Anne-Thérèse de Lambert on Aging and Self-Esteem

ANDREAS BLANK

This article studies Madame de Lambert's early eighteenth-century views on aging, and especially the aging of women, by contextualizing them in a twofold way: (1) It understands them as a response to La Rochefoucauld's skepticism concerning aging, women, and the aging of women; (2) It understands them as being closely connected to a long series of scattered remarks concerning esteem, self-esteem, and honnêteté *in Lambert's moral essays. Whereas La Rochefoucauld describes aging as a decline of intellectual, emotional, and physical powers and is suspicious of the mechanisms of esteem and self-esteem, Lambert develops a view of aging as offering the chance to become more independent of the judgment of others, especially the chance for women to become more independent of the judgment of men. As she argues, aging offers women the possibility of cultivating genuinely estimable intellectual and emotional qualities that attract the justified esteem essential for a stable friendship, as well as the opportunity to develop a form of self-esteem that is based on respect for one's own capacities of judgment.*

Sometime during the early modern period, a change in the attitude toward aging took place. Generally, this change could be described as a shift from seeing old age as a time of wisdom and collected experience to seeing old age as a time of decay not only of physical but also of mental and emotional powers. This development certainly was complex and extended over a long period, but one crucial moment can be seen in the rejection of Stoic ethics in François de La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims* (1665). It is a crucial moment because, of all the philosophical traditions in the West, and one still highly influential in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe, Stoic moral philosophy held perhaps the highest view of the moral value of old age. Unsurprisingly, La Rochefoucauld's attempt at unmasking Stoicism as hiding deep despair behind a mask of serene tranquility—emblematically expressed in the frontispiece of the first three editions of his *Maxims* (see Chariatte 2002)—came with an extremely negative view of the nature of old age. Since this view resonates

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strongly with negative views on aging prevalent in the present-day Western world, the question of how La Rochefoucauld's devaluation of aging could be countered is of persisting interest.

La Rochefoucauld's pessimism about aging was not universally shared at the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. An example of a more optimistic portrayal of aging can be found in one of the moral essays by Anne-Thérèse de Marguenat de Courcelles, Marquise de Lambert (1647–1733).[1] Lambert's essay on aging was published posthumously in 1747, but probably dates back to the first decade of the eighteenth century when Lambert was at the center of a *salon* frequented by luminaries such as Fontenelle, Montesquieu, Saint-Evremont, and Marivaux. Lambert's *salon* is about as famous and well-researched as d'Holbach's *côterie* (see McNiven Hine 1973; Marchal 1991; Hamerton 2010, 216–20). However, I will not discuss here her personal relations with her contemporaries; rather, I will use a comparison with a thinker of the generation before her, who is part of her more remote intellectual context—La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680)—to bring out what is distinctive about her views on aging. In contrast to Lambert's relation to other thinkers such as Pierre Nicole and Nicolas Malebranche (see Danielou 1995, 171–83; Hamerton 2010, 220–38), her relation to La Rochefoucauld has never been discussed in detail. This will be the task of the present article.

Recently, Lambert's essay on aging has come to light as the topic of a chapter in Joan Hinde Stewart's study of gender and aging in early modern France (Stewart 2010, ch. 1). Stewart has outlined some central aspects of Lambert's essay, such as the idea that what offers consolation in old age is a virtuous life (Stewart 2010, 9), the practice of religion and the Christian ideal of resignation (13–14). She also emphasizes the gendered and biographical aspects of Lambert's treatment of aging. As she puts it, Lambert "understands that a woman's youth and middle age are related to the quality of her final years" (18). Also, Stewart notes that Lambert mentions La Rochefoucauld occasionally (Lambert 1808, 23, 85), and that Lambert takes up La Rochefoucauld's insight that we arrive at each age of our life insufficiently prepared (133; see La Rochefoucauld 1946, Maxim 405). Stewart briefly describes Lambert's use of this thought as being "inspired by La Rochefoucauld but transposed to the feminine" (Stewart 2010, 8).

How can the relevant transposition to the feminine be characterized? The answer presumably will have to be complex, since Lambert touches upon other issues that are prominent in La Rochefoucauld, such as the role of esteem and self-esteem in human life and the distinction between *honnêtes hommes* and *honnêtes femmes*. Moreover, her treatment of these issues diverges substantially from his views, partly because she defends Stoic intuitions concerning moral self-perfection and character traits that give rise to a natural right to be esteemed, thereby suggesting that her attitude to La Rochefoucauld's remarks on aging involves more than merely a transformation into a gendered context. I will begin with Lambert's and La Rochefoucauld's respective views on the workings of esteem and self-esteem, then examine their respective views on the ambiguous concept of *honnêteté* that could plausibly figure in

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an explication of the nature of justified esteem and self-esteem, and finally explore the relevance of these issues for their diverging views on aging.

