

DeVane Lecture Discussion – April 5, 2001

AK Good afternoon and welcome, again. I'm here this afternoon with Nancy Cott, the Woodward Professor of History and American Studies at Yale. We're here this afternoon to discuss the themes of Nancy's fascinating lecture on Tuesday on Democracy and the Family. I thought I might begin with a general puzzle. The proposition that family life and political life are somehow entangled—connected up, one with the other—is an idea as old as political theory. You find it already there—very dramatically there—in Plato's *Republic*, for example. Virtually every political system has appealed to the idea, at one point or another, that its principles, its ruling ethos, the character of its citizenry, must all be rooted in and begin with the family as the primary and primitive institution of training and education. And all of that, put in general terms, seems reasonable enough. And there's nothing particularly democratic about it. Aristocrats and monarchs and communists and communitarians all say something like this in general terms. In some cases, in some forms of government, in aristocratic governments, for example, the fit between a particular form of family life and that system of government seems to be quite clear and close. Aristocracy is, in a certain sense, a patriarchal form of government and so a patriarchal family fits it well. It's easy to understand how children growing up in such a family would be prepared for either positions of rulership or submission in the large order. But when one comes to democracy, things get a little more puzzling and it's not clear at all whether there is a single form of family life that's well suited to be that training ground or nursery of democratic citizenship to which you referred and which so many writers seem, in such a cavalier way, to assume. So I guess a good question to begin with is this one: Is there really a form of family life, one way of organizing families, which is better suited than all of the others to the cultivation of these democratic habits and attitudes, or are there a plurality of forms that will do equally well? And are there, perhaps, some which won't do at all? Let me just open it up in very general terms and invite you to speculate and respond.

NC That really is a big question. I think that I don't have the grounds on which to answer it in a general and philosophical way. I think that the question has certainly been answered in American history and in the tradition of American democracy in a particular way, which is part of what I was discussing. That is, there has been a set of assumptions that there's one particular form that's based on Christian monogamy, and what flows from that—not only Christian monogamy, but also the English inheritance of the Anglo-American legal conceptualization of domestic relations. And there's been a corresponding assumption that there is at least one contrasting form of family -- that is, a polygamist organization of family -- that's utterly inappropriate. But I don't think that the proposition in the general sense, as you present it, has really been tested much of anywhere. It's a good question. How many democracies have there really been in the history of the world? I mean, there are certainly ideas about democracy in the ancient Greek world and then there are western politically organized democracies and other governments in the modern era that have followed that western political model. And all of the western political democracies have taken up more or less the same set of assumptions as the American government and society, although I don't think they've all

implemented them with exactly the same earnestness or thoroughgoingness necessarily. So I might have my personal predilections. That is, I tend to think that recent developments in family change, cultural change, suggest that there are a plurality of family forms or family practices. . . I don't mean that we need to choose one of this plurality. But, in other words, more than one family form can flourish in a democracy, especially if an important value in the democracy is the expression of individuality on the part of different democratic citizens – and if diversity of citizens and the allowance for that diversity is part of what's assumed to result from democratic practices and principles, and not just sameness of expression, political wishes, or other kinds of wishes.

AK It's interesting because, of course, our democracy encourages, in a very active way, the expression of individual difference, respect for difference. We celebrate diversity as a virtue, as a good thing. And yet, we tend to think of democratic citizenship as having at its core some consistent set of more or less uniform attitudes and values, like the attitude or value of tolerance itself, of tolerance for difference and diversity. So one might say—rephrasing the question that I put to you a moment ago and coming down a level or two of abstraction— is there a family form, a way of organizing our domestic lives in families, which is likely to be more productive of that attitude that we call the tolerant mind, than other forms are? Some ways of living together in families breed intolerance, contempt, closed mindedness, the habit of exclusiveness. But others encourage that more cosmopolitan appreciation and respect for difference which democracy itself celebrates. And that's a very hard question to answer, I think, in part for the reasons you were just suggesting.

NC I don't have the evidence to answer that. I mean, even to ponder it in my own mind, because I think we've all seen both tolerant and intolerant people be brought up in families that, structurally and formally, look very much the same. So that would tend to dismiss the notion that it is a form of family that actually leads toward or against that kind of attitude. And there are other structures of rearing that may have far more influence. I mean, when you said, initially, that many kinds of governments—and I agree with this—and many kinds of states have all assumed that family life is somehow related to governmental consequences, I think that's one way of referring to it. But I think probably the more primary set of assumptions is that the way people are treated as children—that is, the things we learn when we're very young—has an effect on what kind of governments we live in successfully, or practice. So, simply because we tend to put that rearing of the young in family form, we assume it's about family life – yet there are other examples, like the ones you were referring to, like utopian communities, or one might look at the Israeli kibbutz, or Plato's *Republic*. Don't assume it's literally a family, but the rearing of the young in whatever setting it takes place.

