

2

The Mare, the Vixen, and the Bee: *Sophrosyne* as the Virtue of Women in Antiquity¹

HELEN F. NORTH

When the future Emperor Julian entered the presence of Eusebeia, the wife of his predecessor, Constantius, he was so deeply impressed by the perfection of her womanly virtue that he felt as though he were beholding a statue of *Sophrosyne*. So, at least, he reports in his Encomium of the Empress (*Or.* III.123A-B). It is doubtful that Julian could actually have seen a statue of the personified virtue of *Sophrosyne*. No trace, no record of such a statue has survived, and it is likely that he was thinking of the Roman equivalent, *Pudicitia*, who was portrayed in images and portrait busts, as well as on the imperial coinage from the time of Hadrian. But what is significant is that when he sought to evoke the quintessence of feminine excellence, *sophrosyne* was the concept that occurred to him, as it would probably have occurred to most of his readers, whether Greek or Roman. By the time Julian composed his eulogy (ca. A.D. 355) *sophrosyne* had long been accepted as the principal *virtus feminarum* and as such was mentioned in numberless epitaphs, celebrated in rhetorical *topoi* concerned with feminine *arete*, and ascribed to various mythical exemplars, some of whom—Penelope, Arete, Evadne, Laodamia—figure in this very oration.

But *sophrosyne* is the most multifaceted of all the Greek virtues, and some of its aspects belong exclusively to men.² What is the *sophrosyne* of

¹ This paper is an adaptation of one that I had the privilege of reading at the University of Wisconsin in Madison on May 12, 1974, as part of a celebration in honor of Friedrich Solmsen on the occasion of his retirement. I should like to dedicate this version also to him.

² I have tried to separate some of the threads that comprise the fabric of this complicated *arete* and trace them to their sources in *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca, 1966).

women? When did it emerge as their proper characteristic? And what does it tell us about the way women were regarded in antiquity? It is the purpose of this paper to suggest answers to these questions.

The earliest extant literary allusion to feminine *sophrosyne* occurs in the famous diatribe against women composed by Semonides of Amorgos in the latter half of the seventh century B.C. This poem is of profound significance for the history of women because, like the earlier and still more celebrated story of Pandora as told by Hesiod, it reveals the deep-seated misogyny characteristic of the archaic Greek farmer. Semonides' tirade consists mainly of a series of degrading analogies between types of women and animals. One kind of woman is compared to a sow, another to a bitch, another to a donkey, still others to a weasel, an ape, a mare, and a vixen, each type of woman being charged with the ugly, vicious, ridiculous, or otherwise undesirable traits popularly ascribed to the animal from which she is said to be descended. In one hundred and eighteen lines of pungent comment Semonides finds only one kind of woman worthy of praise, the one he compares to a bee. The excellence ascribed to the bee-woman might easily represent the ideal of feminine conduct enshrined in the hearts of men throughout Greek history. Of this woman the poet says that she makes livelihood flourish and increase; loving and beloved, she grows old with her husband, bearing children who are fair and well-spoken of; she is outstanding among all women, and charm from the gods envelops her. Moreover, she does not enjoy sitting among women when they talk about sex (frg. 7.85-91, Diehl).

After this unique commendation Semonides returns to his normal satiric strain and concludes the poem with a reminder that all other kinds of women constitute a source of woe for mankind, through the device of Zeus. For good measure, he then gives one further instance of the evil women do, deceiving their husbands and making them a laughing-stock among their malicious neighbors. In his description of the bee-woman the poet does not apply the term *sophron* to his paragon, although hers is precisely the kind of conduct for which the word was to be reserved in the classical period. But he does employ the related verb *sophronein* in his vivid little picture of the treacherous wife and the deceived husband. "Whatever woman seems especially to be a good wife—*sophronein*—that very one happens to be doing the greatest harm, for while her husband is gaping, the neighbors rejoice to see how he is deceived" (108-111). Clearly her outrageous conduct is sexual, for just before this Semonides says that when a man has a wife he cannot welcome strangers into his house (106-107). The poet's statement makes sense only if there already exists a general understanding that to be *sophron* is to be chaste—for a

woman, that is. The word does not have a comparable application to the moral or sexual conduct of men until about two centuries later, and it never ranks very high, in this sense, in the table of masculine virtues, as the story of Hippolytus makes abundantly clear.

