

A Republican Housewife: Marie-Jeanne Phlipon Roland on Women's Political Role

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In this paper I look at the philosophical (and sometimes personal) struggles of one eighteenth-century woman writer to reconcile a desire and obvious capacity to participate in the creation of republican ideals and their applications on the one hand, and on the other a deeply held belief that women's role in a republic is confined to the domestic realm. I argue that Marie-Jeanne Phlipon Roland's philosophical writings—three unpublished essays, published and unpublished letters, as well as parts of her memoirs—suggest that even though she adopted a Rousseau-style rural republicanism that relies on complementarity of men and women's virtues, she somehow succeeds in proposing a less sexist picture of the republican family, one that makes it possible for men and women to take an equal part in family business and politics.

I. A FRENCH MACAULAY

In a chapter dedicated to the life of Marie-Jeanne Phlipon Roland, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley writes:

Her fame rests even on higher and nobler grounds than that of those who toil with the brain for the instruction of their fellow creatures. She acted. What she wrote is more the emanation of the active principle, which, pent in a prison, betook itself to the only implement, the pen, left to wield, than an exertion of the reflective portion of the mind. (Shelley 1840, 266)

Shelley might well be forgiven for thinking that Phlipon Roland was a doer more than she was a thinker if she was acquainted mostly with the prison memoirs, written in the months before her death at the guillotine on false charges of treason in 1793 (charges that reflected her disagreements with Robespierre's and the Jacobins' excessive violence), and with Phlipon Roland's reputation as a ring-leader, or *egeria*, of the

Girondists.¹ And indeed, in the three years before her death at the age of thirty-nine she saw rather a lot of political action: attending political clubs, hosting select bi-weekly political dinners, and helping her husband run the ministry of interior (sometimes ghostwriting important documents on his behalf, such as his letter of resignation to the king from his first ministry).

But Phlipon Roland was also, and perhaps foremost, a writer, producing hundreds of well-crafted letters in which she presents philosophical as well as political reflections (Perroud 1900; 1913),² writing essays (including a discussion of pregnancy and childbirth) (Champagneux 1799–1800), and creating travel journals that she would not publish under her own name, as she was persuaded that authorship was not a pursuit suited to a woman (Berville and Barrière 1827, 178). In the early days of the Revolution, away from Paris and immersed in a rural and provincial lifestyle, Phlipon Roland sent her anonymous reflections on political events to Jacques-Pierre Brissot's revolutionary paper, *Le Patriote François* (Brissot 1789–1793). Until her last days, writing her personal and historical memoirs while awaiting death in prison, Phlipon Roland never signed any of her work. Yet a few days before she died she admitted that had she lived, she would have wanted to become an author in her own name: "Had I been going to live, I would have had, I believe, only one temptation left: that of writing the annals of this century, and to be the Macaulay of my country" (Perroud 1905, II, 264).

The publication of those memoirs brought her fame throughout the nineteenth century as much for her courage as for her political ideals (Dauban 1864). This fame did not follow her into the twentieth century, and very little work has been done either on her historical significance or on her works. This is in spite of the fact that many of her writings, including the texts she produced in prison, have been published (Halldenius 2007; Reuter 2007; Green 2012; Coffee 2013; Green 2013; Reuter 2014; Halldenius 2015).

These writings are now more available than they were even a decade ago, thanks to digitization, and the time has come to study their philosophical content. As well as providing valuable insight into her life and times—both what it was like to be a woman before the Revolution, and the nitty-gritty business of running the Revolution—the memoirs tell us how Phlipon Roland came to hold, and sometimes revise, certain views in political philosophy. This, together with her unpublished writings and some of her letters, enables us to engage with her as a political philosopher, focusing in particular on her views on republicanism and gender roles.

In section II, I will propose a reading of Phlipon Roland's views as neo-republican, based on her memoirs and early philosophical writings. In section III, I will focus on her attitude to gender roles, and ask to what extent she follows Rousseau in believing that strong gender roles are necessary for the health of the nation. In section IV, I will argue that Phlipon Roland succeeds in diverting Rousseau's views on complementarity and rural economics to allow for more parity in gender roles, and in particular to make it possible for a woman (such as herself) to participate in politics and help shape the intellectual character of the new republic. I will conclude in section

V by showing how Phlipon Roland managed to draw—and live—a picture of a more egalitarian rural family.

