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Thomas Arnold, Christian Manliness and the Problem of Boyhood

Thomas Arnold is a well-known character in Victorian Studies. His life and work are usually discussed in relation to the development of the English public school system in his role as Headmaster of Rugby School. His importance in the history of Victorian manliness has, by contrast, been somewhat obscured. When scholars do comment on his idea of Christian manliness, they tend to assume it was an overtly gendered ideal, opposed to a well-developed notion of effeminacy. A closer study of Arnold's thought and writings, as well as the reflections of his contemporaries and pupils reveals rather that his understanding of manliness was structured primarily around an opposition between moral maturity, on the one hand, and immoral boyishness, on the other. As this article argues, one of Arnold's chief concerns at Rugby was to 'anticipate' or 'hasten' the onset of moral manhood in his pupils. Moreover, it will be shown that his discussion of manliness in his role as Headmaster was closely connected to his work as a historian – another neglected aspect of Arnold's career. Inspired, above all, by the Italian philosopher Giovanni Battista Vico, Arnold's historical writing is punctuated by the Vichian concept that nations, like individuals, pass through distinct stages of maturity, from infancy, through childhood, manhood, age and decrepitude. A close reading of Arnold's school sermons and other works on the peculiar dangers of boyhood suggests clearly that his historical writing inspired the notions of moral manliness and vicious boyhood which underpinned much of his educational thought.

Keywords: Thomas Arnold; Christian manliness; boyhood; nineteenth century; masculinity; history writing

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1. *Thomas Arnold, 'Manliness' and the English Public School*

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the English public school was seen very differently from the revered British institution it was to become by its end. A public school education was remembered by many former pupils as a depressing, brutal, and academically fruitless experience which made them wary of sending their sons to a similar institution.[1] It is questionable whether we should describe the public schools in terms of a 'system' at all; they are perhaps better understood as a loosely connected set of private foundations with idiosyncratic curricula, teaching methods and assessment practices. Individual schools had their own particular institutional culture and were connected only in terms of the social class from which their pupils were drawn, a shared commitment to teaching the classical languages and a tradition of sending pupils to the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Although the public schools were clearly expected to educate the British elite, to mature the sons of the upper classes, both intellectually and morally, they were more often criticised for turning out young men little less childish than when they had first arrived.[2] Such concerns, moreover, fed into more widespread fears about the immaturity of the British elite as a class, which were made particularly poignant against the background of war with France, when Britain stood in particular need of mature and experienced leaders.[3]

It is against this background that we must view the career and subsequent reputation of the famous headmaster of Rugby school,[4] Thomas Arnold.[5] In Britain, he is remembered, more than a little erroneously, as the man responsible for reforming, single-handedly, the nation's

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[1] For the reputation of the English public schools in the early nineteenth century, see James Anthony Mangan, 'Muscular, Military and Manly: The British Middle-Class Hero as Moral Messenger' in R.Holt, J.A. Mangan and P. Lanfranchi eds., *European Heroes: Myth, Identity, Sport* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 30-31.

[2] The universities of Oxford and Cambridge, in particular, were concerned. See, for example, the comments of Richard Whately, the Principal of St Alban Hall, Oxford in E. Jane Whately, *Life and Correspondence of Richard Whately Vol. I* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1866), p. 79.

[3] See, for example, the concerns expressed by [Sydney Smith], 'Essays on Professional Education. By R.L. Edgeworth, esq., F.R.S. etc.', *Edinburgh Review* 15 :29 (October 1809), 40-53.

[4] Rugby school is located in Warwickshire and is one of the oldest public schools in England, being founded in 1567. It is one of the nine 'great' public schools as defined by the Public Schools Act of 1868.

[5] Thomas Arnold (1795-1842) was a liberal Anglican clergyman educated at Winchester College and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. In 1828, he was appointed as headmaster of Rugby school. In his fourteen years there, he caused Rugby to become a model for the reform of other schools in Britain. Personally, he earned a reputation as the morally earnest champion of a distinctive brand of 'Christian manliness' and a keen participant in religious controversy.

public schools; for turning a corrupt and academically irresponsible system of education into one which prioritized moral earnestness, hard work and intellectual curiosity. Although Arnold's real achievement was not quite so impressive, he should nonetheless enjoy an important place in any historical inquiry into the English public school in the first half of the nineteenth century. In this article, I focus on one aspect of Arnold's career as headmaster of Rugby school in which he truly came to function as an example, not only for other public-school headmasters, but for also for those in charge of grammar schools and the new 'national' schools[6] established in England and Wales from 1811 onwards: his personal crusade to hasten the moral and intellectual transition of his pupils from boyhood to manhood.[7]

Central to this project was Arnold's use of the language of 'manliness'. Most scholars who work on 'manliness' in nineteenth-century Britain have tended to treat it purely as a gendered ideal without appreciating its alternative meaning of 'maturity', which was also, I would argue, its primary meaning in the context of all-male educational institutions. As Arnold was such a famous promoter of 'manliness' in the early nineteenth century, both in his sermons and other writings, scholars interpreting his ideal primarily in a gendered sense have contributed significantly to the general perception of 'manliness' as an overtly gendered category in this period. The idea that Arnold intended his ideal of 'manliness' to indicate primarily 'masculinity' or those qualities peculiarly associated with being male has largely arisen from unhelpful and misleading comparisons with the ideal of 'Christian manliness' developed later in the century by Charles Kingsley[8] and Thomas Hughes,[9] the best known proponents of what came to be known as 'Muscular Christianity'.