Complaisance, Esteem, and Self-Esteem

In her moral essays, Lambert says a number of quite conventional-sounding things about the necessity of securing esteem through complaisant behavior. For instance, she admonishes her son that "with regard to those on whom you depend, the first merit is to please" (Lambert 1808, 16). The relevant sense of "merit" is explicated in the economic metaphor of "price": "In subordinate employments, one maintains one's position only by knowing how to please; as soon as one neglects oneself, one is of a very low price" (22). This remark indicates that there is a mutual dependence between being esteemed and having self-esteem: Self-esteem is a condition for being esteemed, and the desire to be esteemed is a strong motivation for upholding self-esteem. Lambert's recommendations concerning complaisance thus express an insight into the role of esteem and self-esteem in becoming a member of society.

This topic is further developed in her remarks about politeness. She understands politeness not just as an observation of external forms but also as a way of expressing esteem: "True politeness is modest and, since it seeks to please, it knows that the means to be successful in this are to make felt that one does not prefer oneself to others, and that one gives them the first rank in our esteem" (99). Explicating the sense in which politeness seeks to please others, she notes: "[Politeness] makes their good qualities be valued; it lets them feel that it recognizes their superiority: When you know how to elevate them, they will let you be valued in turn; they will give you the place that you are ready to cede to them; this is the interest of their self-love" (28). This passage articulates some empirical observations concerning the workings of esteem that are cast in quasi-economic terms: (1) the result of the actions described is characterized in terms of being valued; (2) what takes place is a kind of exchange in the sense that one person does something that is favorable for the esteem of another person, and that this course of action is reciprocated; (3) the reciprocation does not take place out of gratitude but rather out of the rational self-interest of the person who reciprocates; (4) if this result has been calculated by the first person, the politeness of the first person can also be regarded as pursuing rational self-interest, in two ways: both by avoiding the resentment caused by expressing overly high self-esteem, and by profiting from what others do to enhance the esteem in which we are held.

Still there is something puzzling about Lambert's remarks about politeness and esteem, since in La Rochefoucauld the everyday workings of esteem and self-esteem have come under severe attack. No-one could seriously write about these matters at the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century without at least implicitly taking La Rochefoucauld's skepticism into consideration. Lambert clearly had his skepticism in mind because she quotes, approvingly, one of his observations in this regard, namely, that what others find ridiculous is often experienced to be much more

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dishonoring than what they find immoral (Lambert 1808, 23; see Maxim 333). Lambert also explicates what is disturbing about this observation: Standards of what is ridiculous are entirely arbitrary (23). By implication, if the economy of esteem induces us to want more strongly to avoid appearing ridiculous than to avoid appearing immoral, then it is highly questionable whether the desire for being esteemed even under normal circumstances is a strong motivation for virtuous action.

La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims* are interspersed with a long series of remarks concerning distorted mechanisms of esteem and self-esteem, and it will be useful to recall some of them here. Some of the distortions that he diagnoses have to do with the self-image that most people cultivate. For instance, he suggests that pride is equal in everyone (Maxim 35) (hence, since presumably not everyone has achievements that justify being proud to the same degree, most people suffer from an inflated self-image). As he notes, one cannot plausibly complain about being deceived by others because one is often satisfied with self-deception (Maxim 114). This is also why he takes disillusioning others about their merit to be a bad service (Maxim 92). Some other distortions that he sees have to do with how we seek to obtain esteem from others. As he points out, our desire for esteem leads us to manipulative strategies: For instance, in order to become established, one does everything to appear to be established (Maxim 56). Similarly, he remarks that the price that we put upon ourselves causes the deference of others much more efficiently than family ties or merit (Maxim 399) (thereby suggesting that it is exactly inflated self-image that secures the esteem of others).[2] A further kind of distortion has to do with the question of whether expressions of esteem can be taken at face value. La Rochefoucauld has doubts. For instance, he takes esteem for the merit of our friends to be proportional to the satisfaction that they give us (Maxim 88). Likewise, he observes that we usually praise wholeheartedly only those who admire us (Maxim 356). What is more, he notes that expressing esteem for others often expresses only esteem for our own sentiments (Maxim 143) and for our own equity and discernment (Maxim 144). Also, approval of newcomers is often an expression of envying those who are established (Maxim 280).