AK Also I think, interestingly, in our commercial consumerist democracy, the boundaries of the family—however it's constituted internally—the boundaries of the family, which separate it off from the larger society, are more porous and fluid than they are in other settings. And so, however the family organizes itself, its own internal life, those living in it, and the children in particular, are certainly going to be exposed to a

very wide variety of different experiences and invitations. And so, perhaps, it would be pointless to worry too much about what THE democratic family looks like because any family we design—whatever its final shape—will be so bent out of shape by forces pressing on it from without—the market, advertising, public schools, schools in general. The influences are legion and, in the end, the family may be quite an embattled institution, if one can call it an institution at all.

NC At least in the western tradition, we can see ways in which the family reinforces and, therefore, enables certain practices in government and vice versa and that it matters whether the two more or less match or not. I'm thinking really of the 18th century, the era when the American Republic was founded, which saw a gradual shift from far more authoritarian relationships between parent and child that had characterized at least the way families were supposed to operate in the medieval and early modern period to a more relational, reciprocal understanding of parent/child interaction, especially in the U.S., but more so in Europe, too, through the 19th century. And there's a scholar named Jay Fleigelman who has written about this, arguing that a revolution against patriarchal authority in the family actually preceded and helped to enable the American Revolution—the notion that the colonies would reject the authority of Britain and get better representative government—as much as the reverse also was influential. Tocqueville argues that because we're not in a monarchy—I mean, roughly—and there's not an aristocracy maintaining that, and there is no longer a tradition that the father rules his family like a monarch rules his people, that therefore, those democratic relations pervade both arenas—the government and the father/son relation. And I think there is some truth to that. We do, first, experience authority relations in families. We mostly tend to live in families. That's not true of every society. And therefore, that understanding of authority which is what government and governance is about, I think there has to be some rough match, actually, for both things to continue on the same path.

AK Let me shift for a moment from authority to love. I was struck on Tuesday in connection with your discussion of the images of family life and the central place of family values in the United States campaign during the Second World War to mobilize and muster patriotic feeling; struck by just what a powerful and central place in that campaign the image of a certain form of domestic life played. And the thought I had was this. States like ours depend for their existence on the willingness of their citizens or some of their citizens to risk their all for the life of the state—to go off to war and carry a gun and shoot at people and be shot at and to confront death. Where does the will to do that come from? Where does the attachment to the state from which that will flows come from? Well, it flows, typically, from other more primitive sources of affection and attachment—in particular the love we have for our kin and immediate neighbors, kin and friends and neighbors. So our American state must draw on that great reservoir of feeling which is already there, embedded in our family lives and experience. All of that, again, seems quite familiar and not particularly democratic. Every regime has to mobilize sentiments of patriotism in order to insure its own continued existence and it does this, presumably, in more or less the same way, by tapping the roots of affection and love which lie down closer to the beginning of things. But there is a puzzle in the

case of democracy which is peculiar to it, I think. That is that the patriotism which is mobilized and deployed is a patriotism in the name of and for the sake of a system of government whose organizing principles are not those of blood and heredity, but rather bonds of idealistic commitment to a shared conception of how public life should be arranged. How do you translate the kind of love and affection which is rooted in the family and is tied—at least intertwined with the loyalties of blood in a very complex way. How do you transform those feelings into democratic patriotism, which is a sentiment of love, but one that is directed toward the maintenance of an order based upon ideas? How do you get from the Thanksgiving table, from Norman Rockwell's Thanksgiving table, to the idea of America as a democracy which protects freedom of expression, the right to vote, the popular selection of officials and the like? That's what we stand for, those are our ideals. But the passionate attachment we feel to them comes, in Rockwell's visionary intuition of American life, from the Thanksgiving table, from the hearth. It's a mysterious chemistry, how the one gets converted into the other, because one is so concrete and soaked in ties of lineage and filial and parental obligation and connection, and the other is so abstract.