It is certainly no new idea to stress the differences between the ideals of Arnold and Kingsley/Hughes. As early as 1858 an *Edinburgh Review* article noted a clear difference in tone between Hughes' presentation of Arnold and Rugby in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and that met with in Arnold's own writings and correspondence. Instead of reflecting the tone and

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[6] 'National Schools' were Church of England primary schools set up in England and Wales by the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in England and Wales which was founded in 1811.

[7] For the influence of Arnold's emphasis on 'manliness' as maturity, see John Tosh, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-century Britain', *History Workshop Journal* 38 (1994), 183.

[8] Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) was a liberal Anglican clergyman and novelist. He was also Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University between 1860 and 1869. Most famously, he was the founder of an ideal of 'Christian manliness' known somewhat pejoratively as 'Muscular Christianity' which sought to combine an energetic Christian activism with a vigorous ideal of masculinity.

[9] Thomas Hughes (1822-1866) was a lawyer and novelist. He was educated at Rugby school when Thomas Arnold was headmaster and is best known for his 1857 novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays* which depicted school-boy life at Rugby under Arnold. He is also remembered as an important proponent of 'Muscular Christianity' alongside his friend, Charles Kingsley.

character of the school under Arnold, Hughes, the reviewer declared, 'viewed every part of the subject through the medium of the doctrines of a school of which Mr Kingsley is…the ablest and…most popular teacher.'[10] Scholarly comparisons of the ideals of Arnold and Kingsley maintain a similar line. In *The Sinews of the Spirit*, Norman Vance suggests that in comparison with Kingsley,' Arnold proposed a rather austere Christian manliness as his educational objective: not the physically vigorous manliness of Tom Brown and Tom Hughes'. Echoing the earlier conclusion of Lytton Strachey, Vance argues that, 'it is one of the ironies of history…that this vehemently earnest moralist should have been misrepresented by posterity as the founder of the worship of athletics and good form.'[11] James Eli Adams concluded similarly in his study of Victorian masculinity, *Dandies and Desert Saints*, that the image of Arnold presented to succeeding generations by authors like Hughes was 'largely a myth'.[12] In particular, Adams drew a distinction between Arnold's emphasis upon religious and moral earnestness and Kingsley's stress upon physical and sexual prowess.[13]

However, despite the fact that scholars like Vance and Adams have admitted important differences between the ideals of Arnold and Kingsley, few have questioned the idea that for both men, manliness was conceived as a gendered ideal, opposed to a clearly defined notion of effeminacy.[14] Despite the insightful remarks of David Newsome and, more recently, of John Tosh, scholarly works comparing Arnold and Kingsley have failed to appreciate that Arnold possessed no well-developed notion of effeminacy; for his ideal of manliness was conceived not as an ability in traditional masculine pursuits but as moral and intellectual maturity and was opposed to a notion of boyishness rather than effeminacy. It is true that there were some traits which the Arnoldian construction of boyishness had in common with Kingsley's conception of effeminacy including indolence, moral weakness and a general lack of self-control; it is also true that Arnoldian manliness was gendered insofar as it was exclusively applied within the environment of an all-male public school; however, it will be argued here that distinctions of gender *per se* were only ever a secondary consideration for Arnold, whereas, for Kingsley they were of prime importance. Indeed, it will be suggested that Arnold actually condemned

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[10] 'Tom Brown's Schooldays', *Edinburgh Review* 197:217 (January 1858), 176.
[11] Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: the Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 70-71.
[12] James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 66.
[13] Ibid., p. 65.
[14] For a study which treats Arnold's ideal of 'Christian manliness' as an overtly gendered paradigm of masculinity, see Fabrice Neddam, 'Constructing Masculinities under Thomas Arnold of Rugby (1828-1842): Gender, Educational Policy and School Life in an Early-Victorian Public School', *Gender and Education* 16 (2004): 303-26.

gendered notions of manliness as inferior ideals of life whose emphasis upon an excessive masculine pride at the expense of Christian virtue rendered them understandably (yet inexcusably) popular among boys whose moral and mental faculties had not yet fully matured.