This is certainly a gloomy view of the role of esteem and self-esteem in human life, but it will be easy enough to think of particular examples where La Rochefoucauld's diagnoses fit in a striking way. Lambert shares much of his skeptical outlook concerning the mechanisms of esteem. A series of her remarks emphasizes things that go wrong with the economy of esteem. One problem concerns the kind of glory that the powerful seek: "They invest everything in external signs, and in splendor. Their dignity weighs heavy on others and humiliates them" (Lambert 1808, 19). Another problem concerns the inability of powerful positions to generate genuine esteem: "Titles and positions of dignity are not the bonds that unite us to humans, nor what attracts them to us… One only seeks to recompense oneself for the reverence that one is forced to pay to their position" (19). A further problem concerns the high degree of dependence that the striving for reputation brings with it: "When one aspires to make a great reputation for oneself, one always depends on the opinion of

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others. It is difficult to attain honors through services, if fashions and friends don't render them of value" (22).

Like La Rochefoucauld, Lambert is thus evidently aware of some of the pitfalls of the economy of esteem. Moreover, she takes up (almost verbatim, but without acknowledgment) a thought from La Rochefoucauld when she remarks that merit is the basis of esteem from *gens honnêtes*, whereas luck is the basis of public esteem (211; see Maxim 165). However, unlike La Rochefoucauld, Lambert goes on to argue that esteem is bound to the usefulness of virtue for others: "Because merit turns out to be profitable, they ascribe it to us, not as merit, but as something that is useful for them" (211).[3] Such a view of estimable personal qualities clearly diverges from La Rochefoucauld's analysis of virtue as mixtures of vices that mutually cancel out their negative effects (see Maxims 182; 195).[4] Lambert develops her virtue-based conception of esteem further in her essay on the difference between reputation (*réputation*) and esteem (*considération*). In her view, one acquires a reputation with those who do not know one at a personal level, and usually it is triggered by spectacular actions, almost never by virtuous actions (Lambert 1808, 181). Such spectacular actions inspire more envy than admiration; and even admiration "is a violent state of mind for most humans and only demands to end" (181). By contrast, she points out that some personal qualities have effects on others that give rise to sentiments such as admiration or friendship (210). This is why she holds that only personal merit can give rise to what she calls "esteem of sentiment" (120). This kind of esteem leads to an enjoyment that is more intensively sensed and more frequently repeated than reputation (121). From these considerations derives a clear-cut answer to the question of why we should be motivated to prefer esteem over reputation:

> [P]ersonal esteem provides more agreeable experiences to us than birth, riches, even high positions without merit. Nothing is, at the end of the day, as sad as a great lord without virtues, laden with signs of honor and respect, and to whom one makes it felt at every moment that one owes these only to his high standing and nothing to his person. (343)

Thus, although virtue-based esteem is a source of positive experiences because it expresses what others really feel, the expression of respect paid to reputation cannot function in this way because it is disconnected from attitudes toward personal qualities.

Lambert's distinction between reputation and esteem also sheds light on her remarks concerning complaisance. Certainly, she is a realist as to the condition under which careers are made. Still, she is aware of the limited function of the conventional demands of expressing esteem, when she advises her son: "One owes respect to persons of elevated standing; but this is only external respect: one owes esteem and a respect of sentiment to merit. . .. [I]t should not happen that the brilliance of great positions throws you into illusion" (39). As Lambert explains, the objective of distinguishing external signs of respect from genuinely felt esteem consists in the need to uphold one's own personal dignity (13)—a concept very different from the status-oriented concept of dignity that occurs in other places in her writings. Although she

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takes such external signs of respect to be indispensable for establishing a position in society, she also takes it to be a self-related duty to avoid illusions concerning the personal qualities of those in high positions. Clearly, however, to validate her distinction between external respect and felt esteem, some explication of the nature of estimable qualities needs to be offered.

Esteem and *Honnêteté*

Lambert tackles this task by distinguishing between estimable qualities and agreeable qualities. "Estimable qualities are real and intrinsic to things; and, by the laws of justice, have a natural right to our esteem" (Lambert 1808, 172–73). By contrast, qualities that are only agreeable derive from the disposition of our organs and our imagination and are therefore changeable without a change in their object (173). Of course, speaking of a natural right to something gestured toward the natural-law tradition where a right to esteem in fact played a prominent role. However, Lambert is also explicit that her intention is not to write a dissertation (25), so one would look in vain for an orderly treatment of her attitude toward natural law. Still, as in the natural-law tradition, the qualities that give rise to a right to esteem are qualities that, in some sense to be explicated, are naturally good. If one gathers together the scattered hints that Lambert makes about *honnêteté*, she seems to have had a quite substantial conception of these qualities in mind.

