Toward an Alternate *Andreia*: *The Laches* as Anticipating Contemporary Themes in Gender Studies

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Introduction

The impetus for this project came when I was invited by Professor Christopher Raymond to assist him in translating Plato's *Laches*. On the night before we were scheduled to have our first meeting, I read Rosamond Kent Sprague's 1992 translation for Hackett. It was, admittedly, a somewhat disappointing experience. The dialogue is mostly about courage which, as someone who is primarily interested in Plato's political theory, is less exciting than the other cardinal virtues of justice or wisdom. We nonetheless went along with the translation, and while I was not particularly invested in the text, I felt lucky to be working with original material considering that Vassar was not offering a formal Greek class at the time. While the first few meetings were a bit of a trudge, once we reached 190d I became interested in the connection between *andreia* and *anēr*.

Originally emerging in the Ionic dialect as *andreie*, *andreia* can be traced back to the aeolic noun *anēr* which is commonly translated as "adult male."[1] It was this connection between the virtue of courage and manhood that got me thinking about the symbolic relevance of attempting to define *andreia*. This proves to be a complicated task. While *andreia* itself is not part of the Homeric lexicon, Homer's epics initiate a connection between being a proper *anēr* and demonstrations of physical capacity that the *Laches* builds upon in its dialectic. Closer examination of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* reveal that the difficulties Socrates and the interlocutors have in pinpointing *andreia* are also presaged by Homer's treatment of the *anēr*. A particularly notable example of this is the word *hupernēnoreōn*, which derives from *huper* (meaning beyond) and *anēr*, and indicates an improper surfeit of manliness.[2] Most frequently used in *The Odyssey's* characterization of Penelope's suitors, *hupernēnoreōn* is first used in *The*

[1] LSJ s.v. ἀνήρ.
[2] Bassi 2003, 35.

Iliad by Agamemnon to describe the Trojans as overconfident in their combative abilities. A similar arrogance displayed by the Trojans is then assigned to the suitors who, in their pursuit of Odysseus's wife, are "defined by their gluttony and offensive physical presence."[3] In both cases, *hupernēnoreōn* is worthy of mention because it exemplifies the negative semantic scope represented by the Homeric *anēr.* More specifically, if the critique of the Trojans and the suitors is that they are overweening, then *hupernēnoreōn* appears to suggest that confidence is unbecoming of an *anēr* when it trespasses into arrogance or gluttony. There is thus a sense in which being a man requires that one first recognizes the honorable traits, and then practices them in moderation. As such, *hupernēnoreōn* introduces an element of self-restraint into our picture of Homeric masculinity. While the proper Homeric man performs honorable behaviors, he is a proper *anēr* precisely by virtue of his knowledge of the limits of this performance. When he forgets this boundary, when he neglects prudence, the behaviors that were once the basis of honor quickly become grounds for ridicule.

With this Homeric foundation in mind, it is unsurprising that the *andreia* of the 5th century is a similarly complicated term. The earliest extant instance of *andreia* is in Aeschylus' play *Seven against Thebes,* which is believed to have been produced around 467 BCE.[4] The tragedy picks up on the debacle faced by the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, who are cursed by their father to fight each other for the kingship in Thebes. While Euripides' *Phonissae* foregrounds the conflict as the result of Eteocles' refusal to share the throne, this context is notably absent in Aeschylus's play. Instead, *Seven* positions Eteocles as the noble king charged with defending Thebes against a rebel insurgency of Argives led by his brother.[5] Occurring only

[3] Bassi 2003, 34.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Conacher 1996, 38.

once in all the of Aeschlyus' extant works, *andreia* emerges at line 52 in a scout's report of the Argive champions to Eteocles:

> σιδηρόφρων γὰρ θυμὸς ἀνδρείᾳ φλέγων
>
> ἔπνει, λεόντων ὡς Ἄρη δεδορκότων.
>
> There breathed within them a steel-hearted spirit, blazing with courage, like that of lions with the light of war in their eyes. (Aesch. *Seven*, 52.)[6]

This instantiation of *andreia*, though it evokes the imagery of a steadfast spirit and recycles the Homeric association between the heroic *anēr* and lions,[7] is not as obviously positive as a cursory glance would suggest. As Bassi notes, the other commentary on the Argives' masculinity in *Seven* is the chorus description of them as "the seven arrogant ones" ("ἑπτὰ δ' ἀγάνορες").[8] *Aganores*, stemming from the term *aganōr*, is a Homeric word that resembles *hupernēnoreōn* in that it connotes a similarly inappropriate surplus of masculinity. The evidence that the negative connotation evoked in its Homeric usage is mirrored in *Seven* is substantial, especially if we take Aeschylus' characterization of the brothers into account. Unlike the Euripidean rendition of the myth which portrays Eteocles as unjustly holding the throne, Aeschylus' Eteocles is a venerable figure tasked with protecting the city from a rebellious sibling. Positioned as unjustified aggressors, Polynices and his Argive allies neatly fit Homer's negative archetype of the *aganores*; they exhibit the *anēr*'s traits insofar as they are brave and confident, but they do so to a degree (and for a cause) that is unworthy of praise. Thus, if the Argives are *aganores* in a negative sense, it is reasonable to infer that the *andreia* they partake in

[6] Translation from Sommerstein 2009.
[7] Bassi 2003, 42.
[8] Ibid., 39.

is similarly tainted—"the masculinity of the Argives is clearly a negative attribute whether it is called *aganōr* or *andreia*."[9]

A quick glance at the general Greek perception of the Argives when *Seven* was produced confirms that we should be cautious of their *andreia*. As Jonathan Hall remarks, following the Battle of Sepeia in 494, the Argive servile class, the *douloi*, ascended to fill the positions left by the deceased Argive nobles. While there is debate over the demographics of the *douloi*, there was an undeniable "weakness of the Argive elite at the beginning of the fifth century."[10] If Bassi is correct in her contention that this association would have colored Aeschylus' perception of the Argives, then it further likely that the *andreia* he assigns them in *Seven* is not a positive quality. Indeed, with Hall's contribution in mind, the description of the Argive *andreia* becomes sardonic–far from being the symbols of masculinity, it is plausible that Aeschylus deploys *andreia* here as a way of underscoring the gulf between the Argives and *actual* manliness.

Another noteworthy appearance of *andreia* is in Sophocles's *Electra*, which was likely produced toward the end of the fifth century. Among Sophocles most acclaimed works, Electra chronicles Electra and Orestes' plot to avenge their father by killing Clytemnestra and her new lover, Aegisthus. Throughout lines 975-85, an anonymous narrator describes Electra and Chrysothemis as being worthy of honor on account of their *andreia*. As this is in reference to the former's plot to murder Aegisthus, the *andreia* here presumably symbolizes the manliness associated with violent domination of the Other. However, in assigning this virtue to two women, Sophocles provides another twist in what it means to perform *andreia*; as Bassi suggests, "the use of *andreia* in Electra…points to the absence of masculinity in its traditional or normative

[9] Bassi 2003, 40.
[10] Hall 1997, 71.

form and the emergence of a manliness that is no longer *anēr* specific."[11] Chrysothemis' retort, despite being a condemnation of Electra's fantasies, further complicates our picture of *andreia*:

> γυνὴ μὲν οὐδ᾽ ἀνὴρ ἔφυς, σθένεις δ᾽ ἔλασσον τῶν ἐναντίων χερί.
>
> You are a woman, not a man, and your strength is less than that of your adversaries (Soph. *Electra*. 998.)[12]

In pointing out that Electra is a *gunē* and therefore physically weaker than an *anēr*, Chrysothemis reifies the aforementioned connection between physical strength and being a proper Homeric hero. However, by addressing the *anēr* rather than Electra's desire for *andreia,* Chrysothemis' response implicitly enables the possibility of a *gunē* who possesses *andreia.* In other words, while Sophocles makes it clear that *gunē* and *anēr* are diametrically opposed, her failure to directly address the subject of Electra's fantasy, *andreia,* suggests that its possession is not necessarily incompatible with being a woman. Not only does *andreia* thereby become an attainable virtue for women, but in specifying what exactly the difference between *gunē* and *anēr* entails (a disparity in physical strength) the play implies that *andreia* must be something beyond this simple dichotomy; not merely a reflection of bodily force, Sophoclean manliness reflects the fifth century trend of toying with the notion that *andreia* is not just for *andrasi*.