II. REPUBLICAN WOMEN AND THE REVOLUTION

Historical republicanism has not always been kind to women, often relegating them to a backstage or supporting role for the true citizens: their husbands, fathers, and sons (Green and Petix 2013).³ Yet women did actively defend republican ideals at times when they could not yet hope to partake fully of its benefits, perhaps hoping that in the not too distant future, their daughters would. This was perhaps especially true in the late eighteenth century, a time when two conditions obtained: republicanism was becoming a real option, and women were philosophically active and publishing. These conditions gave us in England Wollstonecraft, Barbauld, and Macaulay (Geffroy 2006; Green and Petix 2013).

Women in France also participated in the Revolution, and some, such as Olympe de Gouges and Etta Palm D'Aelders, took the opportunity to fight for their own rights, attempting to convince the new rulers that women too should be granted citizenship (Dauban 1864, ccxlix). Yet not all French women did so, several preferring to use their influence to help men become citizens—as, for instance, Madame de Staël and Louise Kéralio-Robert did (Berville and Barrière 1827, I, 196). And indeed, although women's active participation in the Revolution was tolerated at first, it was later violently repressed. Hébert, in *Le Moniteur*, offered French women the following advice:

Women, do you want to be republicans? Love, follow, and teach the laws that remind your children to exercise their rights. Take glory in the brilliant actions they may one day perform on behalf of the fatherland, because these speak well of you; be simple in your dress, laborious in your household work; never join popular assemblies with the aim of speaking there; but by your occasional presence there, encourage your children to participate; then your fatherland will bless you, because you will truly have done for it what it expects of you. (Dauban 1864, ccxlix)

This context is important because it gives us an inkling of the social and political pressure women were under not to challenge traditional gender roles during the Revolution. Phlipon Roland, however, became a republican long before the Revolution even started, and we need to go back earlier in order to understand her attitude toward gender roles. In her autobiographical memoirs, as well as in letters and in her *Historical Notices*, she reflects on the childhood origins of her republican convictions. “Plutarch had disposed me to becoming a republican; he had awakened in me the strength and the honor that constitute its character; he had inspired in me a true enthusiasm for public virtues and for liberty” (Berville and Barrière 1827, I, 196). At the age of eight, she tells us, she took a volume of Plutarch's *Lives* to church instead of her prayer book.⁴ At twelve, she cried that she had not been born Roman or

Spartan and could not live in a republic (Perroud 1905, 48), a feeling she remembers in letters to her friend Sophie Cannel in 1776, noting that if she could not be born Roman or Spartan, at least being a man would be better.⁵ Fifteen years later, she tells Henri Bancal that she no longer envied the ancients their republics as she felt that the Revolution had brought about something better still: "Philosophy has extended knowledge of the rights and duties of men, and we will be citizens without being enemies to those unfortunates who do not share the benefits of our nation."⁶

In this section, I want to delve deeper into the sort of republican ideals that Philpon Roland embraced, in particular comparing her to her contemporaries Catherine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft. I tease out three aspects of her republicanism: (1) a strong tendency, from Plutarch, to put the common good first, and a predilection for honor; (2) the view that liberty is most hurt by domination and the frequent use of slavery as a model to explain this—this makes her a republican in the same sense as Wollstonecraft and Macaulay are, that is, what we would now call a neo-republican; and (3) a strong preference for a rural model of republicanism, drawn from Rousseau. I will address all three in turn.

Although she found a strong inspiration in her childhood readings of Plutarch, it is not very clear what sort of ideals she derived from these readings; she says he made her a republican, but what sort? Perhaps she was encouraged by the example of Galba to regard honor as an important political virtue, to think of the common good before that of individuals, including her own, and by Brutus, that liberty was worth fighting and dying for. One of the letters she wrote to Brissot gives us some insight into this:

Every one tells me to move to the city—I will not. I have not hurt any body in the country, I have no land nor title, I have only done good to my neighbors. Were they to become ungrateful, so what? I will pay the interest of the advantages that my position gave me over them. But I will not do them the injury of believing it before the event, and even if I were to fall victim to a few bandits, I would not despair of the *res publica*, as do the cowards who call for a counter-revolution because a few houses were burnt down.⁷

Philpon Roland in this passage emphasizes the need to treat one's neighbors as honorable, that is, to assume that they will act virtuously even when she may be endangered if she is mistaken. But she also announces (in a way that is sadly premonitory) that she is prepared to receive punishment for a crime she did not—but others did—commit if the people find it a just retribution for the ills they have suffered. In other words, she will sacrifice herself, honorably, for the greater good, much as Galba and Brutus did.