Before the time of Semonides words derived from the root of *sophron* have no specifically feminine application in extant literature. In the Homeric poems *saophron* and *saophrosyne* (the original, uncontracted forms) occur but rarely, and only once in connection with a woman. In Book XXIII of the *Odyssey* Penelope tells Eurycleia, the aged nurse, who has announced the return of Odysseus after twenty years, that the gods have deprived her of her wits, "the gods who can make foolish (*aphron*) even one who is exceedingly sensible (*epiphron*) and who have brought the light-minded (*chaliphroneon*) to *saophrosyne*" (11-13). The noun *saophrosyne* is still close to its etymological meaning, "soundness of mind," as its equation with another word meaning "sensible" (*epiphron*) clearly implies. The antitheses to both terms simply mean "foolish." There is nothing specifically masculine or feminine about either condition, and one can imagine Penelope making the same remark to the swineherd, Eumaeus.

We should note, however, a significant application of the adjective *saophron* to Telemachus, the son of Odysseus, when he, a simple country boy from Ithaca, stands bashfully silent in the presence of Menelaus, the world-famous king of Sparta. His young friend Peisistratus apologizes for him, saying, "He is modest (*saophron*) and feels ashamed to embark on hasty speech in your presence" (IV.158-160). This use of *saophron* is notable because to be silent, or to speak only briefly, was to become an important facet of *sophrosyne* for women (and for young persons of either sex) throughout Greek literature.

One other use of *saophron*, this time in the *Iliad*, also forecasts future developments. Poseidon challenges Apollo to fight, taking sides in the battle between the Greeks and the Trojans. Apollo refuses, on the ground that he would not be *saophron*, if he, a god, engaged in combat for the sake of mortal men (XXI.462-464). This use too is significant, because the word here implies self-knowledge, especially knowing one's own place, and although the place of Apollo is entirely different from the place of women in Greek society, *sophrosyne* as a sense of propriety has applications for them too.

In post-Homeric poetry and the society that it reflects, *sophrosyne* took on a variety of new meanings, some of them religious, some political in their implications. The concept was especially congenial to the Apolline morality with its emphasis on restraint, self-knowledge, and the acceptance

of limits, imposed in some cases by the gods, in others by the state, and in the case of women by men. The general tendency of *sophrosyne* to suggest inhibition of some kind made it particularly suitable (from a masculine point of view) as a *summa* of feminine virtue, and it is not surprising that *sophron* begins to replace more general terms of value, such as *agathe* or *esthle*. For example, Hesiod in the *Works and Days* remarks that a man gets nothing better than a good wife, nothing worse than a bad one (702-703)—doubtless a cliché even in the eighth century B.C. His word for the good wife is *agathe*, which becomes *esthle* in Semonides (fr. 6), but when Epicharmus in the fifth century echoes this bit of proverbial wisdom, *agathe* and *esthle* must have seemed insufficiently precise. He therefore substitutes *sophron*, saying that it is the virtue of a *sophron* woman not to wrong her husband (fr. 286, Kaibel). There can be little doubt that by *sophron* he means what Semonides meant by *sophronein*: to be dutiful, obedient, well-behaved. By the fifth century *sophrosyne* in this sense has established itself as the fundamental quality expected of women, married or unmarried. Thereafter the concept may be amplified or refined, adapted to particular circumstances, but no change in the basic meaning occurs, where women are concerned. And during the late archaic and early classical period a further development of great importance takes place: the identification and canonization of exemplars of feminine virtue and vice. Mythical heroines such as Penelope and Andromache, to whom the word *sophron* had never been applied in the Homeric poems, are now stereotyped as models of *sophrosyne*, while Clytemnestra, Helen, Stheneboea, and Phaedra are exemplars of undesirable conduct—licentious, self-willed, destructive. Both kinds of exemplar now become available for citation in a variety of edifying contexts, from choral odes in tragedy to mythological parallels in oratory and popular philosophy.³