NC I think I disagree with a number of the premises on which your question rests. I don't think that most wars in human history have been fought on behalf of love and affection rooted in a notion of the family or kin. I think most of them—and I'll just say in western history, which I know more about—have actually been fought on behalf of God and faith and a sense of a supernatural demand, faith, belonging and obligation. And most of the others, that have not been fought on behalf of God, are more about the abstraction which one might call "honor," which is sometimes expressed in family forms, but I think is, in fact, rather abstract. In the past it was usually associated with the king and I think individuals were led by symbols of their era to identify with the king, with the fight for the monarchy and the name of the regime, out of a sense that this was their own identity as opposed to outside others who had to be fended off or eliminated. And I actually think that the modern, recent project of, say, the last century or especially half century . . . Let me just go back to American wars. For instance, the American Revolution: I think people did feel in that that they were defending their own soil. In that sense, they were local and roots of love and kinship were probably involved. But the actual drive had to do with American men's sense of their personal liberties and the way in which liberties which, as Englishmen, they felt they deserved and had been brought up to think they had, were being taken away from them. So it was about personal liberty more than about kin or family obligations or private life as we now think about it. I'm not even sure that, at the time, there was a conceptualization of private life, in the way we think about it today, at the time of the American Revolution. There have been some very interesting studies recently about the Civil War and what people were really fighting for, and a kind of revision of a previous revision, which goes back to an earlier idea that, in fact, it seems like most men in the south were fighting because they believed in the society founded on slavery. And most men in the north were fighting because they believed only a society based on free labor was really suitable and could serve for the union.

And so, I think it is much more a product of the 20th century where our democratic ideals are expressed in terms of these values of liberties of tolerance, representation, the self,

the right to speak up, where our democracy is defined more in terms of the individual, where the difficulty that Robert Westbrook talks about of how does a society based on such ideals call on the willingness to die for men becomes more of a problem. Are those bonds strong enough? I actually think that there have been many cultural as well as political trends in the United States which have tended to identify our way of life, our political way of life, with elements in our private lives. If I could go back to this first claim I made about most wars being fought on the basis of religion, some supernatural or godlike reason, it has been said that the family is America's civil religion, that we don't have a national religion. It was never the case—never officially the case anyway in this nation—and in many other respects, one might say just casually that the family, and a certain model of the family, has served as a unifying symbol of national life, as a national religion does in some comparable countries in Europe. And these goods of private life are organized around thinking about the family as the locus where private life is led. It would make sense in that setting. That would be the avenue that both government organs and advertising organs, and so on, would take because, I think, even the example of a Rockwell painting of the Four Freedoms suggests that these attachments are not simply natural, though they may have certain roots in what people think of as their natural proclivities. But they are egged on and created very definitely—that's very, very clear in the history of the 20th century in the United States—by government-specific advertising, to make people want to buy liberty bonds, volunteer for the war, work in defense industry. This has been very clearly true in the 20th century wars and later. Part of what got me started thinking about this lecture and this direction was actually a striking little item I read which I haven't been able to relocate. But during the Persian Gulf War in '91 (I apologize for vulgarity here, but it kind of shows what family life has been reduced to in the late 20th century) there was an article mentioning that wives and girlfriends of men at the Gulf were sending their underwear to the men at the front and the men were putting it in their helmets to remind them of what they were fighting for. And so, it's a very literal rendition of what Robert Westbrook argues about World War II, that there was a bargain being struck between men and women: men would agree to die for the ability to return to what femininity and home comforts and so on offered them. I wish I could find this little article.

AK I will never get that image out of my mind now.

NC I know! It's really quite stunning.

AK The floor is open and I would like to invite anybody who wishes to jump in at this point to do so.

Q In the American Civil War, there was a song, "Just Before the Battle, Mother, I'll Be Thinking, Dear, of You." So I don't think that the idea of family and mom and apple pie has been in isolation. I think it's been there all along in one way or another. It's interesting to me that democracy—the changes in democracy, the opening of democracy to the fullest extent in the public and private lives of women—a lot of what you had us read had to do with the women in the family more than it did with the entire family, which is why I was interested to hear that some of the other pieces that we read

were sort of added on. It seems to me that there's been a real change in the way families operate in a democracy, now that that democracy has truly been broadened to include women. The mother outside the home, the changes in the way children deal with discipline, who they truly answer to, the hierarchy of the home has certainly altered drastically in the last few years, I think, and it just seems to me that, if you're going to talk about democracy and the family, the most current changes in democracy and the family seem to be the greatest changes in democracy and the family from that original image of the family as that insulated unit. It's not insulated anymore. Is the feminization of America, if you will—and I don't know that it's happening all over the world—but is the feminization of America changing the way the family acts and making it actually a little less democratic, or more democratic because of the changes for women? I'm not clear on this.

NC Well, you'll have to tell me what you mean by feminization of America.