Perhaps Philpon Roland's affection for Plutarch shows in her attitude rather than in specific views, but she also produced philosophical texts of her own that give us a greater insight into the sort of republicanism she embraced. These, written between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-four, are "Rêverie Politique" (1776), "Discours sur la question proposée par l'Académie de Besançon: Comment l'éducation des femmes

pourrait contribuer à rendre les hommes meilleurs” (1777), and “De la liberté” (1778).⁸

In the 1778 piece, in which she attempts to define what she calls political, meta-physical, and philosophical liberty, Phlipon Roland wrote that “The rule of the general will is the only one that can maintain public happiness: from the moment power grants independence to some parts of the state [but not others], corruption is introduced and will manifest itself by enslaving the oppressed” (Champagneux 1799–1800, III, 170). The rhetoric of slavery is also present in her 1777 essay for the Academy of Besançon, where it is used as a critique of any sort of despotism, even when that despotism is not actually active—the slightest deviation from the rule of the people, she says, could lead to slavery. Conversely, she writes in the Academy essay, no republic is perfect if it allows slavery, whether Helots in Sparta, or anywhere in the world where women are in (metaphorical) chains: “the rust of barbarity covers their proud masters and ruins them together. The poisoned breath of despotism destroys virtue in the bud” (Faugères 1864, 337).

Her emphasis on the noxious effects of domination places Phlipon Roland squarely in the neo-republican tradition, that is, alongside Wollstonecraft, for instance, who also defined liberty as freedom from domination and said that women could not achieve the virtues necessary to citizenship unless they first acquired independence from their husbands, that is, they were no longer subject to their potential interference (Wollstonecraft 1993, 221). Sophie de Grouchy Condorcet, also a contemporary of Phlipon Roland’s, insisted in her *Letters on Sympathy* that what was dangerous about monarchy was not merely the actions of the monarch and the actual restraints on the people’s freedom, but the potential interference; it doesn’t matter, she said, whether a king is good or bad, wise or stupid, he is still a king, and we are under the constant threat that he—or his descendants—might interfere with us.⁹

In her 1776 piece, Phlipon Roland addresses the idea that liberty is nondomination: “And now domination through fear is established; it is the resort of despotic governments: does it ever produce anything good? Alas! It can only feed bitterness, lead to despair, and bury all virtues” (Champagneux 1799–1800, 140). Much like Wollstonecraft, Phlipon Roland believes that it is not possible to become virtuous when one is dominated, whether by a political despot or a private master. So much so that it comes as a surprise that in her 1778 essay she does not conclude, like Wollstonecraft, that women cannot be virtuous while they are dominated by men: “True courage belongs only to free men. What can those who are nothing apart from their master’s will be capable of? And to what obligations will he, who has to fancy himself of a superior nature to those he commands, feel bound?” (Champagneux 1799–1800, 171). It seems as though it would have taken very few steps for Phlipon Roland to conclude both that as a woman she could not be courageous if she were bound to obey men, and that men who thought that they were by nature superior to her were not likely to be virtuous either. We should bear this in mind when reading what she actually has to say about gender relations.

We now turn to the third aspect of Phlipon Roland’s republicanism: her predilection for a rural model. Her favorite model for republican freedom was a Spartan one in which

the occupations of citizens were simple and not too diverse. This was due to her belief that promoting and safeguarding the laws and institutions guaranteeing freedom would likely take up most of citizens' time and that therefore they needed to lead simple lives, with few distractions and unnecessary demands on their time and energy.¹⁰

Phlipon Roland's Rousseau-style rural republicanism is based on the belief that a rural population is more likely to develop the required virtues for defending the ideals of liberty than luxury-loving city-dwellers would be. In his *Constitutional Project for Corsica*, Rousseau makes the link between rural life and a healthy nation very clear: a rural lifestyle makes for healthier citizens who have more children (because they are healthier and less prone to boredom and debauchery). But he also links them because he believes that "[p]easants are much more attached to their soil than are townsmen to their city"; he also believes that peasants are more likely to be patriotic and to put in the work necessary for defending country and constitution. A reliance on agriculture more than on financial power, he says, equates work with freedom in the sense that peasants who produce the food they need to live are independent of external powers (Rousseau 1763, 10).