It is in tragedy of the fifth century that the type of the *sophron* wife is first observed, fully established and represented by the principal exemplars destined to reign in later times. Andromache is preëminent among them. Two plays by Euripides include scenes in which she explains in some detail what her famous *sophrosyne* consists of. In *The Trojan Women* (645-656) it includes staying indoors and not indulging in gossip (we remember the bee-woman of Semonides). This is in fact the minimum qualification

³ Marylin B. Arthur, "Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude toward Women," *Arethusa* 6 (1973) 7-58, suggests reasons why the social, political, and economic organization of Greek communities from the sixth to the fourth centuries made men feel it essential to keep under strict control feminine sexuality and "tendencies towards destructiveness," which in Homeric and other aristocratic societies had seemed less threatening to masculine security.

imposed on women at virtually all periods in Greek history.⁴ It is the essence of Telemachus' injunction to his mother, immediately after Athena has inspired him to assume the responsibilities of an adult male (*Od.* I.356-358). He expresses the advent of full maturity first by rebuking the suitors, then by telling his mother to go upstairs and tend to her household tasks. In Aeschylus' *Septem* Eteocles bids the distraught women of the Chorus to do two things: be quiet and stay in the house (232). We understand how it was that the tortoise became the symbol of the *sophron* woman, from the Ouranian Aphrodite of Phidias to the *Pudicitia* of Ripa.⁵ The tortoise is always necessarily indoors, because it carries its house wherever it goes, and there was even a widespread belief in antiquity that the tortoise had no tongue. It therefore had to be silent!

We understand also why in the *Medea* the theme of "going out"—out of the house—becomes so crucial. In *Medea's* first speech to the Women of Corinth (in the first line of her first speech) she says that she has come out of the house—ἐξῆλθον δόμων (214), and the rest of the play rings the changes on the symbolism implicit in that phrase.⁶ And finally, we understand why when Aristotle in the *Politics* concedes that only aristocratic women can be expected to maintain the standards of behavior that he approves—essentially, *sophron* behavior—he remarks that the women of the poor "go out" (here *exienai*), presumably to earn their living, and therefore cannot conduct themselves in the conservative, old-fashioned way (1300a4-7).

In Euripides' *Andromache*, the concept of *sophrosyne* as the virtue of the ideal wife is embellished by still another facet, one that modern critics have tended to find somewhat extreme. Now *Andromache* recalls that when she was Hector's wife she even suckled his children by other women (224-225). That is, absence of jealousy is a facet of feminine *sophrosyne*, a highly desirable one from the masculine point of view. Its opposite, the refusal to brook a rival, is exemplified by Clytemnestra, *Medea*, and *Hermione*, whose lack of *sophrosyne*, in this respect and others, brings disaster upon their husbands' households.

Women specifically characterized as possessing *sophrosyne* are not

⁴ Exceptions are women like Sappho and the girl athletes celebrated in Alcman's Maiden-song (who, we note, are compared to fillies, with no pejorative implication, fr. 1. 47-48, 58-59, Page). The Amazons are so completely opposed to the Greek concept of feminine *arete* that they regularly figure (like the Centaurs, the Titans, and the Giants) as symbols of *hybris*, in classical sculpture.

⁵ For the tortoise and its significance consult W. S. Heckscher, "Aphrodite as a Nun," *Phoenix* 7 (1953) 105-117.

⁶ See Kenneth J. Reckford, "Medea's First Exit," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 329-359.

uncommon in Euripidean tragedy, sometimes maidens, more often wives (since perpetual virginity is not a Greek ideal, except for certain goddesses, and then for special, often very complex historical reasons). In either condition, they are noted for quiet, inconspicuous behavior and obedience to father, husband, or other *kyrios*, as well as for chastity. They are not, for the most part, protagonists in their tragedies, since for women, as for men, to be capable of *sophrosyne* is to be relegated to secondary rôles—foil characters like Ismene in the *Antigone* or Creon in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Not only Euripides, with his Medea, Phaedra, and Electra, but Aeschylus and Sophocles as well find their tragic heroines in women who reject the feminine stereotype and show themselves to be as passionate and heroic as men. The Sophoclean Electra in a famous passage (983) even aspires to the specifically masculine *arete* of *andreaia* (which Aristotle in the *Poetics*, Ch. 15.4, criticizes along with *deinotes*, cleverness, as unsuited to the feminine *ethos*); she has already recognized that in her situation *sophrosyne* is impossible (307–308). What is commendable in a man is of course dangerous, even to the point of *hybris*, in a woman, and the contrast between the feminine and masculine elements in such natures constitutes a special source of tragedy, almost a special kind of *hamartia*.