Before going into the details of Lambert's views, recalling some aspects of La Rochefoucauld's treatment of *honnêteté* will be useful. As La Rochefoucauld notes, one usually is rewarded for the appearance of merit rather than for merit itself (Maxim 166). In his view, the false *honnêtes gens* are those who disguise their faults to others and to themselves, whereas the true *honnêtes gens* are those who know their faults exactly and admit to them (Maxim 202). In the sense of not entertaining illusions concerning his own faults, the true *honnête homme* is not conceited (Maxim 203). This is why La Rochefoucauld takes it to be a mark of the true *honnête homme* that he always wants to be exposed to the look of *honnêtes gens* (Maxim 206). Knowing one's faults by itself, of course, does not yet constitute virtue, and accordingly La Rochefoucauld notes that there are persons who find recognition in society, whose whole merit consists in vices that serve in the business of life (Maxim 273). In this sense, La Rochefoucauld leans much more toward the side of what Maurice Magendie has called the "gallant conception" (*conception mondaine*) of *honnêteté*, in contrast to what Magendie has called the "bourgeois conception." In a nutshell, the gallant conception is concerned with how to communicate successfully in court society, whereas the bourgeois conception is concerned with moral virtues, especially virtues connected with family life.[5]

Also with respect to female *honnêteté*, La Rochefoucauld sheds doubt on its moral nature. As he remarks, the *honnêteté* of women is often the love of their reputation and of their repose (Maxim 205). Even worse, he reduces the virtue of women (as well as the braveness of men) to vanity, shame, and physiological constitution

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(Maxim 220). Instead of moral qualities, he regards coquetry as a basic characteristic of women, which in some women is controlled only by reason or fear (Maxims 241 and 334). At the same time, he does not expect much from the rational capacities of women since he believes that the minds of most women serve to fortify their craziness rather than their reason (Maxim 340). He also surmises that, in contrast to *honnêtes hommes* who at least know their faults, women suffer from a lack of self-knowledge because they do not know the whole extent of their coquetry (Maxim 332). At the same time, he does not regard the life of *honnêtes femmes* to be pleasurable: As he suggests, there are few *honnêtes femmes* who are not tired of their way of living (Maxim 367).

Seen from the perspective of La Rochefoucauld's suspicions, the concept of *honnêteté* seems to be most unpromising to explicate the notion of intrinsically estimable qualities. This is why it is interesting to see that Lambert's conception of *honnêteté* diverges markedly from La Rochefoucauld's. Her treatment of *honnêteté* does not reduce to what Katherine Hamerton, in her study of Lambert's response to Malebranche's theory of imagination, characterizes as "the seventeenth-century French discourse and set of practices revolving around refined aristocratic politeness, pleasing social performance and apparently effortless good taste" (Hamerton 2010, 209). Christophe Losfeld goes beyond this characterization by pointing out that Lambert also associates with *honnêteté* Christian character traits such as the acceptance of divine order and acts of charity for the poor (Losfeld 2011, 146). Yet Lambert's conception of *honnêteté* is even richer and comprises a range of substantial virtues. As she maintains, *honnêteté* "consists in stepping back from one's own rights and in respecting the rights of others" (Lambert 1808, 26). Moreover, as she describes it, *honnêteté* is connected with virtues such as refraining from revenge (33) and fulfilling the laws of humanity (38). For instance, she takes extreme differences of social standing to be contrary to the laws of humanity: "In an empire where reason would reign, everything would be equal, and one will give distinctions only to virtue" (38). Also, Lambert understands *honnêteté* as an antidote to the natural love of domination (93). In addition, *honnêteté* has esteem-related aspects: "[T]he honest person praises on the right occasion; it is someone who experiences more pleasure in rendering justice than in augmenting his reputation by diminishing that of others" (32). This is why the duty of avoiding rash judgments and of applying equity and justice in judgments concerning reputation is described as an aspect of *honnêteté* (92–93). Fulfilling the duties of judgmental justice also involves developing a reflective attitude toward one's own self-esteem; this is why *honnêteté* demands reflection upon one's own weaknesses (94). And, generally, she connects *honnêteté* with the demands of justice:

> Self-love is a preference of oneself over others, *honnêteté* is a preference of others over oneself. One distinguishes two kinds of self-love: one natural, legitimate, and regulated by justice and reason; the other vicious and corrupted. We are our first object; and we arrive at justice only through reflection... To love oneself as one should, is to love virtue. (26)

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Now it should be clear why Lambert believes that *honnêteté* characterizes intrinsic qualities that "by the laws of justice, have a natural right to our esteem." They are intrinsic qualities that respect the rights of others—not only the rights deriving from positive law but also the rights that follow from the demands of reason (a characterization of natural rights that goes back to Cicero, *Philippica*, XI, 12, 28 and is common in the early modern natural-law tradition)—and express a readiness to do justice to others—not only in the legal sense but also in the sense of judgmental justice as to matters of esteem—again, a prominent topic in classical natural-law theory (see Blank 2012). This is how her conception of *honnêteté* explicates the sense in which esteem is bound to what is useful to others: The virtues connected with *honnêteté* are esteemed not because they are meritorious but rather because they respect the fundamental needs of others—their rights and their desire to be esteemed. They give rise to a natural right to esteem because they exemplify a kind of natural goodness—goodness that consists in respecting needs that are natural for humans.

The conception of virtue-based esteem also explains why Lambert is far from rejecting the desire to be esteemed as a valuable motivation for moral action: "[O]ne should not reject the sentiment of fame; it is the most certain help that we have for virtue; but the question is to choose the good kind of fame" (Lambert 1808, 95). On the contrary, only the personal qualities that give rise to genuine esteem can function as a bond of society: "Only the qualities of the heart enter into commerce: the mind does not bind us to others" (93). She also offers an explanation for this view: "One is estimable only through the heart and one is happy only through the heart because our happiness depends only on the way of sensing" (42). Those who disregard this insight act, without realizing it, against their own rational self-interest, in two respects: First, they disregard their interest in true friendship: "It is an effect of the disorder of humans to become blind to their true interests. Wisdom and truth, by enlightening us, make our self-love abler and teach us that it is in our true interest to attach ourselves to virtue and that virtue brings with itself the sweet pleasures of friendship" (108). And second, they disregard their interest in a good relation to themselves: "The foundation of happiness lies in the peace of the soul, and in the secret testimony of conscience. By the word 'conscience,' I understand this inner sentiment of a fine honor that assures you that you have nothing to reproach yourself about" (43).

What Lambert has in mind, though, is certainly not a retreat into a purely private world of moral sentiments. To be sure, she is highly critical of an education that reduces to teaching the techniques of complaisance: "Nothing is… as badly understood as the education that one gives to young persons. One destines them to please; one gives them lessons only in how to be agreeable; one fortifies their self-love" (52). But she is realistic enough to see that being virtuous is not possible without the desire to be esteemed: "You owe to yourself the testimony that you are an honorable person. Nevertheless, one must not abandon public approbation since from the contempt of reputation arises the contempt of virtue" (57). This is why she recommends a combination of virtue and complaisance: "Graces without merit do not please for a long time, and merit without graces can make itself esteemed without touching; it is

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therefore required that women have an amiable merit, that they join graces to virtues" (62). And, as she explicates, the relevant sense of virtue involves the moral aspects of *honnêteté*, while the relevant sense of grace involves emotions and sentiments without which esteem of sentiment could not create social bonds: "An *honnête femme* has the virtues of men, friendship, probity, fidelity to one's duties; an amiable woman must not only have exterior graces but also not abandon the graces of the heart and the sentiment" (63). Interestingly, Lambert contrasts this character ideal with the figure of a coquette (63). Although she acknowledges that it is most difficult to overcome the role model of being a coquette, her considerations concerning *honnêteté* and the role of sentiment in approving intrinsically estimable qualities indicates the outlines of a female role model that is a genuine alternative to a lifestyle focused on external attractiveness.