Q Mom at work, mom making what dad makes, or more in many cases, mom being a political figure that can be discussed as a potential presidential candidate, mom not being the soft and gentle homemaker, but being as full an authority figure, if you will, as the father. I think those are radical changes in the way that mom is presented within the home. And it's just within the last generation or so. And, to me, that is altering the way that families work within the democracy.

NC I agree wholly with you that there have been quite vast changes in women's roles in the past, say, 35 years, and that it's changed all sorts of allocations of resources and occupations and so on. I'm not quite sure why you would call this feminization. Who is being feminized? But let's say, if we were to agree on a different way of calling it—that is, the somewhat greater equalization of opportunities and obligations inside and outside the family for men and women. Maybe that's a term I could accept better than feminization because I don't quite get who or what is being feminized in that other term. But how has that affected our democracy? I think the short answer is that it's made it more democratic. That is, rather than a so-called democracy that includes a gender hierarchy it's somewhat more egalitarian. Assuming we think of democracy as meaning equal justice—it doesn't necessarily, as Ian Shapiro, who was one of the lecturers in this series has pointed out in a book on democratic justice, there isn't any necessary connection between democracy and equal justice -- but we do tend to think, in the United States, that the two should go together. And so I'm using the term in that respect. I also—just as a historian of women and of family relations—I have to dispute your assumption that the family was previously insulated from society. It really isn't the case. If anything, there was only a very brief period of time when the family was even ideally insulated from society. Mainly, it started in the post-World War II era. It doesn't precede way back. If anything, the boundaries, the porousness between family and society was greater in past times than in, say, the mid-20th century.

Q I'll go along with what you said about the word "feminization" and it was, perhaps, the wrong word to use. But the effect that it's having—is there a noticeable effect that

you see on the way the children are being brought up and the way the families are interacting since this 35-year change?

NC Well, that's a huge question that I don't think has one answer because there are all sorts of families. So I would really refrain from saying what is the effect. But I will say—and this is something that, maybe, helps you think about this—that the kinds of changes that have happened here—not only in terms of proportions of women in the labor force, but the tremendous rise in divorce, tremendous rise in cohabitation of heterosexual couples outside of marriage, tremendous rise in rates of children being born out of wedlock—these are true all over the industrialized world. A French demographer in about 1980 looked—I'm sorry, he did this study later—in the early '90s. But he looked at statistics in all of Europe including Russia and Japan and the United States and found the same phenomena going on all over the industrialized world with the same chronological time frame. 1965, he felt, was a crucial turning point in all of these demographic indicators which, themselves, of course, are not simply demographic. They have tremendous cultural and political impact and effect. I think some of the trends you're alluding to are not the least bit particular to the United States.

AK The gentleman's question raises this further question in my mind. If we ask ourselves, in broad terms, what is the nature and source of authority in our democracy, a very conventional and appropriate response might be something like, "Well, the will of the people," or "the consent of the governed." That's where the authority of those who claim the right to make the decisions and wield the power comes from. That's what it's rooted in. What is the source of authority in the American family today? One might respond, "That's a poorly framed question because a family doesn't have a structure of authority like the government of the United States." But, to some extent, it does. People exercise influence and power over others and there are hierarchies of sub- and super-ordination and there is a fair bit of authority being exercised or wielded. What is its source?

NC This is a good question and actually it makes me think, too, about another aspect involved in the question that the gentleman just asked before, and it has to do with this question of the porousness or nonporousness of the boundaries between the family and other influences. On the authority question, I think for a long time, at least in ideal, prescriptive forms, that relations in a family of discipline and of obligation were supposed to arise from recognition of relationship of duty and reward. That is, the child should obey the parent because the parent was supporting the child and sheltering the child. So it was a relationship of gratitude, of mutual appreciation. And the same was supposed to be true between husband and wife. This suggests that the authority structure is kind of consensual and reciprocal. It is not exactly like popular sovereignty or consent by the governed, but it's not about prescribed authority—you have the right to discipline because you're older, but because you are performing a service for me, you are supporting me. And therefore, you get the right to discipline me. And I think that the way most families assume they ought to operate these days is some form of that consensual agreement based on mutual obligation and mutual receipt of rewards.

But, of course, it can greatly vary—who thinks they're being put upon, who thinks they're being exploited, who thinks they're getting away with murder, etc.

AK And those, of course, would be, in certain quarters, fighting words for those who really believe that the collapse of the family consists in the demise of an older, traditional regime of deference . . .