All this indicates that the *Laches* inherits a picture of *andreia* built on very complex (and sometimes contradictory) meanings about what it means to show manly-courage.[13] In the chapters that follow, I draw upon contemporary gender studies, particularly models of masculinity, in order to present new ways of how the modern reader might make sense of these intricacies. Though I had limited academic experience with gender studies before researching

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[11] Bassi 2003, 42.
[12] Translation from Hugh Lloyd-Jones 1994.
[13] Following Walter Schmid 1992, I use manly-courage to refer to *andreia* because it perfectly illustrates how the dialogue does not draw a neat distinction between manliness and courage.

this thesis, I knew about the so-called "crisis of masculinity" and I sensed that modern models could help illuminate some of the complexities that we find in the ancient material. The most obvious link between the dialogue and contemporary ways of thinking about gender emerges in Laches' first definition. Replete with references to the battlefield and obstinate stoicism, I noticed that there was a relationship between how the general portrays *andreia* and a modern idea permeating both academic and non-academic discourse about gender: toxic masculinity. This realization evolved into an even more interesting line of inquiry—if toxic masculinity can be mapped onto Laches' definition, then how does that affect our reading of Socrates' rebuttals at 191a-c? This is the primary question, coupled with a recent definition of toxic masculinity offered by gender theorist Stephen Whitehead, that motivates the analysis in the latter half of Chapter 2.

Once I began paying more attention to the role of gender in the *Laches*, I went back to an essay I read by Ian Crystal when I first started thinking about the dialogue entitled "Fathers, Sons, and the Dorian Mode in the *Laches.*"[14] Crystal contends that the first half of the *Laches* is largely about fathers, sons and the question of how *aretē* (or virtue) is passed from the former to the latter. While the first half of the dialogue does not specifically identify *andreia* as the part of *aretē* which they are discussing, I talk about why we should assume that masculinity underscores the entire dialectic in Chapter 1. With this in mind, the first section of the *Laches* (particularly Lysimachus' opening speech) invites an interrogation of how masculinity is passed between generations. It was this issue of transference that returned me to a monograph that I was consulting in the early phases of my investigation into modern gender studies—Fidelma Ashe's *The New Politics of Masculinity*.[15] In her analysis of theorist John Stoltenberg,[16] Ashe includes

[14] Crystal 2010.
[15] Ashe 2007.
[16] Stoltenberg 2000.

his view that masculinity is a constructed set of behaviors (which he refers to as a "mask") that is often translated from father to son. Stoltenberg's formulation of masculinity as a constructed phenomenon passed from generation to generation struck me as potentially significant to a modern interpretation of the *Laches*. More specifically, what did Socrates think about the feasibility of masculinity being transferred from father to son and how might Stoltenberg's mask of masculinity help us to reinterpret the Athenian gadfly's position? It is with these questions in mind that we now turn to the dialogue.

Chapter 1: Fathers, Sons, and Masculinity in *The Laches*

A comparatively short dialogue (as several of Plato's early works are), the *Laches* manages to produce a wealth of insight into two complex and related questions: what is the best way to educate young men and how might one define the virtue of *andreia*? The inquiry begins after a performance of a man fighting in armor, to which Nicias and Laches are invited by two Athenian noblemen, Lysimachus and Melesias. Both Nicas and Laches, the latter of whom serves as the titular character, were well-known Athenian generals during the Peloponnesian War. At the time the dialogue took place (around 423 BCE), Nicias was the "unofficial president" at Athens.[17] Known for his temperance, Nicias' extreme caution in battle earned him criticism from both Aristophanes and Thucydides. Laches, on the other hand, led the Sicilian expedition and fought beside Socrates at the battle of Delium. Described by Walter Schmid as "proud, loyal, and straightforward," Laches demonstrated the laconic, action-oriented mentality typical of the Spartans.[18] Lysimachus and Melesias, despite their aristocratic status and their famous fathers' "fine deeds" (καλὰ ἔργα, 179c), admit that they themselves are unworthy of imitation: "Neither of us has deeds of our own to speak of" (ἡμέτερα δ' αὐτῶν ἔργα οὐδέτερος ἔχει λέγειν, 179c). It is in light of these personal deficiencies that they seek assistance in rearing their respective sons, Aristides and Thucydides, who are named after their grandfathers. Convinced that Nicias and Laches, whose illustrious military and political reputations were well known, were therefore

[17] Schmid 1992, 6.
[18] Ibid., 12.

competent in the matter of rearing young men, Lysimachus and Melesias implore them to assist in this matter.

The dialogue's date suggests that the *Laches* emerged in a time when the father-son relationship in Athens was being contested. As Ian Crystal points out, around 423 BCE, Athenian culture[19] was embroiled in a debate regarding the best modes of rearing young men.[20] The argument centered largely around the topic of *aretē*, which is usually translated as virtue. As Thomas Buford points out in his study entitled "Plato on the Educational Consultant: An Interpretation of the *Laches*," the sophists and the aristocrats had opposite notions about the way that *aretē* was instilled in young men.[21] On the aristocratic account, which Buford describes as the "traditional position," *aretē* "was a matter of natural talent or gift, and thus in a sense could not be taught."[22] Noblemen had an innate duty to instill *aretē* in their offspring, and sons received virtue as part of the "natural gift" of belonging to the aristocracy. The sophists, who were generally skeptical of this philosophy, argued that *aretē* could be inculcated in a young man through education; they were particularly critical of the view that "excellence is passed down from aristocratic father to son."[23] Unconvinced by the emphasis the aristocrats placed on the father-son relationship, sophists claimed that if *aretē* could be taught and learned, then it was neither guaranteed for the aristocratic son, nor outside the realm of possibility for the common public.

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[19] Particularly the old aristocratic class and newly-emerging sophists.
[20] Crystal 2010, 247.
[21] Buford 1977.
[22] Ibid., 155.
[23] Crystal 2010, 260.

The question of how to instill *aretē*, which was at the center of the debate between the sophists and the aristocrats, has its roots in the Homeric tradition. In *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, *aretē* was largely ascribed to the Homeric heroes who proved their virtue through great deeds on the battlefield. Margalit Finkelberg alludes to this in her study of Homeric *aretē* and *timē*: "Of the two principal formulae for *aretē*, one means all manner of *aretē* and is usually followed by the enumeration of various qualities such as swiftness of foot, military prowess, etc."[24] In her mention of "swiftness of foot" and "military prowess," Finkelberg puts forward the notion that *aretē* was often a gendered phenomenon. Evoking notions of bodily strength and the battlefield, "swiftness of foot" and "military prowess" point to war—a sphere traditionally reserved for men. Finkelberg thus further complicates the notion of *aretē* by introducing an additional topic for consideration–the Homeric *anēr*.

On Karen Bassi's account, the proper Homeric *anēr* oriented his manhood around the emulation of the battle-oriented heroic archetype–the *aristos anēr*; the Iliadic troops are constantly being told to "be men" (ἀνέρες εστε) and to assert their bodily strength.[25] Furthermore, the epithet "man-slaying" (*androphonos*) is used to describe the *Iliad's* two most prominent heroes, Hector and Achilles.[26] The connection between being a proper *anēr* and asserting strength in the Homeric epics reveals, as Bassi suggests, just how closely Homeric masculinity (and by extension Homeric *aretē*) is linked to physical ability and violence. If the traditional, aristocratic view held that *aretē* was considered to be largely "guaranteed by aristocratic blood-lines passed on from father to son,"[27] then the connection between *aretē* and

[24] Finkelberg 1998, 20.
[25] Bassi 2003, 33.
[26] Bassi 2003, 34.
[27] Crystal 2010, 248.

the Homeric *anēr* suggests that proper masculinity was tied up in what the traditional ideology viewed to be naturally inherited.

This conventional 4th century ideology claimed that a son's access to *aretē* was predominantly governed by his father's social position. In order to understand how Lysimachus and Melesias fit into this framework, we might begin by briefly examining the relationships they had with their fathers. Plato tells us that Lysimachus is the son of the Athenian statesman Aristides. A prominent member of the Athenian aristocracy for much of his life, Aristides was particularly noted for his generalship during the Persian War. His military and political achievements are the object of praise from various ancient sources. In Book 8 of *The Histories*, for example, Herodotus calls him "the best and most just man to emerge in Athens" (*Histories*, 8.79).[28] Thucydides, Melesias' father, was a similarly prominent figure in Athens. He came from a noble family and went on to spearhead a conservative faction that served as the main rival to Pericles' democratizing efforts in the 440s.

While these facts alone indicate their aristocratic lineage, Lysimachus himself says that he and Melesias have very successful fatherst:

> ἡμῶν γὰρ ἑκάτερος περὶ τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ πατρὸς πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ ἔργα ἔχει λέγειν πρὸς τοὺς νεανίσκους, καὶ ὅσα ἐν πολέμῳ ἠργάσαντο καὶ ὅσα ἐνεἰρήνῃ, διοικοῦντες τά τε τῶν συμμάχων καὶ τὰ τῆσδε τῆς πόλεως

[28] Translation from De Selincourt 1996.