Phlipon Roland, who had read most of Rousseau's works, would have been very familiar with his republicanism. In particular she derived a greater insight into Rousseau's fascination with rural economy and its implication for private and public virtue from *The New Heloise* (Berville and Barrière 1827, I, 196). This is reflected in her views on gender relations, as we will see in the following section.

III. "WHAT I WANT WOMEN TO BE"

There are good reasons to suppose—as has been said of her contemporary Kéralio-Robert—that Phlipon Roland was not well-disposed toward the feminist ideas that were developing around her, from Condorcet, Olympe de Gouges, and Etta Palm d'Aelders (Geffroy 2006; Sepinwall 2010; Green 2014). However, we saw from her early political writings that she did not believe domination of any kind could lead to virtuous relationships, thus suggesting that there is a certain amount of tension in her views. In this section, I will examine two main aspects of Phlipon Roland's attitude toward gender equality: first a strong belief in complementarity inspired by Rousseau's *The New Heloise*, and second a more problematic but less clearly attributable belief in the superiority of the male sex. Complementarity—the view that men and women have distinct virtues that enable them to play different but equally useful roles in the family and in society at large—has been popular at least since Aristotle formulated it in his *Politics*, quoting Sophocles saying that "Silence is a woman's glory" to defend his claim that different classes of society must have different virtues fitted to their different natures and enabling them to fulfill their roles. Women's role, he tells us, is to obey (Aristotle 1920, 1260a9–12). What is clear from Aristotle, and many who followed his lead, is that it is very easy to move from complementarity to claims about domination. Aristotle's women must obey men because their nature is to do so. Whatever role they are deemed fit to play will have to be subservient to men's roles.

Phlipon Roland's pronouncements on gender equality can be found in her memoirs and in her correspondence. Some of them, such as the following letter to Bosc, suggest that, like Aristotle, she believed in women's inferiority and need to be dominated by men.

I believe, I will not say better than any woman, but perhaps better than any man, in the superiority of your sex in every respect. You have strength, first, and all that comes with it and from it, courage, perseverance, great ideas, and great talents. It is your job to make laws in politics and discoveries in science. Rule the world, transform the surface of the globe, be proud, terrible, clever, and learned; you are all of this without us, and in all this you must dominate.¹¹

She goes on to explain that women's virtue lies in bringing love and affection to men's lives, so that they are needed somehow. Given how involved she was in helping her husband and male friends with their work—both scientific and political—it is also possible that Phlipon Roland was not only speaking tongue in cheek when she wrote this, but that she fully expected her correspondent, a close family friend, to realize it. It is also, unfortunately, likely that at that time she genuinely believed in men's overall superiority, and in the absence of further evidence, we cannot conclude either way.

Another passage makes use of the same quote by Sophocles cited by Aristotle: "I know full well, Sir, that silence is woman's ornament; the Greeks thought so and Mrs. Dacier wrote it, and despite our century's general opposition to this sort of morality, three quarters of sensible men, husbands especially, still live by it."¹² Note that this passage, written six years after the previous one—assuming the first is not tongue in cheek—is more nuanced. Phlipon Roland is not defending the view that women should not voice their opinions—indeed, she goes on to give her correspondent a lengthy illustrated argument about why he is wrong to dismiss English (male *and* female) writers—but acknowledging that this is still very much the generally accepted opinion, despite the apparent moral relaxation of the times. (Note also that this is the same Mrs. Dacier who co-authored the translation of Plutarch that Phlipon Roland read as a child, and who was a noted intellectual and a philosopher in her own right.)

Phlipon Roland's positive view of women's virtues was first detailed in her 1777 essay on the question whether the education of women could improve men. A woman, she wrote, should be sweet and compassionate so as to inspire love and virtue; patient and hardworking so as to keep the household running smoothly (Faugeres 1864, 332, 334, 344). This picture of domesticity is presented in a republican context: she makes it clear early on in the text that the ideal societies are the Roman or Spartan republics. Women in such societies, she tells us, are confined to their home, and their virtuous presence there maintains the general happiness of the republic.