Aging, Self-Esteem, and Self-Respect

Obviously, Lambert's considerations concerning esteem, self-esteem, and *honnêteté* can be applied to earlier periods of life, and in fact she makes extensive use of them in the advice that she gives to her son and to her daughter. Still, these considerations have a particular relevance for her treatment of old age. Again, the contrast with La Rochefoucauld will help to make clear what is distinctive about her views. According to La Rochefoucauld, in aging, one gets crazier and wiser (Maxim 210). This is why he takes old fools to be more foolish than young fools (Maxim 444). In particular, this holds for intellectual powers. As he puts it, the faults of the mind increase with aging as do the wrinkles of the face (Maxim 112). Moreover, he believes that they do so in a predictable way, since the first approach of old age exhibits where the body and the mind will fail (Maxim 222). Something analogous holds for emotional powers. For instance, he believes that getting more vivacious in old age is close to craziness (Maxim 416). Likewise, he believes that the passions of youth are no less detrimental to well-being than the insensitivity of old age (Maxim 341). Generally, he believes that old age prohibits all pleasures (Maxim 461) and that what the old age of love and life have in common is that one lives only for suffering (Maxim 430). What is worse, old people are vulnerable to appearing ridiculous (the greatest danger for the esteem in which they are held) simply by forgetting that they are no longer lovable (Maxim 408). La Rochefoucauld wraps up these considerations with the insight that few people know how to be old (Maxim 423).

La Rochefoucauld's remarks are not just the result of observing the phenomena of aging; they also are connected with his skeptical treatment of esteem and self-esteem. His conception of virtue as a lucky mixture of mutually inhibiting vices sheds doubt on the idea that there are any personal qualities that are estimable for moral reasons. This is why he also doubts that, in old age, one finds any sincere commitment to morality. For instance, he surmises that old men would like to set bad examples if they only could (Maxim 93). Likewise, in line with his thought that there is rarely a genuinely moral aspect to female *honnêteté*, he assumes that there are few women

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whose merit persists longer than their beauty (Maxim 474). And in line with his thought that coquetry is the basic character trait of women, he does not expect that friendship could offer anything to aging women since he conjectures that women find friendship boring after having known the pleasures of love (Maxim 444). Hence, his insistence on old age as a time of intellectual and emotional decay can be seen as a result of his skepticism concerning the idea that self-cultivation could produce genuinely estimable personal qualities.

Lambert is certainly not blind to the problems that aging brings with it:

> Everyone fears old age; one regards it as an age exposed to pain and sorrow, where all pleasures disappear. Each of us is losing by advancing in age, and women more than men. Since all their merit consists in externally agreeable features, and since time destroys those, they find themselves absolutely destitute; for there are few women whose merit endures longer than their beauty. (Lambert 1808, 134)

This passage ends with an unacknowledged borrowing from La Rochefoucauld; likewise, the following passage begins with another such borrowing: "We arrive at each age of life without knowing how to behave nor how to enjoy it; when it is over, we see the use we could have made of it; but since regrets are useless if they do not serve to improve ourselves, let us see how we can take profit of the time that remains for us" (133–34). However, as to the first borrowing, Lambert clearly articulates a conception of merit that is not her own. This should be obvious if one compares the conception of merit in the sense of what is externally agreeable with the moral aspects of her conception of *honnêteté*. As to the second borrowing, Lambert's remark follows a remark on the role that education plays for women:

> As to women, in all ages one abandons them to themselves; one neglects their education in their youth; later in life, one deprives them of the support and foundation for old age; also, most women live without attention and without returning to themselves; in youth, they are vain and distracted; and in old age, they are weak and deserted. (133)

Therefore, in Lambert, being unprepared for old age is not, as in La Rochefoucauld, seen as an insight into unchangeable facts concerning the human condition; rather, it is a specifically gendered insight into the outcome of distorted educational practices. Also, Lambert adds to her borrowing from La Rochefoucauld something that is entirely absent from the *Maxims*: the advice to use the remaining time well—a clear indication that she takes it to be possible for women to respond to some of the problems of old age.

This is exactly the project that Lambert pursues, although at first the project is presented in rather defensive terms: "I help myself with my reflections; and because I approach the age where everything eludes us, I would like to retrieve in my reason the value of the things I lose" (134). But reading on, it becomes clear that it is not only an insight into what is lost in old age that Lambert seeks: "Let us examine the duties of old age, the respect and the decency that are due to this age, and let us

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recognize also the advantages that one can derive from it, in order to enjoy it" (134). In particular, she does not reduce the duties of old age to other-related duties but also includes self-related duties (141).