> Both of us [Lysimachus and Melesias] have many fine deeds concerning each father to tell the young men [Thucydides and Aristides], the things which they accomplished in war and in peace, managing both the things of the allies and the administration of this city (179c).

In underscoring the various public responsibilities of Aristides and Thucydides, Lysimachus again reinforces his own aristocratic status. However, as Schmid points out, "the historical record tells us next to nothing about Lysimachus or Melesias—their accomplishments, their lives seem less than nothing in comparison with those of their fathers, men of legendary, aristocratic virtue."[29] Something has gone awry in the case of these two noblemen. Lysimachus and Melesias come from aristocratic backgrounds, yet their accomplishments "seem less than nothing" when compared to their respective fathers' "aristocratic virtue." That the *Laches* includes these particular characters invites a critique of the traditional views about fathers, sons and inheritance. That is, if the aristocratic theory were correct, then surely Lysimachus and Melesias would not be the mediocre men they are. Instead, their *aretē* (and by extension their masculinity) would resemble that of their fathers.

A closer reading of *Laches* 179c is similarly suggestive of the idea that Plato uses the opening speech to critique traditional ideas about how fatherhood serves as a vehicle for transmitting *aretē*. Lysimachus' mention of Aristides and Thucydides' "fine deeds" in both war and peace underscored their position among the noble elite. Yet, these καλὰ ἔργα are quickly juxtaposed with Lysimachus and Melesias' lack of success. In stressing the starkness of this

[29] Schmid 1992, 102.

contrast, Plato encourages the reader to rethink the validity of the notion that virtue is passed down through aristocratic bloodlines. The primary indication of this point is that Lysimachus and Melesias, as well as both of their fathers, are undoubtedly members of the aristocracy. As such, they are located among those who would subscribe to the traditional view that excellence moves through bloodlines. The juxtaposition between the fathers and sons thus takes on an ironic dimension; in the traditional view, Lysimachus and Melesias are precisely the sort of men who should expect to inherit their fathers' *aretē*. The fact that they have, in Schmid's formulation, "less than nothing" to show for themselves thus amplifies the absurdity of the aristocracy's claim. In underscoring the discrepancy between the achievements of the fathers and sons, Plato encourages a critical approach to the notion that virtue is inherently passed down to subsequent generations. The status or success of a father is, in the *Laches'* view, no guarantee that his son will reach similar heights.

Even before the contrasts suggested at 179c, Plato encourages us to re-examine the traditional Athenian view of fathers and inheritance through the language of Lysimachus' first demand at 179b:

> εἰδότες οὖν καὶ ὑμῖν ὑεῖς ὄντας ἠγησάμεθα μεμεληκέναι περὶ αὐτῶν, εἴπερ τισὶν ἄλλοις, πῶς ἂν θεραπευθέντες γένοιντο ἄριστοι: εἰ δ' ἄρα πολλάκις μὴ προσεσχήκατε τὸν νοῦν τῷ τοιούτῳ, ὑπομνήσοντες ὅτι οὐ χρὴ αὐτοῦ ἀμελεῖν.
>
> Therefore knowing that you also have sons, we deemed that it is a concern to you regarding these matters (to you if anyone), the matters concerning how the sons are to be attended to if they would become the best sort of men: and if, perchance, you have not

> payed attention to such a matter, we would remind you that it is necessary that you not be neglectful of this (179b).

As outlined above, the fact that Melesias and Lysimachus did not inherit Aristides and Thucydides' degree of success raises questions about the traditional Athenian view about the outcomes of the father-son relationship. In the first part of this excerpt, Lysimachus reasons that Nicias and Laches would be appropriate interlocutors because they have sons of their own. He suggests that they would be the most likely people to care that their sons' are attended to (*therapeuthentes*) because, as fathers, it is "necessary that [Laches and Nicias] not be neglectful of this" (ὅτι οὐ χρὴ αὐτοῦ ἀμελεῖν), in fulfillment of their duty. In the prescriptive rhetoric imposed by the words "necessary" (*chrē*) and "not neglectful" (*amelein*), Plato positions Lysimachus as a quintessential advocate of the traditional view of a father. *Therapeuthentes*, insofar as it locates the sons as being served or attended to (*therapeuō*), likewise portrays Lysimachus as upholding the belief that it is the father's task to instill virtue in his son. Speaking about it as a "duty" that is "necessarily" done, Lysimachus' speech reinforces the social norms governing how proper Athenian fathers should educate their sons. It is because tradition demands that a father tend to his sons' *aretē* that it becomes "necessary" for Nicias and Laches to participate in the fulfillment of this task.

While language like *therapeuthentes* and *chrē* suggests that Lysimachus adheres to the traditional understanding of a father's role, the purpose of the plea here is opposed to that understanding. For instance, he asserts that Nicas and Laches have an obligation to educate their sons because, as proper Athenian fathers, it is their duty. Rather than serving as a condemnation

of the generals, this language emphasizes the irony of the positionality he and Melesias occupy themselves. If proper fathers are really supposed to be responsible for their sons' training, then why should Lysimachus and Melesias need to enlist the help of Nicias and Laches at all? This is further complicated if we return to Crystal's assertion that the ability to perform great deeds is largely passed on through bloodlines. If Lysimachus and Melesias truly subscribed to this notion, then there would be no need to recruit Nicias and Laches. Outside the bloodline, Nicias and Laches would, at best, be a weaker influence in this regard than the boys' actual fathers. *Chrē* and *amelein* thus takes on a new, almost comical meaning only augmented by Lysimachus' ostensible self-assurance. He appropriates the language of an authority on child-rearing, but the complete inability to match the standards he espouses renders the entire section ridiculous. What initially presents as wisdom consequently reads as foolish dogmatism and as painful lack of self-awareness.

As Lysimachus' rhetoric indicates, the *Laches* is critical of the traditional notion that *aretē* (and by extension masculinity) is inherently passed from aristocratic fathers to sons. Given the connection in Plato's dialogue between *aretē* and the Homeric *anēr,* the heritability of virtue also has implications for his notion of masculinity. While the *Laches* is not entirely explicit in its exploration of masculinity, the construction and transferral of masculinity is an area of central importance for contemporary scholars, especially those working in men's studies. Considering the importance of gender in the *Laches*, and the pivotal advances made by gender theorists in the last fifty years, applying contemporary theories to Plato's text enables the modern reader to

reinterpret Plato's politics of masculinity. More specifically, new contemporary models give us a new vocabulary for talking about the critique of traditional Athenian fatherhood that Plato issues.

B. Contemporary Theory and The *Laches*

In the 1980s and 1990s, late capitalist societies experienced significant growth in general interest in and scholarly research into men and masculinities. Universities across the United States began to dedicate specific attention to "Men's Studies" and, in the 90's alone, over 500 hundred books were published on the topic.[30] These trends have continued into the 21st century, as acclaimed works like the revised edition of R.W Connell's seminal *Masculinities* (2005) and Stephen M. Whitehead's *Men and Masculinities* (2002) illustrate. Motivated by the feminist critiques of gender inequalities during the mid-20th century and the disintegration of the traditional male role as "breadwinner," the fundamental aims of such studies include attempts to define what masculinity is, who can partake in it, and whether it is characterized by fixed traits. Operating within these bounds, there are several areas of inquiry with contemporary masculinity studies that create a useful interpretive framework for the analysis of masculinity and fatherhood in the *Laches*.

In his seminal 2000 work, *The End of Manhood*, John Stoltenberg analyzes a host of familial relationships in order to better understand how masculinity is formed and transferred. In this way, he seeks to understand how the family can support a generation of profeminist men who reject the "sexual objectification of women and the control of women's bodies."[31] As part of

[30] Whitehead 2001, 1.
[31] Ashe 2007, 98.

this goal, Stoltenberg dedicates extensive energy to understanding and critiquing the father-son relationship. His argument includes the notion that false ideas about traditional masculinity can be passed down via the latent insecurities involved in traditional fathering. A father may "feel ashamed" of his son, for instance, if he is not "courageous or well-muscled and coordinated enough."[32] This sense of shame is subsequently internalized when the father lets him know that he was "less than nobody to him unless [he] had [his] manhood mask in place."[33]

According to Stoltenberg's analysis, the feelings of shame that the traditional father feels can thus manifest as both a coercive technique and a subliminal acknowledgement of masculinity's transience. Through the act of shaming, the father seeks to instill feelings of guilt in the son. If only he acted differently—if only he wore his mask—he would not bring shame upon his father. In this sense, shame implies the existence of an alternative, positive reward. If some behaviors or qualities are met with shame, then there are likely others that will elicit pride. The son is thus compelled to behave in a manner that satisfies the traditional father's internalized masculine archetype; he is coerced into performing certain behaviors. This guilt, as well as the initial act of shaming, assume that the son *could* have acted differently. Their coercive nature thus also functions as a subliminal acknowledgement of the fact that no matter how hard the father tries, he cannot ensure that the son will perform the "proper" masculinity.