2. The structuring of Arnold's ideal of Christian Manliness

As long ago as 1961 when his study of Christian Manliness, *Godliness and Good Learning*, was published, David Newsome made the point that 'manliness' as Arnold understood it was not based upon a distinction between men and women but between men and boys. Arnold, following Coleridge, he wrote, 'had regarded manliness as something essentially adult' while 'Kingsley and Hughes stressed the masculine and muscular connotations of the word and found its converse in effeminacy.'[15] More recently, in his 1994 article, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity?', John Tosh complained that historians of Victorian manliness were still looking for an overtly gendered ideal where few were to be found.' Manliness presents a convenient target for gender historians', he declared, 'but a fundamentally misleading one'. Although he admitted that manliness was often an ideal which had been emphasized in all-male environments such as the Victorian public school or working men's club, the 'distinction which exercised [the pundits]', he maintained, '(following the influential Dr. Arnold of Rugby) was that between men and boys'. 'Worries about immaturity', he declared, 'counted for much more than the fear of effeminacy, at least until the 1880s.'[16] Despite such insightful suggestions, however, there has as yet been no detailed study of Arnold's ideal of manliness from this point of view or any sustained attempt to explain why distinctions of age were more important than those of gender not only to Arnold, but arguably to the early Victorian period more generally. Indeed, studies of Victorian manliness such as those by Vance and Adams have tended either to overlook or not to recognize the problem of a lack of concern with gender in Arnold's writings. Adams has even tried to argue that Arnold conceived his ideal of the Christian gentleman primarily in terms of 'a persistent resolution of that achievement into gendered components', specifically, masculine freedom, openness and good sense and a feminized, self-denying Christianity.[17]

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[15] David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (London: Cassell, 1961), p. 197.
[16] Tosh, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity?', 183.
[17] Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints*, p. 74.

In the first part of this article I would like to suggest that an awareness of the influence upon Arnold of a combination of Vichian historical theory emphasizing the critical nature of the stage of youth in the life of nations and an ideal of Christianity which minimized sex difference may help to explain the structuring of Arnoldian manliness by distinctions of age rather than gender. In his historical writing, Arnold felt himself something of a pioneer introducing the theories of Giovanni Battista Vico to an England he considered but little acquainted with the eighteenth-century Italian philosopher. Vico's most famous work, *Principi di Scienza Nuova*, Arnold praised as 'so profound and so striking' in its substance 'that the little celebrity which it has obtained outside of Italy is one of the most remarkable facts in literary history'.[18] The most important idea which Arnold took from Vico was that which argued that 'states, like individuals, go through certain changes in a certain order', most importantly, 'the transition…from what I may call a state of childhood to manhood'.[19] Furthermore, Arnold, again following Vico, believed that these two life stages were fundamentally different from each other, so much so that a nation in its maturity ought never to be compared with one in its infancy. It would be, he wrote, to 'institut[e] a parallel between the intensity of our passions in manhood and in childhood'.[20]

This last sentence reveals a crucial link between Arnold's historical thinking and his attitudes towards his pupils at Rugby. Just as one ought never to compare immature with advanced nations, so schoolboys ought never to be compared with men. For Arnold, boyhood and manhood were completely separate stages of development characterized by differences in behaviour so great that they frequently impeded successful communication between men and boys. Speaking to his pupils assembled in Rugby Chapel, Arnold described this difficulty. His weekly sermon, he declared, was like 'the address of a man who speaks and thinks in one way, to persons who speak and think in another'. 'What strong barriers are raised by age, by education', he wondered. 'It is sometimes as hard for a man to put himself again into the place of a boy…as it is for a boy to imagine what he will be when he becomes a man, of which he has hitherto had no experience at all.'[21] The difference between boys and men, however, was not conceived by Arnold simply in terms of age and experience. His belief that under normal circumstances boys were far more susceptible to vice than grown men marked out in his mind their clear inferiority. 'There is', he wrote, in 'Discipline of Public Schools', 'an essential

[18] Thomas Arnold, 'Social Progress of States', *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold* (London: B. Fellowes, 1845), p. 82.
[19] Ibid., p. 82.
[20] Ibid., p. 105.
[21] Thomas Arnold, *Sermons Vol. II* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1878), pp. 31-32.

inferiority in a boy as compared with a man, which makes an assumption of equality on his part at once ridiculous and wrong'. It is 'an age when it is almost impossible to find a true, manly sense of the degradation of guilt or faults.'[22] After the comparative innocence of infancy, he lamented elsewhere, 'come the hardness, the coarseness, the intense selfishness; sometimes, too, the falsehood, the cruelty, the folly of the boy.'[23] Here, we see clearly the Arnoldian understanding of 'manly', opposed not to a gendered notion of effeminacy but to a concept of moral childishness. Arnold did not believe that boys were naturally vicious, but rather that theirs was 'just the time, beyond all others in life, when temptation is great, and the strength of character to resist exceedingly small'.[24] In particular, Arnold thought the public school with its communal living and absence of parental supervision one of the worst possible environments in terms of its sheer capacity for tempting boys to moral evil. Indeed, between 1828 and 1831 he preached some five sermons to the boys on 'The Temptations of School Life'.[25]

Once more, Arnold found support for this idea of the peculiar moral vulnerability of boys in Vico's theory of historical development. Employing the analogy of the seasons, he declared in his essay 'On the Social Progress of States':

> Spring is ever a critical period and the fairest promise of blossom on the healthiest tree may be cut off by one of the sudden frosts or storms so incident to that changeful season. In the political spring also there are peculiar dangers internal and external, which in too large a proportion of instances have never allowed the blossom to ripen.[26]