The *sophron* woman in Euripidean tragedy can be the heroine only in the kind of play whose climax is self-sacrifice, freely chosen, since *sophrosyne* in a woman normally includes self-sacrificing conduct. Hence Alcestis is the other notable Euripidean heroine of *sophrosyne*, and for obvious reasons the one most popular in sepulchral epigrams, which not only perpetuate traditional values, but, in Roman times especially, compare their subjects to Penelope, Andromache, or Arete, as well as to Alcestis.⁷

The study of ancient epitaphs tends to suggest that *sophrosyne*, even though established as the characteristic virtue of women in the late archaic and early classical period, found its way into inscriptions only later. The earliest epitaphs, for both men and women, are extremely severe, sometimes confined to the name of the dead person, but as early as the sixth century B.C. *sophron* and *sophrosyne* begin to appear in masculine epitaphs, particularly those from the Dipylon in Athens, in such formulae as *agathos kai sophron, arete kai sophrosyne*.⁸ Similar phrases become current on feminine *stelae* only in the fourth century. An example is the epitaph

⁷ On this subject consult Richmond Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana, 1942), especially 293–300. For comparisons to mythical exemplars of *sophrosyne* see Kaibel, *Epigrammata Graeca*, 277, 471, 558, 874.

⁸ See Paul Friedländer, *Epigrammata* (Berkeley, 1948) 71, 6, 31, 85.

for Glycera, from the Peiraeus, which describes her as *esthle kai sophron*.⁹ Differing implications conveyed by the same words, depending on which sex is commended, are spelled out only in later, more detailed inscriptions, usually of the Roman period. Nevertheless such a fourth-century Athenian epitaph as that of Hegilla, which praises her *tropoi* (character) *kai sophrosyne*, makes it clear that her virtues as a wife are meant, because the inscription concludes by saying that her husband knows best how to praise her.¹⁰

In the course of centuries, as sepulchral eulogy becomes ever more lavish and specific, the praise of women for traditional domestic virtues occupies an increasingly prominent position. Lattimore cites a late, elaborate list of feminine virtues in the epitaph of Claudia Areskousa, from Patara, whose qualities begin with *philandria asynkritos* (incomparable love for her husband) and proceed through *philoteknia anyperbletos* (unsurpassable love for her children) and *kallos ameimeton* (matchless beauty) to reach a climax in *sophrosyne adiegetos* (indescribable virtue).¹¹

Roman epitaphs commend the departed wife and mother by such terms as *pudica*, *casta*, *sobria*, words that are ubiquitous also in rhetorical eulogy and the stories of the great Roman heroines of the early Republic, Lucretia and Verginia. On both Greek and Roman monuments there is a tendency to link the basic feminine virtue with wool-working. Every student of Roman epigraphy remembers the formula *domum servavit, lanam fecit* (she kept house, she spun wool) which concludes the epitaph for a Claudia of the Gracchan age (*CE* 52). The word *lanificium* (wool-working) finds a place in lists of virtues on tombs, as does the boast: *Lana . . . e manibus numquam sine causa recessit* (the wool never fell from her fingers without good reason, *CE* 1988, 14).

Such proofs of domesticity are somewhat more common on Roman than Greek tombstones, yet there is the famous example from Sardes in the first century B.C. of an epitaph celebrating a woman, Menophila, whose achievements were represented on the tombstone by symbols explained in the epitaph itself. This lady had held office (*archa*) of some kind (probably religious, rather than civic), a distinction represented on her tombstone by a garland; she was honored for her intelligence (*sophia*), symbolized by a bundle of papyrus scrolls, and for her "well-ordered virtue" (*eutaktos arete*, a substitute for *sophrosyne*), which is commemorated by a work-basket (*taleros*).¹²

Epigrams in the *Greek Anthology*, adopting the form of genuine epitaphs

⁹ Kaibel 53; see also 51: *agathe kai sophron*.