In the *Laches*, Lysimachus' paternal shame is visible in his fear that the sons will "become inglorious" (ἀκλεεῖς γενήσονται, 179d) if they are not properly reared in *aretē* and, more

[32] Stoltenberg 2000, 65.
[33] Ibid., 64.

specifically, *andreia*.[34] Using these shared sensations of shame as an inroad, we might begin to map the model of the mask onto Lysimachus' speech. As I've argued, the traditional father's shame when the son does not wear the mask serves as an implicit acknowledgement that his behavior could have been something else. The very sensation of shame, in other words, is a subliminal acknowledgement of the fact that the masculinity he expects is one option among alternatives. Reading Lysimachus' shame together with Stoltenberg's mask thus provides another example of the contradictory nature of Lysimachus' positionality. Portrayed as an adherent to the traditional Athenian epistemology around *aretē*, we expect Lysimachus to believe that his son will inherit his *aretē*. Since Lysimachus has no clear virtues to speak of, one might think he'd only be able to impart mediocrity upon his son. However, the fact that he wants to prevent Aristides from becoming inglorious (and thereby avoid shame) suggests an implicit acknowledgement that his son's *aretē*, and thus his masculinity, is malleable. That is, in this preventative rhetoric, there is a recognition that Aristides' manhood is not solely determined by Lysimachus' own *aretē*. A Stoltenbergian lens thus enables a reimagination of what initially served as an ironic dig at traditional Athenian epistemology. Masks are not an unchangeable phenomena—they can be redesigned and reimagined. By emphasizing the connection between shame and mutability, the mask illuminates the broader ramifications in Socrates' suggestion that the formation of *aretē* is not confined to the traditional father-son relationship. Reading the mask onto Lysimachus' shame thus suggests the possibility of imagining a masculinity that is outside the parameters established by our dads; the audience is invited to consider new sources of (as

[34] I mention *andreia* only in passing because the level of abstraction at which the Lysimachus operates here is more befitting of *aretē*. While *andreia* is implied in the context of the hoplite performance and character of the interlocutors, the connection between *aretē* and the Homeric *anēr* sufficiently invokes masculinity. The identification of *andreia* as the virtue in question will be addressed in more depth in the subsequent chapter.

well as new ways of performing) manhood. If *aretē* and masculinity can exist outside the traditional father-son relationship, then perhaps there are novel, more nuanced and healthier masks to assume. While Socrates does not engage with this possibility, a Stoltenbergian masked reading of Lysimachus' shame here at least opens the line of inquiry.

Masking, however, does not merely connote the existence of alternative visages. Rather, the language of masking gestures toward the possibility of actively *accessing* different modes of being. A mask is not only a refashionable item—it is something which the wearer must specifically choose to put on. Through this element of choice, the mask becomes a symbol of autonomy. As such, Stoltenberg's model not only challenges the notion that masculinity is inherited from the father, but implies the son's agency in choosing how to perform masculinity. Existing only as a set of behaviors rather than a part of identity, masculinity cannot be passed on without the consent of the performer/recipient. While the father can model the mask (as the traditional father does), there is no foolproof method of ensuring that the son will wear the same mask.

Along these lines, the model of the mask can also be used to read Lysimachus' speech as acknowledging Aristides' autonomy. In contemplating whether or not Aristides and Thucydides "would become worthy of the name which they bear" (ἂν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἄξιοι γένοιντο ἃ ἔχουσιν, 179d), the speech points to a phenomenon implied by Stoltenberg's masks: sons' have agency in deciding precisely how they decide to perform their manhood. In giving Aristides a similar degree of agency, Lysimachus can be interpreted as recognizing the notion that *aretē* is something that sons have the capacity to decide their participation in. The speech's

use of the potential optative (ἂν…γένοιντο) and *aksioi* emphasize this point—the fact that the sons have the option of being *unworthy* underscores the fact that they have some role in determining their arete. Since the connections between *aretē* and the proper Homeric *anēr* imply masculinity, the reader once more has to reckon with how this agency impacts notions of manhood. If masculinity is a particular mode of being that is chosen (as a Stoltenberg-inspired reading of Lysimachus' speech suggests), then Plato can be understood as opening the possibility that masculinity is not something that men participate in uniformly. Instead, if the mask connotes *choice*, then perhaps there are other *choices*–other ways of having *aretē* not limited by the Homeric conventions. By implying the existence of such choices, the mask allows for an interpretation of Lysimachus' speech that is radical in the context of both Athenian epistemology and contemporary theory. Specifically, if the way that Aristides decides to perform masculinity is ultimately his choice (not his father's), then is it possible that whatever mode of being he chooses is just as valid as traditional *aretē*? More broadly put, if the way in which we enact gender is always a mask, why should we assign hegemonic status to the traditional mode? One might then begin to question the authority not only of traditional *aretē*, but of the standard conventions enveloping masculinity today. Stoltenberg thus enables us to re-read the *Laches* as anticipating the question of whether any particular mask of masculinity is more "correct" than the alternative.

By interrogating this notion of correctness, we encounter a primary motivation behind Stoltenberg's mask—to expose any notion of masculinity as "real" or "objective" as a facade. On a very fundamental level, the mask symbolizes an attempt to give the impression that a phenomenon is other than what it appears to be—it functions as a potent symbol of falsity or

deception. Similarly, masculinity is a mask for Stoltenberg insofar as it endeavors to give an objective gleam to something that is essentially myth. In the absence of some metaphysical "Truth" about gender performance, it tries to magically unify a particular set of behaviors. What makes the metaphor of the mask particularly poignant is that, like a mask, there is a potentially nefarious quality to the lie told by masculinity. Much like the mask wearer, the performer of traditional masculinity is participating in an act of deception. For Stoltenberg, realizing that masculinity is a nefarious fraud facilitates the possibility of a revolutionary development: the end of the myth of unequivocal masculinity. By reflecting on personal behaviors and teaching their sons to adopt new masks, the hope is that fathers will permit "new subjectivities[to] emerge…from an ethics of justice that involves recognizing the rights of others to personhood, equal treatment and liberty from the oppressive effects of masculinity."[35]

As the discussion of Lysimachus' shame and Aristides' autonomy suggested, the mask can be fruitfully mapped onto the *Laches'* portrayal of the father-son relationship. In Stoltenberg's contention that the mask of masculinity functions as a deceitful myth, our reading of *aretē* in Lysimachus' speech takes on a new valence. More specifically, if Plato is pointing toward the idea that *aretē* is malleable in the way that a mask is, then we are invited to contemplate whether traditional *aretē* is the same sort of deceitful myth described by Stoltenberg. The move to interrogate *aretē* has profound consequences for our conception of masculinity. Once we begin to associate deceitfulness with traditional *aretē*, then the Homeric *anēr* and the traditional Greek notions of masculinity in which it has its roots are similarly implicated. Recall

[35] Ashe 2007, 100.

virtuous qualities like the "swiftness of foot" and "military prowess" mentioned by Finkelberg. If these traits are constitutive of traditional *aretē*, and *aretē* is inextricable from Greek masculinity, then it becomes possible to read these qualities as belonging to a deceitful picture of what it means to be a man. Since the mask encourages us to question whether "swiftness of foot" and "military prowess" are similarly deceptive, we are justified in asking whether these behaviors should even be associated with manhood. The metaphor of the mask thus facilitates the contemplation of a masculinity that transcends bodily strength and battle acumen. A full investigation into the consequences of this observation is beyond the scope here; the subsequent chapter deals explicitly with articulating a masculinity that is not confined to physical aptitude or arenas of violence. Rather, my intention here is to suggest that reading *aretē* as a deceptive mask allows us to anticipate discussions in which conventional ways of performing manhood are put to question.