These 'peculiar dangers', although expressed here chiefly in political and economic terms, were nonetheless considered profoundly negative in their moral consequences. The first, 'the union of property under peculiar local circumstances', particularly in the hands of an aristocracy, leads, Arnold wrote, to a 'state…of physical, intellectual, and moral degradation', while the second, 'the increasing influence of wealth', results in 'despotism…instead of general liberty'. The third danger, war, has the potential to destroy young nations more easily seduced into foreign conflicts. It 'harden[s]…hearts, and blind[s] reason', warned Arnold, 'till they [are] ready for the perpetration of any folly and any crime.'[27] The worst fate to often befall young

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[22] Thomas Arnold, 'Discipline of Public Schools', *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 368.
[23] Thomas Arnold, *The Christian Life: Its Course, Its Hindrances and its Helps* (London: B. Fellowes, 1844), p. 118.
[24] Arnold, *Sermons II*, p. 83.
[25] Ibid. The relevant sermons are numbers V-IX.
[26] Arnold, 'Social Progress of States', p. 98.
[27] Ibid., p. 98-102.

nations is to remain in a state of perpetual childhood with all the vices belonging to that stage of life without ever reaching their maturity. 'In some parts of the world', Arnold wrote, 'society seems never to have reached its natural manhood, but has…gone on in protracted infancy', blighted with intellectual stagnation and a political system amounting to 'despotism in its worst and, humanly speaking, most hopeless form'.[28] This aspect of Arnold's historical thought goes a long way towards explaining his preoccupation at Rugby with securing the successful arrival of schoolboys at moral manhood. Protracted infancy was no more appealing or less likely a fate for boys who failed to reach moral maturity than it was for nations. When such boys became men (in purely physical terms), not only would they possess, Arnold wrote, nothing of the virtue of manhood, but at the same time all 'the unripeness and ignorance of the child'.[29] So great did the dangers seem that Arnold found himself often despairing of success. Writing to his friend John Tucker on his arrival at Rugby in 1828, he confessed his fear that given 'the natural imperfect state of boyhood', his pupils would not be 'susceptible of Christian principles in their full development upon their practice'. 'I suspect', he wrote, 'that a low standard of morals in many respects must be tolerated amongst them, as it was on a larger scale in what I consider the boyhood of the human race'.[30]

3. The need to 'anticipate' the onset of moral manhood

Yet, in one crucial sense, a protracted childishness among schoolboys was far more damaging than it was among young nations and the period of youth even more critical; for boys, unlike nations, possessed immortal souls, which, in Arnold's mind, would be forever lost to Satan if the onset of moral manhood was not achieved. 'So many boys' souls are utterly lost', he lamented, seduced into 'the worship and service of Satan' in consequence of their inability to resist 'the temptations which they here meet with'.[31] Arnold conceived of the whole of earthly life as a period of youth or preparation for the manhood of heaven. 'Ideally', he explained,

> added years will…bring added wisdom, till if our life is spared to the full term of the age of man, we may be so ripe for the kingdom of God, as to seem only to be

[28] Ibid., p. 109.
[29] Arnold, *The Christian Life*, p. 397.
[30] Cited in Arnold Whitridge, *Dr. Arnold of Rugby* (New York: Henry Holt And Company, 1928), p. 94.
[31] Arnold, *Sermons Vol. II*, p. 50.

> transplanted into it in the course of nature, as being grown to too great a height in goodness to remain any longer in the nursery of this world.[32]

Yet, if this degree of moral maturity was ever to be attained in one's earthly life, a thorough education in Christian morality was the only possible method. 'Christ…alone', Arnold preached, 'can give us a new and healthy nature; He alone can teach us so to live, as to make this world a school for heaven'.[33] As he sought to impress upon his pupils every week in the pulpit, his aim, as headmaster and chaplain, was to guide them through the morally perilous years of youth towards 'a more manly and Christian standard of duty'.[34] His most important ally in this campaign was St. Paul whose famous instruction to the early Christians ('Be not children in understanding: howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men') was repeated by Arnold not only to his pupils at Rugby but also to his religious opponents, the Anglo-Catholic Tractarians led by John Henry Newman.[35] The figure of St. Paul was offered to the boys as a sympathetic model for emulation in their own difficult journey to manhood. 'Neither the Apostle, nor any one else', Arnold consoled them,

> has ever stepped directly from childhood into manhood…There must have been a time in his life, as in ours, when his words, his thoughts, and his understanding were neither all childish, nor all manly: there must have been a period, extending over some years, in which they were gradually becoming the one less and less, and the other more and more.[36]

Clearly, in Arnold's conception of Christianity, differences of moral maturity counted for far more than distinctions of gender. It is not simply that he advocated moral maturity with greater enthusiasm than traditional masculine qualities such as muscular ability or sporting prowess; sex difference was actively minimized in his ideal of the Christian religion. When analyzing the moral state of the Roman Empire, for example, he criticized Stoicism (which he considered the noblest philosophy in the ancient world before Christianity) as a narrowly masculine system