More sedentary, more enclosed ordinarily in republican governments, left to domestic tasks, nourished by this patriotism that elevates the soul and

sentiments, they labored toward the citizen's happiness and that of the state, through the peace and order reigning inside their homes, and the care they take to cultivate in their children the germs of courage and virtues that must be perpetuated as well as liberty. Focused on their families, they could not set any other ends for themselves than that of being cherished for the qualities that are needed in the home and that they would be recommended for. The love of little things, seeking vain distinctions, is a feature only of superficial societies, where each brings pretensions devoid of real merit to sustain them. (Faugeres 1864, 344)

This, together with her Rousseau-inspired love for the simple, rustic life as portrayed in both *Emile* and *The New Heloise*, explains her list of womanly duties in a later text: a good woman is in some sense self-sufficient, and should be able to keep the home going without having recourse to much outside help—she should be able to cook for her family, if needed, and should certainly not send her babies to wet-nurses.

I expect a woman to keep her family's linen and clothing in good order, to feed her children, order, or herself cook dinner, this without talking about it, keeping her mind free and ordering her time so that she is able to talk of something else, and to please, at last, through her mood, as well as the charms of her sex. (Berville and Barrière 1827, 1, 198)

It may seem as though there was no change in Philpon Roland's outlook between her youthful writings and her more mature ones: both texts assert that a woman's first and most important role is to ensure the comfort and well-being of her family. But in the second passage she goes further: she tells us that housework and making oneself presentable need not—and indeed should not—take up much of one's time, provided one is well organized. She informs us that she can get everything done in two hours at the most, and that anyone else could do the same.¹³

By contrast, Rousseau's Julie is portrayed as spending her entire day on housework and child care. Philpon Roland spent much of her day on scientific and philosophical pursuits (even if they were her husband's), whereas Rousseau tells us of Julie that

[s]he is not the indolent sort of materfamilias, content to study when action is required, who waste in acquainting themselves with others' duties the time they should spend fulfilling their own. She practices today what she was formerly learning. She no longer studies, she no longer reads; she acts. As she arises an hour later than her husband, she also goes to bed an hour later. This hour is the only time she still devotes to study, and to her the day never seems long enough for all the ministries she likes to fill it with. (Rousseau 1997, 455)

So despite her admiration for Rousseau's work, Philpon Roland did not quite model her own life after his prescriptions, but found a way of defending (in her writings as well as through her life) a sort of complementarity thesis that placed women at the

center of the home but allowed them to study and make themselves useful outside the home (even if through the intermediary of their husbands). Although we should not infer from her biographical writings that she believed all women should write in their leisure time, she does claim that all women who do their chores properly ought to have leisure time, and she certainly frowns on more trivial pursuits. This is enough to read into this passage a disagreement with Rousseau on what it should mean to be a housewife.

Phlipon Roland's pronouncements on gender certainly raise questions for those who would have her join the ranks of republican feminism: until her last days, she stayed hidden from the public eye, not acknowledging her work (especially that which she did on behalf of her husband while he was minister), and defending her image as a perfect Rousseauian wife and mother. Yet she did write and publish her political thoughts in a way that seems incompatible with her ideals of what a woman should be. In the next section I propose a philosophical interpretation of how these ideals may be reconciled.

IV. "THE LEGISLATORS' MISTAKE"

In this section I will argue that Phlipon Roland succeeds to some extent in diverting Rousseau's views on complementarity and rural economics to allow for more parity in gender roles, and in particular to make it possible for a woman (such as herself) to participate in politics and help shape the intellectual character of the new republic.

Phlipon Roland's discussion of the place of women in society is influenced by Rousseau's views both on the nature of women and on the role of the rural family in the republic. But as her own views evolve, it becomes clear that they tend more toward an egalitarian arrangement and that she is developing a distinctive theory of the role of the family in a republican state.

In the earliest piece of writing that we know she intended for publication, the essay written for the Academy of Besançon, Phlipon Roland presents an argument that was at the same time conservative and innovative.