Her conception of duties of old age is meant to offer a solution to some of the problems that aging brings with it, especially for women. One such problem concerns reputation: "[I]n the life of women, there comes crisis: it is the conduct that they observe and the side they take that gives the final form of their reputation and on which the tranquility of their lives depends" (137).[6] As she explains, this is so because in the course of aging, seducing charm disappears, which is why aging women are judged with full rigor (140). This is why one of the duties of old age consists in avoiding circumstances that will lead to negative judgments and seeking circumstances that will lead to positive judgments. Somewhat disconcertingly for present-day readers, Lambert recommends to aging women a kind of withdrawal to private life. As she argues, participating in activities like going to the theater (whose predominant function for mundane socializing in the eighteenth century is well documented[7]) is detrimental to the self-esteem of aging women: "The advantages of the mind compare unfavorably among brilliant young people; they will make you feel too much what you have lost; nothing is more suitable than being at home; self-love suffers less there than elsewhere" (141). However, as her emphasis on showing the advantages of the mind indicates, what she recommends is not a withdrawal from all contact with other humans but rather a kind of sociability that is favorable for upholding self-esteem. Hence, her recommendation can be understood as exemplifying the demands of duties to oneself. What she has in mind is the need to find a setting where intellectual and moral virtues come to the fore while the loss of physical attractiveness will be felt less vividly.

Lambert describes the ensuing relation to the self as an instance of self-respect. For instance, she ascribes the following (probably fictitious) quotation to a "great man": "Withdraw yourself into yourself; but prepare yourself to receive yourself well; fear shame and cultivate respect for yourself: cease to love yourself and learn how to respect yourself" (153). She regards the withdrawal from public places such as the theater as an instance of duties to oneself that one should fulfill "out of a feeling of dignity for yourself, because one must live respectfully with oneself" (141). This, of course, raises the question in which sense Lambert is using the notion of self-respect. The following passage may give a hint:

> The last age liberates us from the tyranny of opinion. When one is young, one only dreams of living in the idea of someone else; one must establish one's reputation and create for oneself an honorable place in the imagination of others, and be happy even in their idea; our happiness is not at all real, it is not ourselves whom we consult but others. In a different age, we turn to ourselves, and this return has its sweetness, we begin to consult ourselves, and to believe ourselves; we escape chance and illusion; men have lost their right to deceive us; we have learned to know them, and to know ourselves, in order to profit from our mistakes that instruct us as

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> much as those of others; we begin to see our error to have made so much of men; they often teach us to our detriment to count on nothing; their infidelities set us free. (150)

Here, old age—and in particular, the old age of women—is seen as a period when the overly strong dependence of self-esteem on the opinion of others—and, in particular, the opinion of men—can find an end. Lambert is clear that the kind of self-knowledge attainable in this way is not always flattering, as when self-reflection leads to insight into previous mistakes and present folly. But instead of pursuing the goal of cultivating acts of high self-evaluation, something different can be reached, namely, reliance on one's own judgment which is based both on experience and on insight into previous mistakes.

What makes such a form of esteem attractive is that it comes with increased reliance on one's own judgment, increased self-knowledge, increased independence from the judgments and values of others, and increased ability to follow the demands of one's own conscience. Lambert's concept of "living respectfully with oneself" indicates that what she has in mind is not only self-esteem in the sense of acts of positive self-evaluation; more fundamentally, it is a kind of relation to oneself that is responsive to one's own capabilities and needs. This is why friendship in old age can replace the youthful search for momentary pleasure through an entirely different function: the mutual reaffirmation of virtuous character traits which can contribute to the stability of these traits. In friendship of this kind, dependence on others is not eliminated but rather channeled into a form where the judgment of others can always be checked against the demands of one's own conscience. This increased sense of reliance upon oneself thus characterizes aging well, and especially for women it implies an increased independence of male criteria for female attractiveness.

Self-Esteem and Aging Well

As La Rochefoucauld's pessimism about aging is connected with his diagnosis of the pathologies of esteem and self-esteem, so is Lambert's optimism about aging connected with her conception of justified esteem and self-esteem. It is not so much that the two thinkers differ with respect to their insights into the problems of esteem and aging; rather, they take fundamentally different attitudes to these problems: La Rochefoucauld an attitude that interprets virtuous behavior to be largely the result of physiology, chance, and the mutual balancing of vices; Lambert an attitude that understands virtuous behavior to be largely the result of self-cultivation. What gives plausibility to her conviction that self-cultivation is possible is her view that there are personal qualities that are genuinely useful for others because they respect their fundamental rights and needs. These are the qualities that, in her view, give rise to a natural right to esteem. On the basis of her conception of what is morally good, Lambert can thus formulate a distinction between qualities that are only pleasant and qualities that are estimable. With this distinction in hand, it makes sense for her to

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ask whether aging may not bring with itself an increase in moral perfection and the ensuing benefits of enhanced social relations and enhanced relations to oneself. Living a virtuous life, in her view, solves some of the problems of aging because it offers a new source for satisfying some deep human needs: the needs for justified esteem and justified self-esteem. Through the opportunities for self-cultivation that it offers, aging opens up the possibility of relying more strongly on one's own judgment and thereby becoming more independent of the judgment of others. In Lambert's view, moral virtue is exactly the same for women and men, but aging brings specific advantages for women. If aging women manage to live respectfully with themselves, this implies that dependence on the expectations of men loses much of its grip. Nothing could be further away from La Rochefoucauld's pessimism than Lambert's perspective on old age as a liberating period of life.