I want to emphasize that this analysis of the relationship between Lysimachus and Aristides is not meant to suggest that the *Laches* (or any of Plato's dialogues) foreshadows the "profeminist man" or the "end of masculinity" envisioned by Stoltenberg. Instead, Stoltenberg's mask allows us to reconsider how Lysimachus' opening speech, particularly his rhetoric surrounding *aretē* and the education of sons, can be read in conjunction with contemporary theories of masculinity. While the *Laches* does not lead to the conclusions Stoltenberg reaches, it can be read as anticipating the sort of discussions he pursues. The present chapter explored *aretē* and masculinity through their relevance to the father-son relationship. In doing so, I elided a long-form consideration of the part of virtue that the interlocutors spend the second half of the

dialogue attempting to define—*andreia*. While I have suggested that masculinity is tied up in the *Laches'* discussion of *arete*, Socrates' move to prioritize the identification of *andreia* (or manly-courage) at 190d brings masculinity front and center. With this in mind, Chapter 2 primarily addresses how Laches' first definition of *andreia* (coupled with Socrates' subsequent rebuttal) reveals what Plato thought about the traditional view of masculinity. I also explore the ways in which theorist Stephen Whitehead's recent definition of toxic masculinity can be read onto the dialogue, and enable us to reread the ways in which toxicity functions in both Laches' definition and Socrates' rebuke.

Chapter 2: Analyzing Andreia

In Chapter 1 I suggested that the *Laches* can be read as anticipating contemporary discussions about how masculinity is a constructed rather than inherited phenomenon. Beyond these conclusions, however, questions remain as to how the dialogue defines masculinity itself. In the second half of the *Laches*, the object of discussion shifts from a more abstract discussion regarding the education of young men to a targeted interrogation of *andreia*. To further decipher how the *andreia* discussed in the *Laches* connects to contemporary models of masculinity, I turn my attention to the interlocutor's attempts to define the most gendered of the cardinal virtues. In the following section, I argue that Laches' first response and Socrates' subsequent rebuttal provide a particularly powerful rejection of traditional Athenian masculinity. When coupled with a recent definition of toxic masculinity, the interaction between Laches and Socrates allows us to read the *Laches* as anticipating contemporary discussions regarding toxic and collapsed models of masculinity.

The transition to the debate about *andreia* occurs around 189d5, when Socrates notes that in order to properly advise Lysimachus and Melesias, the interlocutors must have a demonstrable familiarity with the topic of discussion. He acknowledges that *aretē* is the first thing with which the other characters must be familiar, as *aretē* is what the aristocratic fathers seek to instill in their sons. However, before consulting Laches and Nicias, Socrates rejects the plausibility of defining *aretē* on the grounds that it would be too large a task (190c). In turn, the characters agree to limit their inquiry to a specific part of virtue—*andreia*.

The titular character is the first to take up the task. A brief glance at Laches' position in the dialogue helps to contextualize the importance of his response. Unlike Nicias, Laches came from a family of modest means—he was a hardworking man who primarily made a name for

himself through repeated demonstrations of bravery on the battlefield. As Schmid notes, Laches received special praise for his participation in the Athenian defeat at Delium (in which he fought alongside Socrates). Despite his achievements, Laches' intellectual acuity is clearly juxtaposed with that of both Nicias and Socrates. More at home among the "proud, loyal, straightforward men of action," Laches is all but "defenseless against the shyster lawyers and word warriors." [36] Generally portrayed as hopeless next to his rival Nicias, once Laches' assertions are repeatedly rebuffed he descends into "sputtering and angry silence."[37]

Other works from antiquity are similarly disparaging of Laches' intellectual capacity. In Aristophanes' *Wasps,* Laches appears "thinly disguised" as a dog named Labes[38] who is accused of "stealing some cheese and then not sharing it."[39] Labes is brought to trial by the accusers, but he is flustered by their sophistic flair and finds himself speechless. Bdelycleon (Labes' advocate) eventually steps in and successfully defends him, but Labes remains unable to rebuke the accusations by himself. Even this brief picture carries important connotations about the Athenians' perception of Laches—lacking intellectual self-sufficiency, he was not the type of man to go toe-to-toe with the "word-warriors." His weaknesses in the *Wasps* therefore reaffirms suspicions about his portrayal in Plato; if Laches is comically helpless in the face of a low-stakes accusation, then we must doubt that he (along with the traditional conception of *andreia* he represents) will withstand a Socratic dialectic.

Still, Laches seems confident in his conception of *andreia:*

οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐ χαλεπὸν εἰπεῖν: εἰ γάρ τις ἐθέλοι ἐν τῇ τάξει μένων ἀμύνεσθαι τοὺς πολεμίους καὶ μὴ φεύγοι, εὖ ἴσθι ὅτι ἀνδρεῖος ἂν εἴη.

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[36] Schmid 1992, 12.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Schmid (ibid.), points out the association between Labes and Laches is solidified in that they are from the same deme.
[39] Ibid.

> By God, Socrates, it is not difficult to say: for if anyone would be willing, remaining at the post, to ward off the enemy and not flee, you would know well that he would be a man of courage (190d).

Laches' definition here is unsurprising. Having centered his life around the pursuit of military glory, Laches would have been most familiar with an idea of manly-courage that tied into his experiences at war. The personal aspect of this definition is especially visible in the language of being "willing…to ward off the enemy" (ἐθέλοι… ἀμύνεσθαι τοὺς πολεμίους)—Laches exhibited such behavior throughout his career and would have taken pride in the idea that his actions fit the archetype of *andreia*. The character of Laches' contentions here is relevant because, as Schmid asserts, this first definition "represents nothing less than the basic, traditional Greek conception of patriotic or political courage."[40] Through this, Plato encourages an implicit connection between Laches' traits and traditional Athenian notions of courage. In turn, the philosophical validity of the traditional notions which he represents are similarly cast into doubt.

However, Socrates' rejection of the traditional *andreia* is made more explicit in his response to Laches. While the general's definition is not completely discounted at this juncture, Socrates argues that, as it stands, it is far too narrow. If Laches' definition *were* sufficient, Socrates asks, then how are we to account for the man who "fights with the enemy while fleeing and not remaining?" (φεύγων μάχηται τοῖς πολεμίοις ἀλλὰ μὴ μένων; 191a). Socrates' language here already gestures that he is preparing to reshape *andreia*. The most clear indication of this is the replacement of "to ward off" (*amunesthai*) with "fighting" (*machētai*). In doing so, he completely reframes the argument; what about the *andreia* shown through offensive action rather than defensive endurance? In a similar vein, by flipping how the *andreios* interacts with *pheugōn*

[40] Schmid 1992, 101.

and *menōn*, he undermines Laches' definition and invites us to wonder whether a man can both flee from his post and demonstrate *andreia.* Is such a man not *manly*? In elaborating on this preliminary critique, Socrates raises three examples meant to illustrate that manly-courage is present even in those who are fighting while fleeing.

The first of these is the Scythian horsemen, who partake in *andreia* although they "are said to fight just as much fleeing as pursuing" (λέγονται οὐχ ἧττον φεύγοντες ἢ διώκοντες μάχεσθαι,191a). In this example, Socrates emphasizes that *andreia* is visible in dynamic as well as static warfare—the fact that they are *pheugontes* illustrates that it is not a prerequisite of *andreia* to remain at your post while fighting. However, the invocation of the Scythians in this particular context is worthy of attention. In Herodotus, the Scythians function as the archetypal example of bravery and daring.[41] Although they were a nomadic people whose military tact hinged on mobile warfare, they nonetheless exhibited an element of boldness which, "as the dialogue will make abundantly clear, [is] an essential aspect of war courage."[42] If the Scythians have this essential element of boldness, but they do not stay in place and endure attack, what are we to make of their *andreia*? Socrates thus invites the reader to wrestle with an important tension: how are we to reconcile the *andreia* of enduring an attack while "holding one'(s) ground" and the *andreia* of daring to continue fighting while fleeing and retreating?

Socrates' second example concerns Homer's *Iliad*, specifically Aeneas and the horses about whom Homer "says they knew how to pursue and flee quickly this way and that" (κραιπνὰ μάλ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα ἔφη αὐτοὺς ἐπίστασθαι διώκειν ἠδὲ φέβεσθαι, 191b). While the Scythians presented a tension between the "enduring defense" (μένων ἀμύνεσθαι) and "daring attack" (διώκοντες μάχεσθαι) aspects of manly-courage, this example introduces another

[41] Schmid 1992, 103.
[42] Ibid.

contradictory dichotomy within the specter of *andreia*—the juxtaposition between obedience and self-assertion. In mentioning both Aeneas and his horses, "the example presents us with the idea of two different kinds of courage, the obedient kind possessed by the horses and the commanding kind possessed by the charioteer."[43] Similarly to the first example, Socrates' move here underscores the narrowness of Laches' first definition as the primary culprit in its insufficiency. If we define *andreia* as the willingness to stay at the post and follow orders in the same way a horse obeys his charioteer, we neglect the *andreia* of the master who orders their movements. By the same token, if we only discuss Aeneas' commanding *andreia* we neglect the steadfast obedience aspect of *andreia* represented by his horses. A successful account of manly-courage, for Socrates, must not fail to account for these complex and even seemingly contradictory elements. Once more the reader is asked to reconcile two elements of *andreia* that seem in conflict—an *andreia* characterized by leadership and *andreia* based on deference to authority.