First, she points out that in the best constitutions, women must remain in the home. Women's position in the home, she says, is crucial to the good development of society, as witness republican societies, because domestic life is the best environment not only for happiness, but for learning: this is the passage we looked at in the previous section. But more than simply holding up the moral backbone of the republic, women, according to Phlipon Roland, make it possible for society to come into existence:

Women are, therefore, by their natural destination, appointed to make men better; only they can give birth to the affections that bring them closer to one another We saw in the impressions they produce the origins of society and of all the goods that make it desirable, and in the

contempt for their power or forgetting of their rights, a source of the horrors that tear it apart and disfigure it. (Faugeres 1864, 338)

The very idea of a family modeled on the classical republican one, separate from the state, but at the same time nurturing the virtues that are required for it to carry on, is exactly what Rousseau proposes in *The New Heloise* and *Emile*. And in both these texts, women are at the same time essential to domestic success, and willingly subservient to male authority.¹⁴ For Rousseau, the (rural) family harks back to the first societies as they are represented in his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*. When such families are found in an actual society, they reflect the rural republican ideal. The family must therefore take care, in order to retain the qualities it derives from both the pre-social state and the republic, not to fall victim to the temptations of either; it must keep to itself and participate without losing its particular mode of existence. This is what Rousseau advises in *The New Heloise*, concerning the rural families who are Julie's neighbors:

On this principle they make a point here, and even more at Étange, of contributing as much as they can to rendering the peasants' condition easy, without ever helping them to leave it. The best off and the poorest have equally the mania of sending their children into the cities, some to study and one day become Important, the others to enter domestic service and relieve their parents of their upkeep. . . . They show them all the error of these prejudices, the corruption of children, the abandonment of fathers, and the continual risks to life, fortune, and morals, where a hundred perish for one who succeeds. (Rousseau 1997, 438)

But the patriarchal aspect of Rousseau's ideal family does not seem to follow from anything that Rousseau says about the place of the family in relation to the state, or the dangers of city life. Rather, as Eileen Hunt Botting argues, the argument behind sex-differentiation is based on his belief that we can never go back to the freedom we experienced prior to socialization. In particular, as women are physically weaker than men, they must, within a society, agree to be dominated in order to receive the protection they need (Botting 2006, 35–36). Thus, in the opening of the *Discourse on Political Economy*, Rousseau tells us that as far as domestic economy is concerned, fathers must be in charge of the family because "the father is physically stronger than his children" (Rousseau 1988, 59). In *The New Heloise*, this is expressed in terms of complementarity. St. Preux, when he visits the Wolmars, describes himself as basking in the glow of "living reason and sensible virtue." Wolmar is the embodiment of reason, as is shown by his wise discourses on their domestic arrangements. Julie, "who never had any rule but her heart and could not have a surer one," implements these arrangements, led by her instincts and her complete trust in her husband's wisdom.

Phlipon Roland is clearly influenced by two aspects of Rousseau's thought, that is, by the picture of the family as preserving society, and the thought that women's nature is such that if they are to be part of society they must be dependent on men. Yet some of her pronouncements on women's nature are difficult to take seriously and

suggest that she was either not serious about them herself, or that she failed to reconcile certain central contradictions between what she regarded as the respectable position and her own observations. For instance, she tells us that they are “weak in their constitution, the great operations and abstract ideas are equally strange to them; anything requiring a powerful effort or deep meditation is beyond them” at the same time as she is herself competing with the best minds in the country in a highly abstract enterprise (Faugeres 1864, 333). Nor are her claims of physical weakness any more credible than those of inability to handle abstraction. Her requirements for a woman include physically demanding work—such as washing the family’s linen (a back-breaking activity if ever there was one)—not to mention the work that, she tells us in her academic essay, gives rise to women’s intimate understanding of physical suffering: pregnancy and birth, and that again requires a nonnegligible amount of physical exertion.