¹⁰ Kaibel 78. ¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 292. ¹² *Ibid.* p. 293.

or dedicatory inscriptions, sometimes refer to the *talaros*, the spindle, the loom-comb, or other symbols of wool-working, as well as more enigmatic emblems of feminine excellence. Since household tasks are traditionally the *erga* or *ergmata* of Athena, the apparatus of wool-working is often dedicated to this goddess, sometimes to mark the end of the weaver's career (e.g., *A.P.* VI.247), sometimes to indicate that the dedicator, tired of honest poverty, is transferring her attention to the works of Aphrodite (e.g., *A.P.* VI.47, 48, 285).

Among the "enigmatic epigrams" which describe puzzling emblems and explain their significance (a type to which the Sardes inscription really belongs), is one by Antipater of Sidon which says, in the person of the dead woman, that the wool proclaims her to have been *philoergos*, a lover of work (*A.P.* VII.423). Another epigram by the same poet asks the dead woman, Lysidice, the meaning of the reins, the muzzle, and the cock that adorn her *stele*, emblems that do not suit sedentary women, but rather the works of the spindle and the loom. The answer comes that the cock proclaims her to have been an early riser, the reins show that she was the "charioteer" of her house, and the muzzle reveals that she was not talkative, but full of lovely *hasychia* (quietude, VII.424). One thinks of the emblem-books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Italy, which recommend that artists depict a bridle as an emblem of *temperantia* (the usual Latin rendering of *sophrosyne*). Even earlier, Giotto portrayed the personified *Temperanza* in the Arena chapel in Padua as a woman wearing a bridle and holding the bit in her mouth.

If the primary virtue of women is thus signified on Greek and Roman epitaphs and funeral *stelae* by workbaskets and allusions to *lanificium*, if Lucretia, in Livy's account, is found by her husband late at night spinning, if spinning or weaving symbolizes feminine virtue in New Comedy and Roman elegy,¹³ we are bound to consider the economic aspect of feminine excellence, the explicit identification of the good woman with the good housekeeper. Phocylides of Miletus in the sixth century B.C. sums up the kinds of women in a catalogue consisting of four types, three of them bad: the flirt, the slattern, and the shrew, compared, in the manner of Semonides, to a mare, a sow, and a bitch. The only good woman is the one he calls the *oikonomos agathe*, the good housekeeper. She is of course compared to a bee (fr. 3). Phocylides does not describe her as *sophon*, but it is appropriate to ask to what extent and at what date feminine *arete*, especially *sophrosyne*, was defined in terms of *oikonomia*.

A study of Homer yields a rich harvest of "value-terms" applied to

¹³ Consult Ogilvie on Livy 1.57.9 for many apt citations.

women, although, as noted above, *sophron* itself is exceptional. Terms of praise include *pinyte*, *pepnymene*, and *periphron*, all of which refer to some kind of practical intelligence, *echephron*, "self-restrained," and occasionally (in the *Odyssey*) *euergos*, "a good-worker." These values are determined by men, on the basis of what is advantageous, profitable, or simply pleasant for them in the context of heroic society. Within the framework of the epic poems, the terms of value are usually applied by masculine characters, talking about women—Agamemnon, the Trojan Elders, Odysseus, or the Suitors. Women are seldom quoted on the subject of other women. Exceptions are Nausicaa talking about her mother, Arete, Calypso talking about Penelope, and Penelope talking about Helen or the treacherous maidservants. Only Nausicaa is complimentary.

One of the first references to a woman in the *Iliad* is also one of the most instructive: Agamemnon's statement in Book I of his reasons for preferring his captive, Chryseis, to his wife, Clytemnestra. He says that Chryseis is not inferior to Clytemnestra in respect to form, stature, intelligence, or accomplishments (*erga*, 115). Of the three categories—physical appearance, intelligence of some kind, and the work a woman can do—the last is of special concern to us. It is a commonplace in the Homeric poems that women are valued for their capacity to work. We need think only of the women offered by Achilles as prizes in Book XXIII, the Funeral Games for Patroclus. They are described, not in terms of beauty or desirability, but with respect to their accomplishments. The first prize in the chariot race is a woman who knows blameless works (*amymona erga*), plus a tripod (263), while the second prize in the wrestling match is a woman who understands many tasks (*polla erga*), worth four oxen (705).