At this stage Laches briefly intervenes in order to draw a distinction between the *andreia* of the cavalry and the *andreia* of the hoplite soldiery. He concedes that the examples of the Scythians and Aeneas are an accurate portrayal of *andreia* in the former mode of warfare, but he maintains that it is the hoplites who stand firm and thus "fight in the manner I describe" (μάχεται… ὡς ἐγὼ λέγω, 190c). In response, Socrates introduces the third and final example used to refute the definition given at 190d—the Spartan hoplites at Plataea. While fighting Mardonius and the Persians at Plataea, the Spartan hoplites, on Plato's account, "were not willing to remain and fight against them, but fled" (οὐκ ἐθέλειν μένοντας πρὸς αὐτοὺς μάχεσθαι, ἀλλὰ φεύγειν, 191c).It was only when the Persian ranks had been broken that the Spartans "turned and fought" (ἀναστρεφομένους…μάχεσθαι, 191c) and "in this way won that battle"(καὶ οὕτω νικῆσαι τὴν ἐκεῖ μάχην, 191c). Here, the inconsistency between Plato and Herodotus' account of

[43] Schmid 1992, 103.

the battle provides some insight into what Socrates' objection is trying to get across. Whereas Plato neglects to mention any cause for the Persians' collapse, *The Histories* suggests that, following Pausanias' prayer, there was some divine intervention that shifted the luck in favor of the Spartans (Her. *Histories*. 9.63). By leaving out this detail, Plato emphasizes the agency of Spartans (as opposed to the gods) in defeating the Persians. Furthermore, in stressing that the Spartans waited until "when the Persian ranks had been broken" (ἐπειδὴ δ' ἐλύθησαναί τάξεις τῶν Περσῶν, 191c), Socrates suggests that the Hoplite victory was the outcome of a collective intelligence rather than Pausanias' piety— the Spartans analyzed the correct moment for attack and then took advantage. By emphasizing the cunning element of the Spartans' behavior, Socrates points to a crucial failure in Laches' account: the general does not address how calculated, deliberate action influences *andreia*. While Laches' simple definition suggests that recklessness and daring are enough to constitute *andreia*, the hoplite example illustrates Socrates' skepticism. Boldness is not sufficient—there must be some crafty, intellectual element to manly-courage.

In the three refutations to the definition Laches offers at 190d, Socrates' response takes aim at both the general himself and the traditional Athenian notions about manly-courage at large. By invoking the Scythians and Aeneas, Socrates implies that Laches' definition is plagued by insufficiencies. Through the Scythians, Socrates demonstrates that the ethic of stoic endurance in Laches' first definition fails to account for *andreia* that is demonstrated by those who flee. Similarly, in suggesting that both Aeneas and his horses partake in *andreia*, Socrates reminds the reader that Laches' definition does not consider the fact that *andreia* contains components of both leadership and obedience.

Since Laches' attempt here is representative of traditional Athenian views on courage, we should also be reading Socrates' refutations as a critique of the traditional Athenian epistemology on *andreia*. The specific imagery evoked by Aeneas and the Scythians only bolsters this suspicion. Symbolic of traditional ideas about honor and virtue, Aeneas and the Scythians are precisely the sort of examples that Laches himself might have deployed as examples. Instead, Socrates' usage ironically underscores the problematic tensions within the traditional framework. If the Scythians and Aeneas are archetypes of traditional courage, the fact that they can be juxtaposed with Laches' definition at 190 illuminates the contradictions within (and ultimate insufficiency of) conventional thought about *andreia*.

The example of the Spartan hoplites has a similar function—while Socrates ostensibly uses it to refute Laches, it also encourages deeper skepticism about the value of the traditional conception of courage. Often contrasted with the cultured Athenian, the Spartan archetype is that of the laconic but bold warrior. Perhaps even more so than the Scythians or Aeneas then, the hoplite is the ideal symbol of "real courage and manliness;"[44] fleeing from battle would not be associated with a proper hoplite warrior. Nevertheless, the Spartans of the *Laches* initially flee and then win the battle by carefully deliberating when to strike. The ironic function of the Spartans here thus underscores another deficiency of the traditional view—the connection between knowledge and *andreia*. The fact that the hoplite more readily evokes an image of brawn rather than brains further strengthens Socrates' critique—even the Spartans, the symbols of traditional manliness, fled from battle and then devised a scheme to win. If even they conduct themselves in this manner and are located among the most *andreioi* of men, then traditional *andreia* once more proves to be insufficient.

[44] Schmid 1992, 104.

Whitehead's Toxic Masculinity

In challenging Laches, the Athenian gadfly confronts not only his interlocutor's definition, but also the traditional Athenian notions of *andreia* more generally. Laches' definition is particularly interesting for the modern reader because it contains several key features that map onto recent critiques of masculinity. Toxic masculinity is one such discussion that has gained significant cultural currency in the past several years. While the use of toxic masculinity as an analytical framework has been criticized for reinforcing outmoded gender binaries and deflecting the agency from men, the term has had an undeniable influence on how modern masculinity is thought about in both cultural and academic settings. With this in mind, I am interested in the way that toxic masculinity becomes a productive lens through which we come to a new understanding of Plato's *Laches.* In particular, we will see that Laches' definitions at 190 resemble many of the harmful archetypes present in toxic masculinity. In examining the connection between *andreia* and toxic masculinity, the primary contemporary definition of toxic masculinity I consult comes from Stephen Whitehead's recent monograph, *Toxic Masculinity: Curing the Virus: Making Men Smarter, Healthier, and Safer*.[45] I argue that Whitehead's book is of further use in that one of the alternatives to toxic masculinity he outlines– "collapsed masculinity"– can be understood to be anticipated by Socrates' rebuttals at 191.

The definition of toxic masculinity that Whitehead offers, and which serves as the primary frame of reference for my analysis of the Laches, is worthy of full citation here:

[45] Whitehead 2021.

> "[toxic masculinity] is based on characteristics such a competition, ambition, self-reliance, and physical strength…The image of masculinity that is perpetrated [by hegemonic masculinity[46]] involves physical toughness and the endurance of hardships."[47]

Several of these traits will be examined at length, but perhaps the most immediate consequence of Whitehead's definition is that toxic masculinity is based on physical strength and is an essentially competitive performance. Importantly, *Curing the Virus* does not contend that strength or competition are inherently malignant. Instead, it argues that when men use strength and competition as a source of power–when they formulate their sense of masculinity on these traits, they become toxic.[48]

Whitehead frames violent conflict, a nexus between the assertion of physical strength and competition, as a quintessentially toxic phenomenon. Maintaining that the issue of violent combat has been largely overlooked, he argues that "throughout history…few people have identified war as a particular problem of men."[49] In mentioning war, Whitehead highlights the battlefield (along with other sites of aggressive conflict) as being especially important to the exhibition of toxic masculinity. Considering its inextricable connection to violence as *the* means of demonstrating physical strength, the battlefield's link to toxicity is clear. If toxic masculinity is connected to violent articulations of physical strength as a means of gaining power, then as a prime locus of violence, the battlefield becomes the archetypal arena for performing toxic masculinity.

Whitehead's identification of the battlefield enables the reader to recognize the toxic undertones in Laches' definition at 190e. A consideration of the Greek makes this especially

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[46] Whitehead uses toxic masculinity and hegemonic masculinity interchangeably: "Toxic masculinity is, in effect, the mainstream term for hegemonic masculinity" (2021, 30).
[47] Ibid., 15.
[48] Ibid., 16.
[49] Whitehead 2021, 29.

clear: in describing how someone who posses *andreia* would act, Laches suggests that such a man would remain "ἐν τῇ τάξει" (190d). While I've translated this phrase (following W.R.M Lamb)[50] as "at the post," the Greek word *taksei* explicitly connotes a military context; Thucydides and Herodotus both routinely use it in their descriptions of armies to describe the arrangement of battle and the line of soldiers.[51] To disrupt the *taksis*–in this case to flee from one's post–was akin to breaking from battle formation. In this imagery of battle arrangement and soldierly ranks, the battlefield emerges as the specific theater to which Laches' first definition applies; it is not just any post, but one's post in battle to which the general is referring.