These contradictions, taken together with her later writings recording both her lived experience and her advice for other women, suggest that the picture she draws here is more than just a youthful interpretation of Rousseau. Instead, we see the seeds of a more mature and complex position. For one thing, although she takes from Rousseau the idea that women, by nature, are destined to make men love them, she does not think that this is due to weakness and bodily charms. On the contrary, she says, women inspire love because they are themselves compassionate, and this compassion comes to them because they are used to suffering—mostly through giving birth—and therefore understand more intimately than men what it is to be in pain and to need support from others (Faugeres 1864, 334–35). What we may choose to retain from Phlipon Roland’s youthful essay—as it reflects something we find in her later writings—is the thought that politics begins at home, in the sense not only that political society is not possible without homes, but also that the welfare of society depends on what happens in the home, and how those running the homes are treated and allowed to behave.

Though Phlipon Roland does agree that families provide the environment in which civic virtues are taught and preserved, her view is stronger than that, and she believes that those who seek to determine and bring about the common good need to study families before anything else:

Our century’s legislators try to create a general good from which particular happiness will follow; I strongly fear that they may have put the cart before the horse. It would be in better conformity with nature, and perhaps reason, to study carefully what domestic happiness consists in, and to insure that every individual has it, so that common happiness is composed of the happiness of each, and so that all should be interested in maintaining the order that procured it for them. (Berville and Barrière 1827, I, 184)

Phlipon Roland’s argument relies on the premise that domestic good is desirable for all, in that one can find happiness only within a home or family. More than contentment, what the home provides is the right environment for individuals to discover

what their happiness consists in. It follows that not only do homes enable the growth of happiness, but also that the state cannot determine what happiness is without studying individuals in their homes. It seems as though we have good reasons to believe that Philpon Roland, had she lived and carried out her plan to become a French Macaulay, would have developed a more egalitarian sort of rural republicanism.

V. GENDERED VIRTUES PUT TO THE TEST: A BIOGRAPHICAL CONCLUSION

I will conclude in this section by showing how Philpon Roland managed to draw a picture of a more egalitarian rural family—her own—showing how her move to the city so that she and her husband could participate more closely in the progress of the Revolution affected her views.

In her later writings, it is less clear that Philpon Roland still accepts the thesis of women's inferiority and necessary subservience. Her writings on that topic, as we saw in the previous sections, are ambivalent and appeal more to questions of reputation and what people believe than to a conviction about women's actual inferiority, which indeed would have been surprising in a healthy, mature woman leading such an active life. But what she does retain from Rousseau is a belief in the rural family, the enclosed space in which virtues, work, and education are practiced, friends received without pomp and circumstance, trust and discretion practiced, and the outside world held at a distance, while it gathers strength from the virtuous lives of the family. She also retains the idea that husband and wife are partners as far as the upbringing of children is concerned. Philpon Roland and her husband worked together at the education of their daughter, Eudora, discussing the best way to handle breastfeeding and later constructing an educational program from their reading of *The New Heloise* (Reynolds 2012, 75).

But Philpon Roland's rural republican family was in some ways more egalitarian than Rousseau's. Any of Roland's work that could be done from home—researching, reading, writing, corresponding—was shared with his wife, who reports that during the twelve years they were married she worked with her husband as customarily as they ate together (Berville and Barrière 1827 I, 178). And although any official outings in his capacity as inspector or later as minister had to be handled without his wife, when it came to diplomatic traveling and visiting for a matter concerning the family, it was Marie-Jeanne who went, leaving her husband at home with their two-year-old daughter for several months while she visited Paris and Versailles (Reynolds 2012, 94). The Roland family seemed to be ruled by the principle that each did what he or she was best at, according to their actual—rather than fictional—nature. And the result seemed to have been more or less egalitarian.

Philpon Roland's conception of home and family was transformed by the Revolution in such a way as to amplify those aspects of it that were republican and distinctive of her own perspective, and to erase some (but not all) of its gender distinctions.

She spent the first three years of the Revolution in Amiens at the country home of Le Clos, living a simple, retired life, receiving visitors who played an important role in the revolution—Lanthenas, Bancal, Paine, even—and corresponding with others, notably Brissot, who printed several of her letters (with her consent) in *Le Patriote François*. There her ideas about what a home could be began to evolve, and together with her husband, Jacques-Pierre and Felicité Brissot, Henri Bancal, and a few others, she made plans to purchase some church property and live with friends in a commune. The families would live and work together, working the land and educating the local peasantry so that they could become republican citizens. The home, larger and no longer run by a single woman in charge of the physical and spiritual well-being of those who went out into the world, was to turn into a center for civic education as well as a self-sustaining community in which men and women participated equally. The commune would be both a private space where friends could flourish and follow the lifestyle that suited them, and a civic, public center for the development of the republic (Reynolds 2012, 128–29).