Special importance is attached to one kind of *ergon*—spinning or weaving. Already in his brutal speech to Chryses early in Book I, Agamemnon has defined the *erga* that lie ahead for Chryseis, until old age overtakes her in Argos, far from her native land. He pictures her as *ιστόν ἐποιχομένην*, going back and forth in front of the loom (31). So great is the symbolic value of this task that it is not confined to slaves and captive women. Even Helen, in the *Odyssey*, safely back from Troy, has a golden distaff ready to hand when she presides over the entertainment of her guests in Sparta. Calypso and Circe, nymph and witch respectively, go back and forth singing before the loom on their magic islands. And of course Penelope is inseparable from the notion of weaving, because her very name is derived from the word *pene*, which means thread or woof. The command of Hector to Andromache at the end of their farewell scene, bidding her go to the house and attend to her tasks, specified as the loom and spindle (*Il.* VI.490-491), is doubtless already formulaic; it is in these terms that

Telemachus relegates his mother to her proper place, in the passage already mentioned (*Od.* I.356–357).

The reason for the prominence of spinning and weaving is obvious. To clothe her dependents is one of the primary tasks of the mistress of a household in ancient times, a task so important and time-consuming that it never becomes purely symbolic (unless perhaps in the household of the Emperor Augustus, whose insistence on wearing garments woven by Livia and Julia is related to his moral reforms).¹⁴ Even before the age of Homer, in still more primitive societies, the weaving of mats and screens for shelter may have been women's work, as Erich Neumann suggests.¹⁵ He also calls attention to the implications of spinning and weaving for matriarchal cultures, in which the Great Mother weaves the web of life and spins the thread of fate. Thus plaiting, weaving, and knotting belong to the "fate-governing" activity of women. The crossing of threads symbolizes sexual union, the device by which the Archetypal Feminine "weaves" life. In Homer the Fates are Klothēs—Spinners. How persistent this motive is may be inferred from its appearance in medieval art, where the Blessed Virgin and St. Ann are often portrayed in Annunciation scenes with spindle or distaff, as an emblem of their maternal function.¹⁶

Agamemnon, in death as in life, is wont to link the kind of woman he prefers with the concept of *ergon*. In two key passages in the *Odyssey* his shade (which might be expected to set the highest value on fidelity in a wife) actually speaks as if being a good worker is the supreme feminine *arete*. In both scenes in Hades his ghost draws a contrast between Penelope and Clytemnestra, saying that the guilty wife will for ever bring shame on all women, even one who is *euergos* (XI.434, XXIV.193). Although translators usually render the word as if it meant "behaving virtuously," it could hardly fail to convey some idea of working hard, being industrious, as well.

The implications of this word are confirmed by some of the derogatory terms applied to women in early Greek poetry. Hesiod has two words for the kind of woman he dislikes, the one who impoverishes her husband: *epiklopos* (thievish) and *deipnolochē* (dinner-stealer). The latter term is applied to the bad wife who "roasts her husband without fire and makes him old before his time" (*Erga* 704–705). The capacity of a wife to help

¹⁴ See Suetonius, *Aug.* 64.2, 73.

¹⁵ *The Great Mother*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York, 1955), p. 284. See also pp. 227 ff. I am indebted to Katherine A. Geffcken's monograph, *Comedy in the Pro Caelio* (Leiden, 1973) for calling to my attention Neumann's theories about the significance of these motives in literature.

¹⁶ See Don Denny, *Art Bulletin* 55 (1973) 205–212.

or hinder her husband economically lies behind much of Semonides' invective. Thus the "mare-woman"—luxurious, scornful of household tasks, so dainty that she bathes two or even three times a day—is fit only for a king or a tyrant; no ordinary man can afford her (57–70). The "donkey-woman" eats, day in and day out, all over the house, and the work she engages in, illicitly, is the *ergon aphrodision* (46–49). The "bee-woman" is commended both for her lifelong fidelity to her husband and for her ability to make his life prosperous (85). Semonides observes that whoever dwells with any other kind of woman will not quickly drive hunger from his house (100–101).