NC Yes, simply because of where you are in the structure, simply because you are the older one, or simply because you are the man and not the woman. But I think that those ideas have been contested in American democracy for a long, long time. I mean, for 200 years, really. You don't see arguments like this made, even in 1800, among American spokespersons about the family. You don't see the argument, yes, you're supposed to obey the father just because he's older. Now, actually, there were more arguments, explicitly, yes, the woman has to cede to the man, the wife to the husband, just because he's the man and the husband. I think those lasted far longer explicitly and were said with more verve and assurance—far longer than the idea that children should obey parents simply because they were the parents. But the second thing I did want to say is that I think that popular media have an enormous impact on family relations these days. And if we really did want to do a kind of sociological inquiry into what is the state of American families and what have been the results of changes that have taken place, I don't think that the questioning could occur just within what wives and husbands, parents and children do. I think it's very, very much about representations of family life and representations of the different generations in many forms of media that have enormous impact on how people think of themselves. I'm really thinking here about children and about the extent of time children are exposed to popular media and what senses of themselves they get from that and of their just desserts or what they can demand from their parents with justification. So this is absolutely part of the mix in thinking about what determines family life today, I think.

Q I have a bunch of ideas banging around in my head, so I'll try to come up with a coherent question from among them. In the lecture on Tuesday, the connection between the genealogy of American democracy and the monogamous family was brought up and rejected by the lady to a large extent, but I feel like the case for that wasn't really made and it wasn't clear what the case for that was. I assume people had reasons for thinking this. It seems like the conversation we've been having now has shed a lot of light on some of the correlations between the family politically and broader politics. But I'd like to draw out, perhaps, two points that might suggest further correlation here. One is the idea of commitment or loyalty. It seems that politically we have been shifting from less choice to more personal choice on a broad spectrum over a few hundred years and individually as well. You go from a patriarchal society to a democracy which still greatly looks up to and respects its leaders and expects them to lead them rather than to just manage the general will of the public. And then you move into this sort of distrust of the leadership and, in some ways, more factionalism and more fragmented identity. And in a family you have all the way from arranged marriages to you choose a spouse but you will stick with this person forever to divorce is extremely easy now and divorce rates are very high. So I was wondering about a

correlation between the idea that you are born into a family and that is your family and you have the name of the father which is your name and you didn't choose that but you have a strong, strong loyalty there, and even if you don't like what goes on in your family, you love the family -- and connect that with the idea of patriotism, that you're born into a country and you didn't choose to be born an American but you love America and you stand there as an American, even if you don't necessarily like everything that goes on in America. And it seems that, even as the capacity for choice in familial and friendship relations has increased, so has the capacity for unwillingness to identify one's self as a patriot, as an American. It seems much more fractured into interest groups in some ways. And then, the second correlation I'd like to draw or throw out there is the idea of representative government. . . The lady spoke of when Tocqueville spoke of the individual being the father, the head of the household. It seems like, in many ways, this wasn't necessarily cutting down on the value or importance of the rest of the family but was simply the recognition that the father was the representative of the unit. In this same way, we have this happening all the way through our federal system of representative government as opposed to a direct democracy. I feel like I'm talking for a long time, so I'm going to stop and wait for your answer.

NC I don't really hear a question there. I mean, I think a lot of the connections you drew make a great deal of sense.

AK Could I pick up on one theme here? When you say—I don't remember whether you used this word, but it was the word that occurred to me as you were speaking—it's a piece of fate for each of us that we happened to have been born into the families that we were born into. We wake up one day and there we are. We're in the middle of a family drama that's been going on for some time and we didn't pick it, it's not our choice to be there. But we do feel, with some complication of attitude, I believe, an allegiance to that fateful home where our lives begin. In very general terms, I think this sensation, of being loyal and attached to a bit of fate, to a destiny, to something that is not the product—in the most obvious sense, not the product of a choice we've made—this sensation is increasingly anomalous itself in a world, in a culture, in a civilization which, in so many other ways, celebrates and makes operationally available to us the ethic of self creation and self formation. We govern ourselves as a people. We invent ourselves, to a considerable degree, as adults. We have great control—increasingly greater control over the shape and the durability of our bodies. So whole wide areas of life that before were swallowed up in fate have been progressively been brought under the domain of human control, collective or individual. But this fateful fact that we start off in families which are not of our own choosing, that destiny marks us forever and shapes all that follows—that one accidental beginning. This is something which we not only can't seem to get rid of but actually continue to feel quite attached to. So this is a little bit of affectionate fatefulness in a civilization which is increasingly enlightened, rationalized and subject to the dominion of human control. I don't know if that's too abstract but you see what I mean.