However, Laches' move to locate *andreia* on the battlefield is partially foreshadowed by Socrates' assertion that the interlocutors should begin with the part of *aretē* "which fighting in armor is supposed to support; and would seem to many to be *andreia"* (ὃ τείνειν δοκεῖ ἡ ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις μάθησις; δοκεῖ δέ που τοῖς πολλοῖς εἰς ἀνδρείαν,190d). It is important that, although Socrates mentions fighting in armor (ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις μάθησις), we avoid thinking that he wants to confine discussion of *andreia* to the battlefield. The repeated use of δοκεῖ coupled with the mention of the opinion of the many (τοῖς πολλοῖς) about manly-courage suggest, instead, that Socrates himself does not subscribe to such a view. Of course, Socrates actually reveals himself to be opposed to this when, at 191d, he broadens the conversation to include expressions of *andreia* that transcend the context of war. With this in mind, Socrates' speech at 190d reads as an arrogant assumption about how Laches will define *andreia*; he knows Laches is a man of war and not particularly sophisticated, so Socrates expects that the definition the general supplies will fit within the conventional logic of war. While the Athenian gadfly thus foreshadows Laches' mention of the *taksis*, he by no means mandates it.

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[50] Translation from W.R.M Lamb 1924.

[51] LSJ s.v. τάξις, citing Herodotus. 8.86, Thucydides 5.68.

Curing the Virus' link between the battlefield and toxic masculinity takes on a new valence in the context of the *Laches*. That is, Whitehead's model enables us to recognize Laches' project as confining articulations of *andreia* to a particularly toxic location–the fields of war. Moreover, if remaining "ἐν τῇ τάξει" is a defining characteristic of *andreia*, then Laches' account further suggests that being *andreios* (a man of courage) is contingent upon participating in a toxic archetype. Whitehead thus enables us to recognize that Laches' definition—ostensibly an attempt to pinpoint manly-courage—might also be read as a description of toxic masculinity.

The discourse of war invokes another part of Whitehead's definition of toxic masculinity: a stoic "endurance of hardships." If, as *Curing the Virus* implies, endurance is one of the key aspects of how we're construing toxic masculinity, then we need to appreciate what it connotes. Read in the context of competition, the notion of endurance implies a categorical refusal to accept loss. The bond between endurance and toxic masculinity means that the man who performs toxic masculinity perseveres through whatever the opponent offers without acquiescing. Furthermore, in a subsequent reference to toxic endurance, Whitehead describes it as an "endurance in the face of death and torment."[52] The idea that it takes place "in the face" of hardships, in suggesting the subject's knowledge of what he is encountering, underscores the fatalist aspect to toxic endurance. It is thus a uniquely self-aware, fatalistic persistence that distinguishes toxic endurance—if endurance arises when we know that we are "in the face of death and torment," then its deployment suggests that the toxic man voluntarily *prolongs* hardship to affirm his masculinity.

The voluntary endurance of hardship described by Whitehead serves as another point of connection between Toxic Masculinity and Laches' first definition. Let us return to Laches' original suggestion:

[52] Whitehead 2021, 122.

εἰ γάρ τις ἐθέλοι ἐν τῇ τάξει μένων ἀμύνεσθαι τοὺς πολεμίους καὶ μὴ φεύγοι, εὖ ἴσθι ὅτι ἀνδρεῖος ἂν εἴη.

If anyone would be willing, remaining at the post, to ward off the enemy and not flee, you would know well that he would be a man of courage (190d).

While several elements of this account imply the endurance aspect of toxic masculinity, perhaps the most immediate is Laches' syntax. In his use of the future-less-vivid construction (εἰ + ἐθέλοι and ἂν+εἴη), this definition sets forth a condition the fulfillment of which is not guaranteed."[53] Laches thus emphasizes that it is only *if* the man is willing to stay at his post that he will possess *andreia*. In underscoring the fact that a man *must* be willing to remain at the post if he wants to be *andreios*, the definition invokes notions of contingency and agency that are crucial to the concept of enduring hardships. The logic of endurance confirms this—one only endures something *if*, on some level, they make the decision to do so.

The choice of the verb *etheloi* is even more revelatory. Of particular interest is that the dialogue opts for *ethelō* over *boulomai* despite the fact that the two words are remarkably similar in meaning (both can translated as "to be willing.") *boulomai*, however, is distinct from *ethelō* in that it implies that the subject *wants* to perform the action—there is a sense of desire connoted by *boulomai* absent from the acquiescence of *ethelō*.[54] Laches' choice of *etheloi* consequently suggests that the *andreios* is not necessarily pleased to remain at the post, but he nonetheless accepts his duty to do so. In the juxtaposition between willingness (*etheloi*) and wanting (*boulomai*), the dialogue invokes another element of endurance related to previously mentioned theme of agency: consent. The discourse of endurance is one of toleration, of *consenting* to bear

[53] Smyth 1956, 523.
[54] LSJ s.v. ἐθέλω.

unfavorable circumstances. Outside the realm of preference and aspiration, endurance is a willingness (not a wanting) to suffer.

Endurance is thus not some inconsequential feature, but a necessary element of possessing *andreia*. A man's capacity to become *andreios* is predicated on the fulfillment of the conditional–he *must* be willing to endure at the post. By linking *andreia* and endurance in this way, Laches anticipates *Curing The Virus'*s claim that toxic masculinity is reliant upon "the endurance of hardships."[55] Similarly to the way that the word *taksis* allowed us to locate the battlefield as a commonality between Laches' view of *andreia* and toxic masculinity, the theme of endurance in 190e becomes another way of mapping a toxic archetype on Laches' definition. As such, what initially reads as an attempt to describe *andreia* can once more be read as an effort to define manly-courage and masculinity on the basis of toxic behavior.

Tied to the topic of enduring hardships, Whitehead's definition also includes the idea that the man who performs toxic masculinity must demonstrate "self-reliance." Evoking the image of a man who disavows assistance, Whitehead's mention of self-reliance in his definition of toxic masculinity allows the reader to make an additional inference: a man must not avoid difficulties, and when he happens to encounter them they should be faced alone. Much like the broader topic of endurance, the key point here is a fear of revealing weakness. The act of seeking assistance represents an acknowledgement of limits; we must have some confrontation with the borders of our capacity before asking for help. In denying this option, there is a denial of weakness—an implicit rejection of the fact that one is not omnipotent. If it is fair to draw an association between self-sufficiency and refusing to be vulnerable, then we must contend with the fact that this is tied up in the toxic self-reliance referenced by Whitehead.

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[55] Whitehead 2021, 30.

This unwavering self-reliance coupled with the refusal to be vulnerable is similarly present in the definition at 190e. The most explicit indication of this is Laches' inclusion of the phrase "καὶ μὴ φεύγοι" (and not flee) in the second half of the protasis. What complicates this remark is that the participle *menōn* (be remaining) already makes it clear that the man must be willing to stay put at the post if he wants to partake in *andreia*. Considering that Laches makes this stipulation, καὶ μὴ φεύγοι initially reads as a redundant insertion–of course the *andreios* cannot flee if he must be μένων at the post. However, in juxtaposing what Laches should do (ἐν τῇ τάξει μένων) and what he should not (*pheugoi*), this clause identifies fleeing as diametrically opposed to the sort of qualities that comprise *andreia*. Summoning themes of escape and the avoidance of consequences,[56] *pheugoi* evokes the same sense of cowardice rejected by the logic of self-reliance. That is, in emphasizing that the *andreios* does not flee, Laches' definition implies that such a man must not show the sort of weakness scorned by toxic masculinity. He must be able to demonstrate self-reliance in the sense that he will not shirk danger by sending for his comrades or leaving the battlefield. The specification that he who possess *andreia* must "μὴ φεύγοι" thus invokes the same pathos of self-reliance formulated in *Curing the Virus*. It is on account of this inclusion that it once more becomes possible to reread 190e as connecting *andreia* to toxic notions of what it means to perform masculinity.

If, as I've suggested, Laches' definition of *andreia* at 190d may be viewed as embodying the same traits Whitehead ascribes to toxic masculinity, then Socrates' rebuttals can also be read in a new light. In enumerating alternatives to toxic masculinity, Whitehead argues that the first step in creating healthier men is to move towards a collapsed masculinity:

> Collapsed Masculinity results from the inability or unwillingness of men to continue contributing to the myths which have historically sustained notions of traditional

[56] LSJ s.v. φεύγω posits this connotation, citing Homer. Il.11.327 and Demosthenes. 21.162.