The dividing line between the public and the private was further erased in the next two years of the Revolution (and the last two years of Phlipon Roland's and Roland's lives) when they moved to Paris and turned their home into a political salon. Though much has been made of Phlipon Roland's insistence that she should not participate in the political debates that took place in her home, and that she could be nothing more than an enabler, it seems as though she had to put some distance between herself and her previous image of herself as a housewife, writing to a friend that she just could not stay home and had to go to the Assembly and the clubs every day to follow the events.

While peace lasted, I kept myself to the tranquil role and the kind of influence that seem to me proper for my sex. But when the King's departure declared war, it struck me that we must all devote ourselves without reserve; I went and joined the Fraternal Societies, persuaded that zeal and right thinking can sometimes be very useful in times of crisis. I cannot keep to my home and am visiting all my acquaintances in order to excite us for the greatest actions.¹⁵

For Mary Seidman Trouille, this shows that the Revolution gave Phlipon Roland “a unique opportunity for self-fulfillment outside the domestic sphere—the chance she had secretly hoped for to play an active role in shaping the ideal republic she had dreamed of ever since she first read Plutarch” (Trouille 1997, 174). Although this is to some extent plausible—we saw that in early letters to friends she regretted she had not been born a man for that very reason—it seems that the mature Phlipon Roland does not conceive of the home as separate from public life in quite the same way; rather, public space is an extension of the home, but one in which, as a woman, she must still tread carefully to avoid the threat of a bad reputation that would reflect on the extended community tied to that home.

It is not, perhaps, possible or desirable to portray Phlipon Roland as critical of Rousseau in the way that Wollstonecraft was, and indeed, even if she can be

described as holding feminist views, she nonetheless embraced Rousseau's belief that women essentially belonged to the domestic sphere. But what is striking about both her writings and her life is that she was able to offer a woman's perspective on what it might be like to embrace Rousseau's ideals of womanhood and actively defend republican ones at the same time. Hers is yet another first step toward understanding the issues involved in the political participation of women.

NOTES

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1. I follow Siân Reynolds's excellent study of her life and works in using the name she used to sign her nonpersonal and political letters (often in initials), that is, her full first name, Marie-Jeanne, her unmarried name, Phlipon, and her married name, Roland (before the revolution Roland de la Platiere) (Reynolds 2012).

2. All translations from the French are my own.

3. See Matthes 2001 on the strong relationship between republican myths and the abuse of women and Pateman 2007 and Phillips 2000 for the difficult relationship of republicanism and feminism. But see Sepinwall 2010 for a nuanced story about feminism during the French Revolution.

4. She used the nine-volume integral translation produced by Anne and André Dacier in 1721, a translation slightly modernized and moralized but in no way abridged.

5. February 5, 1776 (Perroud 1913, 374).

6. July 18, 1790 (Perroud 1900, 107–08).

7. Letter to Brissot, August 3, 1789 (Perroud 1900, 55). Reprinted in the *Patriote François*, August 12, 1789.

8. The first and last pieces are printed in Champagneux 1799–1800, III, 138–41, and 169–79; the *Discours* is in Faugeres 1864, 325–49.

9. See Bergès 2015 for a discussion of Grouchy's republican thought, and Pettit 1997, 22ff., 272 for a contemporary argument that domination does not depend on the rulers' actual interference.

10. Yet they too failed to achieve the Republican ideal, because they kept slaves. See Champagneux 1799–1800, 173.

11. July 29, 1783, to Bosc (Perroud 1900, I, 256–57).

12. March 21, 1789, to Varenne de Fenille (Perroud 1900 II, 43–44). The anecdote is as follows: Mrs. Dacier, when asked to autograph the album of a learned German traveller, seeing the names of some very famous writers and scientists above hers, chose to copy this verse from Sophocles out of modesty.

13. "One who is well organized will always have leisure" (Berville and Barrière 1827, I, 199).

14. For an enlightening discussion of Rousseau's rural family, see Botting 2006, especially 25–26.

15. June 23, 1791, to Bancal (Perroud 1900, II, 307).

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