and which marxist feminists call liberation or even communism. The more that citizens—comrades—exercise internal goods (such as the virtuous capability of *phronesis*), the more capable they will be in making strategic decisions as history unfolds dialectically. And the prudent decisions they will make will strategically connect the diverse needs and abilities among different social positionalities in order to open up new solidaristic possibilities for a common good.

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Chapter 2: The Dialectical Virtues (and Vices) of Social Reproductive Care Work

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Chapter 3. Working Toward a Common Good: Alienation, Autonomy, and Solidarity

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VITA

I. Education

Graduate Certificate in College Teaching & Learning (2018)
University of Kentucky, Lexington KY

MA in Philosophy (2014)
Institute for Christian Studies (ICS), Toronto ON

BA in Philosophy and Political Science (2010)
Trinity Christian College (TCC), Palos Heights IL

Major in Philosophy (2010)
Oxford University, Oxford UK (Semester Study Abroad Program)

II. Professional Positions Held

Teaching Assistant (2015—2020)
University of Kentucky Philosophy Department, Lexington KY

Adjunct Instructor (2016—Present)
Bluegrass Community & Technical College, Lexington KY

Philosophy Summer Camp Counselor (2016—Present)
University of Kentucky Philosophy Department, Lexington KY

Adjunct Instructor (2013—2015)
Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights IL

Archivist (2012—2013)
ICS Library, Toronto ON

Research Assistant (2011—2012)
Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto ON

III. Scholastic and Professional Honors

Grant for UK Philosophy Summer Camp: \$500.00 (2018)
Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA)

Grant for UK Philosophy Summer Camp: \$2500.00 (2017)
Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO)

Middleton Memorial Award for Excellence in Theology (2013)
Northeastern Seminary, Rochester NY

Bernard Zylstra Scholarship (2011—2013)
Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto ON

IV. Professional Publications

“Book Review of Carl A. Rashke, *Critical Theology: Introducing an Agenda for an Age of Global Crisis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016).” *Christian Scholars Review* 47:2 (2018), pp. 207-209.

“Book Review of Christopher P. Long, *Socratic and Platonic Political Philosophy: Practicing a Politics of Reading* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014).” *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 55:1 (2016), pp. 1-3.

“(Im)Peccability Amid the Powers: Christological Sinlessness and Systemic Evil.” *Canadian Theological Review* 2:2 (2013).

“Book Review of Lisa Isherwood and Marko Zlomislic (eds), *The Poverty of Radical Orthodoxy*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012).” *Metapsychology Online Reviews*, 17:24 (June 26, 2013).

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