NC Let me just respond briefly to what you [the questioner] were saying. Maybe you somewhat misinterpreted the drift of my talk in this respect. I wasn't trying to reject the

genealogy I sketched of a linkage between a particular form of family and the government; rather, I was trying to sketch it for you, that it had existed through most of American thinking about American political society. I simply wanted to relieve you from thinking it was inevitably thus linked. The point is that it was thus linked for certain purposes which might still be good purposes and people might well believe in them. I just think it's important for critical thinking to recognize that that linkage was made in order to distinguish this from other forms, to reject other forms, and that it's not a necessary linkage of some sort that's written in stone or written in nature, or inevitability. And on this matter, the way you [Dean Kronman] were just putting it, about the unchosen-ness of our family roots, it's an interesting duality, I would say, because while I certainly agree that the proliferation of choice is one of the things we see in modern life, that doesn't, however, always mean control. In fact, it means the opposite to many people—that proliferation of choice is about loss of control, loss of certainty, because we don't know how to choose. This is another way to talk about modernity. And quite apart or separate from—although it goes parallel with--the proliferation of choice and of the possibility for self creation and the desire for it, and self-creation is a very powerful trend in our society today that we see all around us, identification with things that are unchanging. I mean, the whole demand for ethnic identification, which is supposedly written in the blood, or for fundamentalist religion. These are two seemingly quite opposite trends. We're positive enough about the contradictoriness of human nature to understand why they would be parallel, or contemporaneous anyway. Many people—the very unchosen-ness of their family—there is some rock to stand on.

AK And may even do so with increasing fervor and passion, the more they feel the anxieties and uneasiness of the vastly extended opportunities and liberties which our culture of choice affords them.

Q I have a philosophical concern that I'm going to try to concretize as an historical question. I was at Yom Kippur with a friend of mine, a grown woman with kids and everything. Yom Kippur, for those who aren't Jewish or don't happen to know, is an occasion for the confession and forgiveness of sins. And it was the break-fast and she was praying out loud. And she was running through, when she was assessing how she had done with her life that year, the roles that she occupied and how she had fulfilled the duties and obligations that were part of those roles. So she said, "I've been a good mother, I hope I've been a good wife, I hope I've been a good teacher." Just sort of, "Here's what I am and here's what I do." That occasion made it clear to me how much the roles we occupy in the world—the satisfaction of those roles is what gives us some of our deepest and most abiding senses of well being. I'm a graduating senior so I don't have much of a role right now. But I remember, when I was a young kid, before I was fascinated with the intellectual life for its own sake, just wanting to do well on the test because, in my family, that meant being a good son. And there was a deep satisfaction in that. It was really abiding. And yet, if there's one thing that the Susan Okin and the John Stuart Mill readings show up, it's that roles can be oppressive, especially to people who don't happen to fit them. As Susan Okin was pointing out, if your role is to be a homemaker, but you're just designed—maybe genetically, maybe because of some early influence—to be a really sharp business woman, that can be oppressive. There's

a deep tension here. For me, it's become one of the abiding concerns in social thought—that, on the one hand, human flourishing requires roles that are not too porous because they have got to come with duties and obligations that we can satisfy, and, on the other hand, that are not oppressive. So here's the attempt—it may be an unsuccessful attempt, so if you want to do it otherwise, please feel free to concretize that historically. I feel like the status of roles right now is problematic. We have an explosion of freedom and of choice which is decreasing the degree to which we can take a sense of well being in satisfying our roles because it's not clear what our roles are anymore. Has there been another moment in American history when roles changed a lot or some new role was created, which both opened freedom, opened up the option to be a different way, and at the same time, allowed a sense of well being? For example, was there ever a time when somebody could say, "I've been a good husband," and that didn't mean, in this particular moment, what it had meant 100 years before that moment? It did not mean, "I've been a good provider and I've been a good leader of the family and so on." Do you see what I'm getting at?

NC Yes, I do see your question. I think it's a really interesting question, actually, the way you've framed this whole matter of us needing to get satisfaction from fulfilling our roles well. And I think there is a basic kind of human truth in that. But I'm not sure that we two would understand roles in exactly the same way. And that is that I don't see quite as much of a conflict as you seem to between the self definition of how one is going to lead one's life and a feeling of satisfaction in one's role. In the sense that I think people inhabit even given roles in different ways and that, in one setting or another, in one ethnic group or another, in one religious group or another, even in one neighborhood, one class, what it means to be a good mother could vary vastly. And I would multiply that just for different individuals and personalities. You can see it in certain work roles—just at work, a desk job. Some people think, "I'm doing a good job," if they just barely keep the paper off their desk, and other people have higher standards for themselves, however inculcated. So I think there's a huge amount of personal differentiation on role definition. But I do think that, in asking about change and historical change, that you're hitting a really important tension point and what we were just discussing about the ways in which greater choices don't always create a greater sense of freedom. They can create a kind of oppressive sense of uncertainty and wandering. I think this has been the history of many groups in American society, throughout American society, because we do—unlike some societies and governments that have a much longer past and a sense of the tremendous value of tradition—we actually, as a society, have always valued change. Not that we throw away tradition, and there are certain symbols and so on that we want to hark back to. Many people would argue, the U.S. is the first modern society, that change is a very positive value in this country in general.