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[32] Thomas Arnold, *Sermons Vol. I* (London: B. Fellowes, 1845), p. 24.
[33] Ibid., p. 31-2.
[34] Arnold, *The Christian Life*, p. 38.
[35] 1 Corinthians XIV. 20. The Tractarians (also known as the Oxford Movement) were an affiliation of High Church Anglicans led by John Henry Newman and Edward Bouverie Pusey, many of whom were members of the University of Oxford. In the early 1830s, they began a movement for the reform of the Church of England along Anglo-Catholic lines which ended with substantial numbers of Tractarians converting to Catholicism.
[36] Arnold, *The Christian Life*, pp. 11-12.

whose utter contempt for physical pain 'was absolutely unattainable by persons of delicate bodily constitutions; and thus…particularly by that sex which under a wiser discipline has been found capable of attaining to such high excellence'.[37] 'The Christian religion', by comparison, was, he wrote, 'the first instance in Roman history of a society for the encouragement of the highest virtues…embracing persons of both sexes'.[38]

However, the fate of boys failing to reach moral manhood worried Arnold to such an extent that he determined not merely to encourage boys in the ways of Christian manliness, but to accelerate the rate at which the necessary virtues were attained. In a school sermon, he inquired 'whether the change from childhood to manhood can be hastened'. 'That it ought to be hastened', he remarked, 'appears to me to be clear…When I look around, I cannot but wish generally that the change from childhood to manhood in the three great points of wisdom, of unselfishness, and of thoughtfulness, might be hastened from its actual rate of progress in most instances.'[39] Now, Arnold was aware that this policy would encounter harsh criticism, in particular, the accusation that he would 'destroy the natural liveliness and gaiety of youth…by bringing on a premature seriousness of manner and language'.[40]. His reply was simple: that a true liveliness and cheerful disposition came only through faith in Christ and that an accelerated progression towards Christian manhood would only serve to enhance these qualities. Perhaps Arnold's best known strategy for 'anticipating' the onset of Christian manliness was the enhancement of prefectoral powers at Rugby. He gave the sixth form, as a whole, much greater responsibilities for overseeing the moral behaviour of younger pupils than ever before, responsibilities which included the administering of corporal punishment and control of the fagging system. Having such trust placed in them by the headmaster, sixth formers would learn, Arnold wrote,

> to feel a corresponding self-respect in the best sense of the term; they [would] look upon themselves as answerable for the character of the school, and by the natural effect of their position acquire a manliness of mind and habits of conduct infinitely superior, generally speaking, to those young men of the same age who have not enjoyed the same advantages.[41]

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[37] Thomas Arnold, *History of the Later Roman Commonwealth Vol. II* (London: B. Fellowes: 1845), p. 463.
[38] Ibid., p. 466.
[39] Arnold, *The Christian Life,* p. 18.
[40] Ibid., p. 27.
[41] Arnold, 'Discipline of Public Schools', p. 373.

By the same token, prefects were expected to provide worthy models of manly behaviour for the younger boys to emulate. This principle is once more paralleled in Arnold's historical thought on the social progress of nations. Following Vico, he maintained that those states 'who have advanced the furthest in civilisation are bound to enlighten others whose progress has been less rapid.'[42]

In addition, Arnold intended his support for a system of moderate corporal punishment to teach younger boys what he considered the true meaning of manliness: a willingness to submit humbly to just punishment for moral wrong-doing. Ideally, 'flogging', as Arnold termed it, should produce in chastised boys 'a discipline truly generous and wise, in one word, truly Christian', instead of what he found too often to be the natural state of feeling among his pupils: 'That barbarian pride which claims the treatment of a freeman and an equal, while it cherishes all the carelessness, the folly, and the low and selfish principle of a slave.'[43] This identification of the state of manhood with the privileges of freedom and that of boyhood with the restrictions of slavery is common in Arnold's writings, particularly in his discussion of another strategy for hastening the onset of moral manhood at Rugby, the fagging system. Such a system, Arnold argued, taught boys the invaluable lesson that while freedom was an attribute of manhood, it must always suffer some necessary curtailment in any advanced society. 'It is an institution', he wrote, 'indispensable to a multitude of boys living together, as government, in like circumstances, is indispensable to a multitude of men'.[44] Above all, Arnold's government of the school was designed to impress upon his pupils the simple lesson that manliness was not a virtue inherent in the male gender *per se* but one which could only be acquired through hard work, just like the privileges which accompanied it. 'As long as a boy remains at school', Arnold wrote, 'the respectability and immunities of manhood must be earned by manly conduct and a manly sense of duty.'[45] Although Arnold was indeed criticized for the methods he used, other contemporary commentators seemed to affirm their general success. 'It soon began to be a matter of observation to us in the University', wrote George Moberley upon Arnold's death in 1842, 'that his pupils brought quite a different character with them to Oxford than that which we knew elsewhere…thoughtful, manly-minded, conscious of duty and obligation.'[46]

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[42] Arnold, 'Social Progress of States', p. 111.
[43] Arnold, 'Discipline of Public Schools', p. 369.
[44] Ibid, p. 371.
[45] Ibid., p. 370.
[46] Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, D.D.* (London: B. Fellowes, 1852).