> manliness. Collapsed masculinity infers an implosion, wherein the edifice of maleness and all supporting imagery is revealed to be an artifice; a linguistic trickery which has long influenced the behaviors of men but is subsequently recognized as being artificial and inauthentic.[57]

Collapsed masculinity, for Whitehead, refers to a process in which men begin to recognize traditional manliness as proliferating a falsely unified image of what it means to express masculinity. Once men acknowledge that this standard is constructed on toxic archetypes they empower themselves to disentangle themselves from this mythos–they are equipped to collapse their masculinity. The significance of this move resides in the space it unlocks for re-imagining what it means to express manhood; it is only when toxic masculinity has been identified and deconstructed that new masculinities might emerge. With this in mind, we can reread Socrates' rejection of Laches definition at 190e as a critique of toxic masculinity that, similar to Whitehead's "collapsed masculinity," opens the door for new modes of gender expression.

In the first objection, Socrates implies Laches' definition of *andreia* is insufficient in that it fails to account for the bold, daring *andreia* shown by the Scythians. While we've already seen how this critique amounts to a rejection of the traditional Athenian view on manliness, the link between Laches' definition and toxic behavior recasts Socrates' move as a refutation of toxic masculinity. While invoking the Scythians, Socrates implies that they were able to demonstrate *andreia* despite the fact that they were *pheugontes*. The use of the participle from *pheugō* is particularly noteworthy here because this verb (as the previous discussion of "καὶ μὴ φεύγοι" put forward) connotes a vulnerability antithetical to toxic masculinity's demand for endurance and self-reliance. Socrates' specific recycling of *pheugō* in the response therefore suggests that expressions of masculinity can manifest in the precise spaces that toxicity shuns. Like collapsed

[57] Whitehead 2021, 66.

masculinity's realization that traditional manliness is built on myth and artifice, the contrast drawn by the *pheugontes* Scythians suggests there is a superficiality to a toxic framework that seeks to neatly unify masculinity behind a particular set of behaviors. In this way, Socrates' response anticipates what collapsed masculinity locates as the first step in moving toward a healthier picture of masculinity. That is, in gesturing toward the superficiality of Laches' definition, Socrates invites an interrogation that "infers an implosion" of toxic masculinity and facilitates the reconsideration of manhood that collapsed masculinity prescribes.

Socrates' mention of Aeneas and the horses allows for a reading that similarly challenges a toxic account of masculinity. At 191b, Socrates quotes Homer's contention that Aeneas' horses "κραιπνὰ μάλ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα ἔφη αὐτοὺς ἐπίστασθαι διώκειν ἠδὲ φέβεσθαι" (knew how to pursue and flee quickly this way and that,191b). The mention of *epistasthai* and *phebesthai* in this Homeric allusion are particularly relevant to our discussion of toxic masculinity. *Epistasthai* ("to know") is the infinitive form of *epistamai*, from which *epistēmē* derives; important throughout the dialogues, *epistēmē* refers to phenomena that fall within the realm of science and true knowledge.[58] It connotes a degree of awareness and wisdom that runs contrary to the bold, almost foolish daring inherent to the toxic logic of self-reliance and obstinate endurance.

Alternatively, *phebesthai* (at least in the Homeric lexicon) generally hints at a flight prompted by fear.[59] It consequently does not refer to departure in the broad sense, but rather movements that manifest as reactions to perceived threats or a sense of vulnerability. *Phebesthai* therefore returns us to an acknowledgement of one's limitations– it is when the subject recognizes that he is not omnipotent that he flees in fright. Much like *epistasthai* then, the language of *phebesthai* falls outside the acceptable bounds of toxic masculinity. In eliciting

[58] As opposed to δόξα.
[59] LSJ s.v. φοβέομαι, citing Od.22.299, Il. 15.345.

notions of boundaries and weakness, *phebesthai* opposes the pathos of determined independence and perseverance outlined in Whitehead's definition of toxicity.

Considering the meanings associated with *phebesthai* and *epistasthai*, Socrates' use of these infinitives in connection with the *andreia* of Aeneas' horses serves to challenge a definition of masculinity built on toxic characteristics. Through their invocation of intelligent, calculated action (*epistasthai*) and vulnerability (*phebesthai*), these two terms are not reconcilable with toxic demands for endurance and self-reliance. Instead, these aspects of toxic masculinity imply a rugged stoicism that grants no space for prudence or a recognition of weakness. Socrates' assertion that Aeneas's horses partake in *andreia* (but are nonetheless associated with *phebesthai* and *epistasthai*) therefore enables the contemporary reader to appreciate how masculinity can exist outside the confines established by a toxic model. As was the case in the Scythian objection, this realization lays bare the fact that toxic masculinity is an artifice based on "linguistic trickery" and "supporting imagery." The seeds of Whitehead's collapsed masculinity now come into play once more. It is when men realize that they are sustaining a fiction that they can begin to dismantle its structure. In other words, the "inability or unwillingness of men to continue contributing to the myths [of masculinity]" can (and must) begin with an insight which Socrates provides the basis for–manliness cannot be defined by toxic behaviors.

Much like the first two objections, Socrates' reference to the hoplites at Plataea can also be read as both rebuking toxic masculinity and facilitating a dialogue that foreshadows Whitehead's model of collapsed masculinity. In this part of his response, Socrates reminds Laches that the Spartans:

> οὐκ ἐθέλειν μένοντας πρὸς αὐτοὺς μάχεσθαι, ἀλλὰ φεύγειν, ἐπειδὴ δ' ἐλύθησαν αἱ τάξεις τῶν Περσῶν, ἀναστρεφομένους ὥσπερ ἱππέας μάχεσθαι.

> did not wish to be remaining and to fight them [the Persians], but fled, and when the battle formation of the Persians broke, they rallied and fought just like the cavalry (191c).

A culmination of the previous arguments, the philosopher's rhetoric here combines elements from his mention of the Scythians and Aeneas. Through the re-use of *pheugō* in the phrase "but fled" (ἀλλὰ φεύγειν), Socrates returns us to the Scythians who likewise fought while fleeing (*pheugontes*). As the earlier analysis demonstrated, the connection between *andreia* and φεύγω presents a challenge to toxic masculinity insofar as the discourse of fleeing is contrary to the toxic demands for endurance and self-sufficiency. Moreover, the temporal conjunction *epeidē* and the subsequent clause emphasize the Spartans' strategic and tactical warfare; they were wise enough to wait until the Persian ranks had been broken (*eluthēsan*) before they made their move. Much like Aeneas's horses, the Spartans appear to have exhibited a collective *epistēmē* that facilitated their victory. Again, the hoplite example appears to stress a level of awareness and prudence that does not easily fit within the specter of toxic masculinity.

In using Socrates' reference to the Spartans at Plataea as a tool to rethink *andreia*, it becomes clear that the Spartans (like the Scythians and Aeneas's horses) offer a picture of masculinity that does not neatly fit within the bounds of toxic masculinity. That does not mean, however, that toxic masculinity is completely absent from the three rebuttals Socrates offers at 191. The very fact that Socrates uses three examples involving combat suggests that, in trying to meet Laches on his terms, he still operates in what I've described as a quintessential space for enacting toxicity—the battlefield. Nonetheless, the fact that Socrates' objections lend themselves to a reading of *andreia* that transcends *Curing The Virus*' account of toxic masculinity points to their versatility and their anticipation of Whitehead's collapsed masculinity.

Conclusion

In concluding this study, I want to briefly re-emphasize that it has not been the aim of this project to assert that the *Laches* argues that masculinity *is* a mask or that toxic masculinity *needs* to be disavowed in favor of a collapsed masculinity. To make that argument represents what, to my mind, is an inappropriate attempt to present Plato as an advocate for gender equality. Indeed, while some 20th century scholars, often underscoring the ostensible equality between male and female gaurdians in *The Republic*, have tried to reframe Plato as proto-feminist, there is very good reason to doubt the validity of such claims.[60] Instead, over the course of these chapters I have tried to demonstrate how modern thinking about masculinity can help us reread the *Laches* as anticipating the sort of questions and discussions that interest contemporary gender studies theorists. In approaching the dialogue in this way, I hope to have shown that discussion of *andreia* and the Socratic critique of traditional ways of defining manly-courage demonstrate the perennial complexity in debates over manliness. While the discourse surrounding the present day "crisis of masculinity" encourages the idea that masculinity is only now being reckoned with, the Socrates we encounter in the *Laches* disproves such notions. That is, in offering critiques but no definitive answers to the same questions scholars grapple with today, his rebuttals do not merely lend themselves to modern conversations. Instead, they urge us to recognize that masculinity has always been in crisis, and that the answer as to how we are to move forward remains—as it was then—unclear.

[60] See Saxonhouse 1976.

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