When we were talking before about uncertainty, I was actually thinking of work I used to do on the period of, roughly, say the 18-teens to the 18-thirties—it was a period of initial industrialization in the United States when, in many towns and villages—right about here in New England—where people had always lived the same kind of life. I mean, a man growing up knew that what he had to do to be able to make a livelihood was get a piece of land, like his father hand, and make it fruitful enough. And a woman knew that

to do decently, she had to find a husband and, hopefully, be able to bear children. And then there were both constraints and new options. You could move to a bigger city, you could go to work for a wage. Maybe the land wasn't so good where you lived. There was a multiplication of potential adult roles. That created religious awakenings. People seek for certainty and for a sense that there is a role they can fulfill successfully, sometimes by looking for an entirely new role—like a role of devoting one's self to God. Or maybe, in these days, when people are faced with frustrations about how to fulfill their role as a worker, as a parent, whatever relationship—sometimes they seek it by an avocation which would define being a good person in a more abstract or, perhaps, regimen-dominated way. That is, if I give up eating meat, I am a better person. I'm not destroying the earth by having all these cows eating all this grain, etc. People find regimens for their life where they feel they can adhere to the regimen and, at least in that role definition, they are doing an adequate job. And that is extremely functional for human personalities. I think that's pretty clear. This is not a new phenomenon, although it may be one that is just much more broadly proliferated through the society and reaches far more people than it used to. But dealing with role change and both the uncertainties and the opportunities at the same time and figuring out how to get a sense of personal satisfaction rather than a sense either of wandering or, on the other example you brought, of not taking up new opportunities and feeling that you were oppressed in your existing role—it's not a brand new problem.

AK Is your thought that the current crisis is a crisis produced by the relaxation of the requirements of the roles that we inhabit so that we no longer know, in any role, what's expected of us, what we're to do, how we're to behave? Or is it that the number of roles that are open to us to take on and fill has multiplied, and the freedom to pick amongst them has grown, and that leaves us feeling giddy and, maybe, even—to use a Sartrean term—a little nauseous as we dance or jump from one to the other?

Q I could imagine myself asking about either, but in this case, I was asking about the former. I was interested in the concern—I wouldn't call it a crisis—an issue of concern for me is whether all roles have become so unspecified, so porous and so open and so unclear as to exactly what our duties and obligations within that role are.

AK Because, listening to your question, I was thinking, there is another very powerful strain in American culture, really in modern western culture, which begins with a deep suspicion of roles and the capacity of our occupancy of them to fulfill us in any deep or important way. I mean, we say—often pejoratively—“She's just playing a role. She's acting a part. You've got to understand, right now, he's in the role of thus and such.” The implication of the suggestion or the invitation being that the person's true and truly valuable being isn't to be found in any one of these diverse roles, even in doing them all splendidly well, but in some difficult to identify, difficult to articulate, but infinitely precious humanity which transcends them all. And that's a pretty fashionable idea these days, too.

Q And it's a 19th century American idea particularly.

AK Well, I would say very much 21st century American, too.

NC One thing I would say on your question about the uncertainty of roles. On the one hand, it could be that your experience of this shifting of the greater vagueness of definition of roles is part of your own maturation. All children tend to see what they have to do in simpler terms. And what it takes to be good as a child in a family is usually described much more simply by parents than what we then, as adults, learn it actually takes to fulfill a given role, particularly a role that's about relations with other intimate people. But secondly, you started with the example of a woman saying, "How have I been as a mother, a wife, a teacher?" I do think that gender roles, that what it means to be a man or a woman, what it means to be feminine or masculine is far more in flux these days than has probably ever been the case in western history. Because that role is so central to our sense of ourselves as humans, I think it's virtually impossible to think of yourself as human without thinking of yourself in terms of gender. That may change with transgender operations and so on. But I think, up 'til now, it's been basically impossible to think of yourself as human without putting that in gender terms. And so, the lack of a convenient or shorthand definition of what it means to be a man or a woman these days, and the fact that there are such differing interpretations of that by parties who live very close to one another, that, I think, is especially unsettling. It's really more basic to most people than even the qualities of mother, father, etc.