The method, however, in which Arnold placed the greatest hope in his effort to hasten the onset of moral manhood was one requiring no institutional innovation: the promotion within the school of what may be termed 'Christian friendship' between boys who Arnold felt could teach each other valuable moral lessons. Such, for example, was the relationship which Thomas Hughes imagined the fictional 'Doctor' encouraging between Tom Brown, a boy, who, though brave and courageous, lacked moral consistency and the shy, but deeply religious, George Arthur in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*.[47] Behind this ideal lay Arnold's strong conviction that boys and men were fundamentally different creatures and that boys learned more successfully from their peers than from adult instructors. 'Equality of age, and similarity in outward circumstances', he declared, in a school sermon,' draw men most closely to one another…Friends are sharers together…in those hours of free and careless mirth which the presence of persons of a different age would instantly check.'[48] It was this unique bond between peers which Arnold sought consciously to harness in the cause of Christian manliness. 'Christians in their youth', he suggested, 'are somewhat like the good men who lived in…what may be called the youth of the world: that is, their consciences are less enlightened than they become at a more advanced age…but, if they are Christians in earnest', he argued, 'they gradually lead one another on to higher views.'[49] Here, the likening of the consciences of young Christians to those of good men who lived in 'the youth of the world' reminds us once again of the pervasive influence of Vico's theories of historical development upon the way in which Arnold viewed his pupils at Rugby and their transition from boyhood to manhood.

4. *The importance of intellectual maturity*

Although a boy's moral development was always uppermost in Arnold's mind when he used the term Christian manliness, he was clear to point out whenever he discussed the ideal that it also enjoined progress towards intellectual maturity. In *The Christian Life*, he defined 'progress' towards 'Christian manliness' as the exchanging, not only of 'selfishness for unselfishness' and 'carelessness for thoughtfulness', but 'ignorance for wisdom'.[50] A scientific understanding of God's creation and the workings of his will throughout the human past was a vital part of Christian education for Arnold. He was especially struck, as we have seen, by St.

[47] Paul M. Puccio, 'At the Heart of 'Tom Brown's Schooldays': Thomas Arnold and Christian Friendship', *Modern Language Studies* 25:4 (1995): 57-74.
[48] Arnold, *Sermons Vol. I*, pp. 262-3.
[49] Ibid., p. 263.
[50] Arnold, *The Christian Life*, p. 30.

Paul's injunction to the early Christians to be 'men in understanding'. In particular, he valued a thorough knowledge of the literary culture and political history of the Greek and Roman world which a classical education could provide; not, as we may imagine, for the sake of self-cultivation, but because he believed that (excepting the fields of religion and morality) Greek and Roman civilization represented the highest achievement of humanity to date. Classical culture revealed the potential of a human society which had reached Vico's 'third period of full civilisation' or manhood, and, as such, presented, Arnold believed, an incomparable model for the intellectual development of nineteenth-century Britain and Europe.[51] 'The mind of the Greek and Roman', he declared in an article entitled 'Rugby School - The Use of the Classics', 'is in all essential points…our own; and not only so but it is our own mind developed to an extraordinary degree of perfection'. Indeed, he continued, 'Aristotle…Plato…Thucydides…Cicero, and Tacitus, are most untruly called ancient writers; they are virtually our own countrymen and contemporaries.'[52] Ancient historians, endowed with what Arnold perceived as their unrivalled concern for factual accuracy and balanced judgment, were his favourite classical authors and those he felt most important for his pupils to study. They should read 'some first-rate historian', he declared, 'whose mind was formed in, and bears the stamp of some period of advanced civilization, analogous to that in which we now live.'[53] When pupils at Rugby went on to university, he often sought to impress on them the relevance of ancient history and philosophy for understanding modern political life. As he wrote to A.P. Stanley when he was reading for Greats at Balliol, the narratives of the best works of ancient history 'will be constantly recalling modern events and parties to your mind and improving…in the best way, your familiarity with them'.[54]

However, just as Arnold was convinced that a thorough knowledge of ancient history and philosophy would aid the cultivation of a manly intellect, other disciplines traditionally included within the remit of classical studies, in particular, the study of Latin and Greek verse and the practice of word-for-word construing, he considered to encourage an unquestioning, childish mind. In his 1825 article 'Early Roman History' in *The Quarterly Review*, Arnold criticized England's 'general deficiency in the field of classic literature and criticism'. This deficiency, he remarked, was particularly noticeable at the universities where dons, though cleared of their eighteenth-century reputation for 'indolence,…prejudice and port', now spent

[51] Arnold, 'Rugby School - Use of the Classics', p. 358.
[52] *Ibid*., p. 349.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 358.
[54] Stanley, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold*, p. 326.

most of their time teaching students how to construe. 'The consequence of it', Arnold concluded, 'has been the converting of our universities' into little more than 'great schools; and the leaving in them scarcely any individuals who are simply occupied in the cultivation of literature'.[55]