The thievish nature of women is naturally combined with deceitfulness in speech. Thus Hesiod in the *Works and Days* describes Pandora as being endowed by Hermes with lies and crafty words and a thievish (*epiklopos*) nature (78). Later he warns the reader (a male reader, naturally) not to be deceived by a woman with a sweeping train (*pygostolos*). She will beguile a man with deceitful words, but all she is after is his barn (373–374). Grimly, he concludes, "He who puts his faith in women puts faith in deceivers" (375). Three centuries later, in Old Comedy, the thieving ways of women still constitute a commonplace, together with their reputation for sexual license.¹⁷ Among all the charges lodged against women by the Greek misogynists the two that are most persistent are just these: they impoverish their husbands by not being good housewives, and they betray them by not being faithful. The reverse of the coin, the good woman, as portrayed in epitaphs and encomia, is valued equally for her chastity and her domesticity. That the concept of *sophrosyne* embraces the first of these virtues no one doubts; it remains to consider the relation of *sophrosyne* to *oikonomia*.

There are etymological reasons why a connection between the two concepts would come easily to the Greek mind. If *sophrosyne* in its radical sense means soundness of mind, that soundness can easily develop in the direction of "shrewdness" or "good sense", especially in protecting one's own advantage. *Sophrosyne* enables its possessor to be safe in various ways. Such an excellence soon came to be valued in the Greek *polis*, and *sophrosyne* has a long history as a civic virtue (predicated always of men, never of women). The *polis* of the late archaic and early classical period depends for its safety and prosperity on many excellences in its citizens—in wartime, obviously courage, in peacetime, not only restraint and moderation,

¹⁷ Aristophanes, *Thesm.* 418–420, 556–557, 812–813, *Ecc.* 14–15, *Frogs* 1043. The persistence of the motive connecting deceit with spinning, as typical of women, is indicated by its recurrence in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, 401–402 (Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive/ To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve).

but good sense and shrewdness in managing the affairs of the city. Good management is described in Greek by such words as *eu oikein* or *dioikein*, and in the fourth century good management of both household and state is unequivocally linked with *sophrosyne* (Plato, *Meno* 73A–B; cf. *Symp.* 209A–B).

It is not surprising that Greeks who distinguished masculine from feminine forms of excellence—as most Greeks did—should sometimes do so in terms of *eu oikein* or *oikonomia*—the man directing this activity towards the affairs of the city, the woman towards her own household. Gorgias is supposed to have said something like this according to the *Meno* (71E), whose dramatic date would be late in the fifth century, but he does not relate either kind of *oikonomia* to *sophrosyne*, nor does Aristotle in the *Politics*, when he distinguishes between the tasks of men and women on the basis of two types of *oikonomia*, the one acquiring, the other preserving (1277b20–25).

Apart from the Platonic Socrates in the *Meno*, Xenophon is the first, as far as I know, to define both masculine and feminine *sophrosyne* with reference to *oikonomia*. The issue arises in the *Economics*, which reports a conversation between Socrates and a certain young land-owner, Xenophon himself thinly disguised. Part of the dialogue consists of an account by the young man of how he taught his bride her responsibilities in their new partnership. When she protests that she can do nothing to help her husband manage his estate, because her mother has taught her just one thing, *sophrosyne* (i.e., to be chaste, modest, a good wife in the narrower sense), her bridegroom responds that in fact his father has taught him the same virtue, for *sophrosyne* is proper to both sexes. It is the part of those who possess it, whether men or women, to act in such a way as to preserve what they have as well as possible and to acquire in addition as much else as they can, provided that they do not violate what is fair and just (7.14–15). The interesting thing here is not so much the definition of *sophrosyne* as guarding one's advantage (although this is important in the history of the concept), but rather the perception that the common element uniting masculine and feminine facets of *sophrosyne* may be *oikonomia*. While Xenophon at this point sounds as though he intends to maintain the Socratic doctrine that virtue is one, whether manifested in men or women, he very shortly reverts to the traditional Greek view of specialized function, according to which God has made women suited to indoor work, including spinning and weaving. It is not surprising that he repeatedly compares the position of the wife in the *oikos* to that of a queen bee (7.17).