Q I guess what I'm interested in doing is just to show up how that change in gender roles, that opening of gender roles has costs as well as benefits, and that both are really powerful. As to what you were saying, Dean Kronman, I would argue in response that there is . . . I think you were going back to the idea that there is a notion of individuality, of realizing your individual humanness which is just as powerful, particularly in 21st century American values, as fulfilling your role as well. Still, I don't really buy it. I would recall to you just the proliferation of phrases in as many languages that I know. There's, in American English, the old idea of "be a man," of "be a lady," or in Yiddish, there's "be a mensch," which has an entirely different meaning, but it's still a genderized meaning. Those ideas, we don't overcome that with American individualism.

AK I think we have time for one more question.

Q In your lecture, and again today, you've highlighted a lot how the public and private spheres—these areas that are supposedly separate—have historically had a lot to do with each other. And in Okin's book especially, she's in favor of completely opening them up and putting in legal structures that insure democratic liberties within the family. And I think I agree with that. But you also mentioned in your lecture a lot of advancements we've made, advancements for personal liberties in general and women's rights specifically that have been based on a privacy argument—like the case about married couples and contraception and even *Roe v. Wade*. And I'm just wondering how you would respond to someone who said that, "Yes, these two have been historically linked and historically, the legal structures have been used to inhibit democratic liberties, not insure that they're there". And is it dangerous to put in these structures? Even now when we want to use them to better democratic liberties, is there

a danger that someone may come along later on and want to do the opposite and be able to do that?

NC I think you point to a very important and tension filled set of issues and I don't think—luckily I'm not a lawyer—but I don't think I philosophically would agree with what seem to be the direction of Susan Okin's resolutions, which would be, as you say, to make operations within the family subject to the same kind of civil regulation that will obtain in public life, because I do think that defense of privacy rights are an important area of personal liberty. However, I don't think I locate those privacy rights institutionally in the family and certainly not only in the family. Actually, I don't think—you [Dean Kronman] can clarify this—that constitutional doctrine does, these days, either. I mean, on the birth control issues, *Griswold v. Connecticut* was extremely important and it did use the marital bedroom as the site for privacy that enabled overturning the old Connecticut law. But only six years later in a case that had to do with shouldn't unmarried people have resort to buying birth control, and wasn't it a failure of equal protection of the laws if married people could buy birth control and use it and unmarried people couldn't, the court said, "Yes, it is a failure of equal protection," and in that decision, in '71—a long time ago—the Supreme Court said privacy is really more of an individual right. I forget the language right now, but it did make privacy portable, so you could take it out of the marital bedroom and it might function elsewhere, and that's even somewhat influential, I think, in *Roe v. Wade*, which is about a woman's private right to discuss with her doctor and make a decision. So I don't think that constitutionally, and I personally don't believe that, conceptually, rights of privacy and all of those things that we might not want regulated are institutionally—what's the word I'm looking for? When something overlaps exactly right? Contiguous with . . .

AK Homologous.

NC Well, homologous is another way to view it. . . With the family institution. And I think that's one possible way out of the dilemma you point to. I do think—again, this is just my personal view—I do think that civil prosecution of domestic abuse is the right thing to do. I think it's violence. Just like the courts said, "You can have freedom of religious belief, but you can't have an action, like marrying two wives. It's against our criminal law". Just like you couldn't, because of religious beliefs, say, "I'm doing ritual murder of my neighbor." Maybe there's some sort of analogy about domestic abuse. Yes, we think of the family as a place where we should have privacy rights. Yet, it somebody is doing a criminal action, i.e. physical assault, within the family, the civil authorities should be able to come in and regulate that.

AK I think you're absolutely right about this. What's being protected in these cases is the individual's right to engage in various activities and to enter into certain relationships as an expression of a fundamental right to privacy which does not correlate exactly with the family as an institution, and may even threaten it. For example, I'm thinking about the case . . . I think it's called *Stanley v. George* which upheld the right of a man to watch pornographic films at home in the privacy of his bedroom or living room or wherever he had the projector set up. And in this case, the

decision was justified in precisely the terms that the right of a married couple to use contraceptives was defended in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, anticipating *Roe v. Wade*. I think it's privacy, sexual intimacy and expression, and closely related to that, sexual reproduction. And those, of course, have to do with the family in a rough and ready way because the family is the place, the locus where these expressions and reproductions, for the most part, take place. But it's not the family as an institution which is the object of solicitude or protection. It's something else. Well, we're out of time. Please join me in thanking Nancy Cott for this most stimulating conversation and for the wonderful lecture on Tuesday.