True to his conviction, he banned the practice of construing at Rugby, preferring sentence-by-sentence translation. Construing, he declared, was an unfit mental exercise even for the youngest pupils and he railed publicly against the 'absurdity' of its continued use in other schools especially 'with pupils of an advanced age'.[56] In a similar move, he replaced many of the ancient poets on Rugby's classical syllabus with his own favourite prose writers, most notably ancient historians like Herodotus, Thucydides and Arrian.[57] A comparison once more offers itself here with Arnold's own historical writing. Indeed, it was his firm belief that an over-concentration on the composition and recitation of poetry had been a major factor behind the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Under such circumstances, literature 'degraded…into a mere plaything of men's prosperous hours', he wrote, 'an elegant amusement, and an embellishment of life, not a matter of serious use to individuals and to the state'[58]. 'Want of judgement', he maintained, 'is the prevailing defect' in societies 'wherein the showy branches of literature have been forced by patronage, while the more beneficial parts of knowledge have been neglected.'[59] It did not help the situation, he added, that societies which show little interest in the study and writing of history tend also to be destitute of any real political freedom. 'Men', he wrote, 'will dwindle into children in understanding and energy, when they are obliged to depend in childlike helplessness on …their rulers.'[60]

5. *Gendered concepts of manliness in Arnold's ideal*

The question, however, remains as to the role which gendered ideals of manliness (such as Charles Kingsley advocated) played in Arnold's thinking, primarily as a headmaster, but also as a historian. The difference was stark: Kingsley's conception of manliness, as we have seen, was opposed not to a notion of moral and intellectual childishness, but to a clearly defined idea of effeminacy, a state neither temporary nor transitional, which could be ascribed to men of

[55] [Thomas Arnold], 'Early Roman History', *Quarterly Review* 63 (June 1825): 67-92.
[56] Thomas Arnold, 'Rugby School - Use of the Classics', p. 351.
[57] Stanley, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold*, p. 115.
[58] Arnold, *Later History of the Roman Commonwealth Vol. II*, p. 453.
[59] Ibid., p. 455.
[60] Ibid., p. 441.

any age and for any length of time. Both Arnold and Kingsley criticized John Henry Newman and the Tractarians as 'unmanly' and it is perhaps in these attacks that the difference between their respective ideals of manliness is clearest. A typical example of Kingsley's anti-Tractarian invective appears in his 1848 play, *The Saint's Tragedy*, where he denounced the Newmanites as 'sleek passionless men who are too refined to be manly and measure their grace by their effeminacy'.[61] Arnold, by contrast, never used the term 'effeminacy' in his attacks upon the Tractarians, preferring instead to criticize their moral and intellectual immaturity. Such an accusation occurs, for example, in a letter of January 1841 addressed to Arnold's friend and fellow Broad Church sympathizer Rev. J. Hearn. 'They so completely reverse St. Paul's rule', he complained, 'showing themselves children in their understanding, and men only in the vehemence of their passions'.[62] The difference is equally apparent when we compare Arnold and Kingsley's historical writings. While Arnold, inspired by the Vichian idea that the process of national development reflects the life stages of the individual, Kingsley entertained a thoroughly gendered view of the past. We remember, for example, that Arnold attributed the fall of Rome chiefly to the Empire's increasing moral and intellectual immaturity; Kingsley, by contrast, although he shared Arnold's concern about an over-concentration on the 'showy branches of literature', nonetheless interpreted the negative moral consequences in gendered terms. 'The morals of the Empire', he declared, in *The Roman and the Teuton*, 'grew more and more effeminate, corrupt, reckless' until 'the soldiers…actually laid aside, by royal permission, their helmets and cuirasses, as too heavy for their degenerate bodies.'[63]

Gendered conceptions of manliness do occur in Arnold's writings and correspondence; yet they are always depicted as the favoured ideals of juvenile minds not yet sufficiently matured (either morally or intellectually) to appreciate the superiority of Arnold's own genderless notion of Christian manhood. In the last of five sermons on 'The Temptations of School Life', Arnold cautioned his young charges against subscribing to a masculine ideal which held it unmanly to miss the comforts of home, especially the love of close female relatives. In the all-male environment of a public school, he warned, 'you sometimes learn to feel ashamed of indulging your natural affections, and particularly of being attached to your mothers and sisters, and fond of their society'. 'You fancy it unmanly', he continued,

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[61] Charles Kingsley, *The Saint's Tragedy* (London: John W. Parker, 1848), p. 82.
[62] Stanley, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold*, p. 507.
[63] Charles Kingsley, *The Roman and the Teuton* (London: Macmillan, 1889), p. 61.