The "Socratic" position is, of course, maintained and developed by

Plato, who derives from it many consequences important for the position of women in the Ideal State, especially their eligibility for higher education and promotion to the rank of philosopher-ruler. Related to the general question of feminine capacities is a special theme prominent in the *Republic*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*—that of the dangerous polarity of the two temperaments, what Plato usually calls the *sophron* (gentle, moderate) and the *andreion* (spirited). It is a fundamental doctrine of his three principal works on statesmanship that the two natures must be combined, woven into one fabric, if the state is to be strong. The *andreion* temperament is of course masculine, the *sophron* feminine. Glenn Morrow, discussing the emphasis on this subject in the *Laws*, points out, "The masculine nature tends towards majesty and valor; the feminine towards orderliness and temperance. These differences are of considerable import; for the feminine qualities, it should be noted, are precisely those which in an earlier passage (628 ff.) [Plato] has said a state most needs."¹⁸ In both the *Republic* and the *Laws* Plato indicates in various ways his preference for the *sophron* temperament,¹⁹ but although he clearly realizes that this temperament is feminine and that the state has the greatest need of the qualities identified with it, he never puts the two propositions together and draws the conclusion that the state needs, not women who are as much like men as possible, but citizens who excel in qualities that, in Greek society, are seen most often in women.

In connection with the theme of the two temperaments we should not overlook the controlling metaphor of the *Statesman*, in which the ruler is explicitly compared to a weaver whose task is to combine the bold and the gentle, the *andreion* and the *sophron*, and prevent the dangerous excess of either without the other. Weaving is woman's work, and the statesman is not only blending feminine with masculine qualities to produce the strongest possible fabric in the state, but is using feminine techniques to accomplish this task. Perhaps this is really the Philosopher-Queen at work.

Whatever the sex of the Statesman, Plato had a notable predecessor in the use of the weaver-metaphor. Lysistrata, in Aristophanes' comedy, employs this very analogy when she explains to the magistrate how to restore order and justice to wartorn Greece, a task at which women are likely to be more competent than men. She describes how women untangle yarn, wash dirty wool, bring together all the necessary skeins, and ultimately weave a strong cloak for the state (567-568). This is not the only passage in Old Comedy which raises in jest an issue that philosophers

¹⁸ *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton, 1960), p. 331.

¹⁹ Consult *Sophrosyne* (above, note 2), pp. 171, 190-192.

took up in all seriousness a generation or two later, and it is particularly remarkable how often fourth-century philosophy analyzed, defined, and commended as essential to the well-being of the state the virtues that were familiar in fifth-century drama as the qualities proper to women—self-restraint, cooperation, lack of aggressiveness.

Nevertheless, in spite of the willingness of Plato and, later, the Stoics to concede to women at least a theoretical capacity to achieve the same kind of *arete* as men, there was overwhelming pressure from ancient society to make even philosophers assume that a woman is best occupied when she has a spindle in her hand. Thus the Stoic Musonius Rufus, sometimes called the Roman Socrates, in a discourse entitled *That Women Should Study Philosophy* (Or. III) insists that they should, because they are endowed with the same capacities as men, but it turns out that, like most contemporary philosophers, he has lost interest in the more theoretical aspects of his discipline and defines philosophy merely as the effort to live well, i.e., in accordance with the cardinal virtues. Hence the proof that women should study philosophy amounts to little more than a series of statements about their capacity to achieve these virtues and apply them to the solution of their practical problems. According to Musonius, the first requirement is still that a woman be a good housekeeper, although he regards this as a manifestation of *episteme*, not *sophrosyne* (which now implies superiority to passion, the fundamental Stoic virtue).

How very limited Musonius is, as a champion of the liberated woman, becomes painfully clear from a passage in which he seeks to defend her. Some critics have charged that women who associate with philosophers are bold and brazen, abandoning their household tasks to go about with men, practicing speeches, behaving like sophists, and analyzing syllogisms, when they ought to be sitting at home spinning. Musonius replies that the study of philosophy is useful only if it has practical results; disputation is worthless if it does not help the soul attain virtue. He concludes with a ringing assertion that philosophy will actually instil in women modesty (*aidos*), *sophrosyne*, and *oikonomia*.

Swarthmore College