This is a result of considerable historical interest since it documents how Lambert's eclectic and undogmatic defense of some Stoic intuitions can be successfully used to counter some of the devastating consequences of La Rochefoucauld's rejection of everything connected with the Stoic tradition. However, it also may lead to considerable contemporary interest. Of course, it would go far beyond the scope of the present article to give even a brief overview of recent feminist and/or philosophical work on aging. But some of the relevance of Lambert's thought may become evident if it is contrasted with an excellent overview that Toni Calasanti, Kathleen Slevin, and Neal King have offered. Their article covers the feminist literature on aging from the early 1970s to the mid-2000s (Calasanti, Slevin, and King 2006), and although some time has passed since it was published, it is still instructive because some of the themes identified there recur in more recent publications. As Calasanti, Slevin, and King point out, the most extensive part of the literature is concerned with the aging body, covering issues of sexuality after the menopause, questions raised by plastic surgery, and problems posed by giving and receiving care. Certainly, compared with this part of the literature, Lambert seems to be outdated. In this respect, Stewart rightly warns readers against entertaining exaggerated expectations. In particular, she documents that Lambert does not claim for women the right to love in old age (Stewart, 2010, 15–16). Yet Calasanti, Slevin, and King also highlight the emergence of a growing field of studies on age relations. Many of these studies focus on the development of power relations during the process of growing older, ranging from impaired access to the labor market to diminishing status and authority. Very few studies examine advantages that aging women may have over aging men, for instance, stronger support networks of aging women (see Barker, Morrow, and Mitteness 1998); and it is difficult to find studies that consider the possible advantages that aging women could have over the young or middle-aged.

As Calasanti, Slevin, and King suggest, the fact that there is little that is positive in contemporary thought about aging may be the result of the widely accepted view that aging well consists mainly in upholding patterns of consumption characteristic of affluent middle-aged persons. This view inevitably brings with it a cultural devaluation of the elderly because they will be less and less able to cope with the standards of life of the middle-aged (Calasanti, Slevin, and King 2006, 20–26). From this perspective,

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it is not surprising that studies of age relations regard aging mainly from the perspective of a loss of power. It is here that Lambert's account of aging could add something significant to the contemporary debate, since she does not regard aging well as a matter of keeping up with the younger as long as possible. Rather, she maintains that aging well requires building up social relations that involve a degree of independence of the need to secure the esteem of others that is characteristic of earlier biographical periods. What is more, she suggests that aging well also requires building up relations to the self which become possible through the decrease of dependence on the esteem of others. For this reason, she sees aging not only from the perspective of decreasing bodily faculties and diminishing social power; she sees aging as also offering the possibility for building up friendships of increased depth and for developing increased self-respect and self-esteem. This is a thought-provoking view.

Notes

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1. For overviews of Lambert's thought, see Zimmermann 1917; Geffriaud-Rosso 1984a, 1984b; Beasley 1992; Steinbrügge 1995, 18–20; and Green 2014, 64–72. There is a lot of uncertainty concerning the chronology of Lambert's writings. Emile Boulan dates the two "Avis" to around 1700 (Boulan 1920, 113). Robert Granderoute dates the *Reflexions sur les femmes* to before 1724 (Lambert 1990, 208). Due to its easy availability on the Gallica website of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, I will key all references to Lambert 1808. Translations are my own (with some substantial improvements from one of the referees for *Hypatia*); however, I have consulted with the translation in Lambert 1769.

2. On La Rochefoucauld's treatment of merit, see Galland-Szymkowiak 2002.

3. On Lambert's conception of virtue, see Kryssing-Berg 1982.

4. On the historical background of La Rochefoucauld's analysis of virtue, see Sellier 1969.

5. See Magendie 1925, 386–93, 892–900 (on the gallant conception), 633–75 (on the bourgeois conception). For more recent studies, see Stanton 1980; Bury 1996; and Steigerwald 2011.

6. The moment of biographical crisis is also a central topic in the poems and letters of Lambert's contemporary, Lady Mary Mortley Montagu (1689–1762); for a detailed analysis, see Brophy 2004.

7. See, for example, Weber 1993; Johnson 1995, ch. 1.

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