> to be thought to be influenced by them, and you are afraid of being supposed to long too much for their tenderness and indulgent kindness towards you. Thus you affect a bluntness and a hardness which at first you cannot put on without an effort; but the effort is made, and that from a false shame of being laughed at for seeming too fond of home.[64]

The events of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* seem to provide confirmation of the presence of these kinds of fears among the pupils at Rugby. In a conversation between Tom and George Arthur, Tom warns the shy new boy not to talk about home 'to boys you don't know, or they'll call you home-sick, or Mamma's darling, or some such stuff.'[65]

In addition to this embarrassment about showing affection for mothers and sisters, Arnold identified a worrying tendency among Rugby pupils to idealize traditionally masculine qualities such as physical strength and sporting ability at the expense of 'humbler', 'softer'(and, arguably, more feminine) feelings like 'self-abasement', 'reverence' and 'devotion'.[66] In a school sermon, Arnold railed against 'the unprincipled life of those who think of nothing but bodily exercises and animal enjoyments'. The life of the Old Testament character Esau, eldest son of Isaac, was just such a man, he declared, and, in his obsession with 'bodily exercises', constituted 'the very image of the prevailing character amongst boys' in our own day.[67] That muscular ability had a certain cachet among Rugby school-boys seems once more to be confirmed by events in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. When Arthur first comes to Rugby, Tom and East conclude that as a small and shy boy he will not enjoy their energetic, masculine pastimes of fishing, drinking bottled-beer, reading Marryat novels and sorting bird's eggs. 'This new boy', thought Tom, 'would most likely never go out of the close, and would be afraid of wet feet, and always get laughed at, and called Molly, or Jenny, or some derogatory feminine nickname'.[68]

Ultimately, Arnold attributed the appeal of gendered ideals of manliness among his pupils to the emphasis which they placed on an over-developed sense of masculine pride, the product, Arnold thought, of an aristocratic-chivalric ethos of personal honour which opposed itself to the Christian duty of serving God humbly and submissively. It was to the popularity of such an ideal at Rugby that he attributed the increasing number of boys who complained that

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[64] Arnold, *Sermons Vol. II*, p. 59.
[65] Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (London: Blackie And Son Ltd., 1857), p. 223.
[66] Arnold, *The Christian Life*, p. 218.
[67] Ibid., p. 94.
[68] Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, p. 218.

corporal punishment was insulting and personally degrading. While Kingsley was to idealize chivalric honour as the epitome of Christian virtue (particularly as it manifested itself in the time of the Crusades) Arnold condemned it wholesale as 'that proud notion of personal independence which is neither reasonable nor Christian, but essentially barbarian'. 'It visited Europe in former times', he explained, referring to the Medieval age; and he was determined to do everything in his power to prevent its return. For the stakes were far higher than the salvation of a single school. Arnold feared that the chivalric ideal was gaining ground all over England, manifesting itself most recently in the 'idolatry of personal independence' characteristic of Jacobinism. 'For so it is', he declared, 'that the evils of ultra-aristocracy and ultra-popular principles spring precisely from the same source – namely, from selfish pride.'[69] Elsewhere, Arnold wrote that societies dominated by the chivalric ideal were those which have either remained in, or have fallen back into 'a state of infancy'.[70] Such comments reveal his profound anxiety about the security of England's future as a nation worthy to be counted amongst those in the hallowed third stage of Vico's scheme of historical development.

In light of what we have learnt, not only about Arnold's own ideal of manliness as moral and intellectual maturity, but also about the gendered notion of chivalric honour against which he fought both as headmaster and historian, it becomes impossible to agree with Norman Vance's description of his system at Rugby as one in which 'the worst brutalities of school life' were only kept in check when 'superior strength and seniority' were 'ennobled as chivalric manliness'. Here, Vance was referring specifically to the system of fagging, which, he argued, was intended by Arnold to 'secure quasi-feudal patronage and protection against bullying for otherwise defenceless youngsters'.[71] Although curbing bullying was one of the aims of the changes which Arnold introduced (including the restricting of fag-masters to the sixth form), the most important object, according to Arnold himself, was the positive instruction of pupils in the lessons of Christian manliness, first among which was due deference and manly submission to one's legitimate superiors, whether school prefects, the British government, or God himself. Contrary to what scholars like Vance and Adams have argued, Arnold's peculiar brand of Christian manliness was not structured (like Kingsley's) around a clearly defined opposition of 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Instead, as David Newsome, and more

[69] Arnold, 'Discipline of Public Schools', p. 365.
[70] Arnold, 'Social Progress of States', p. 90.
[71] Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit*, p. 72.

recently, John Tosh, have suggested, it relied upon notions of 'childishness' and 'manliness' (in the sense of moral and intellectual maturity), derived, I have argued, from Arnold's personal conception of Christianity and his thoughts on the nature of historical change which were dominated by the Vichian idea that the process of national development mirrored the life stages of the individual. Following Vico, Arnold developed the idea that boyhood was an incomparably vulnerable life stage requiring constant supervision to secure a successful transition to moral and intellectual manhood. The former was always to occupy first place in Arnold's consideration, for moral childishness, continued into adulthood, would lead, he was convinced, to eternal damnation for the individual involved; hence his concern to 'anticipate' the onset of moral or Christian manhood through the institutional methods of fagging, flogging and the prefectoral system.

Gendered notions of manliness, however, were by no means absent from Arnold's writings and correspondence; indeed, in the peculiar form, of what he termed the 'chivalric' ideal (with its emphasis upon masculine pride and a code of personal honour), they provided the rival ideal of life which proved so popular with the boys at Rugby and which Arnold spent his whole career as headmaster endeavouring with varying degrees of success to suppress.

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