The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy

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Women, the Public, and the Private

Understanding Aristotle’s vision of the public and the private requires deciphering his views on women. On the one hand, he observes that women constitute half of a city’s free persons (Pol 1260b19, 1269b16–18, 1299a20–22); on the other, he mentions them otherwise in his political philosophy only in connection with the household. That women in his view are both free and live in the household does not, as we have seen, present a contradiction—in fact, it serves to support my claim that he believes one may live a free life in the household; but that Aristotle makes a point of observing that women are “half of the city” and yet seemingly advocates their engaging only in household activities—not a half share of a city’s activities—does make one doubt the consistency of his views on women. Or, assuming the consistency of his views, this apparent difficulty makes one wonder what other activities he thinks women should undertake, what kind of life they should lead. In answering this question, I aim to show that the appropriate kind of life is one that helps bring about harmony between the public and the private.

In trying to discern the life Aristotle advocates for women, it is helpful to consider what he thinks of them—of their distinctiveness from men and of their capabilities. In recent years,
scholars, some in the context of advancing feminist theories, have charged that Aristotle disparages women. One group, for example, Maryanne Cline Horowitz, Eva C. Keuls, G. E. R. Lloyd, Nicole Loraux, and Susan Moller Okin, maintain that Aristotle's biological writings are misogynistic because they portray the female as inferior to the male. Another group, for example, Stephen R. L. Clark, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Okin, argue that Aristotle, by relegating women to the household, regards them as suited only to necessary, not political or intellectual, activity. This latter group accuse Aristotle not only of trapping women in the household, but, like Arendt, of depicting the household as unable to provide fulfilling activities. Hence, they conclude that Aristotle regards women as unfulfilled and unfulfillable: indicating that women should be locked inside, he evidently thinks that they are unfit to experience the freedom of the world. Whether this interpretation is accurate remains to be considered.

The Female: A Biologically Inferior Being?

An inquiry into Aristotle's views on women should begin perhaps by considering the following questions: (1) what, according to


4 Arendt admits, however, that according to this ancient conception of the household both the male and the female functions—“the labor of man to provide nourishment, and the labor of the woman in giving birth”—“were subject to the same urgency of life.” On her interpretation, life outside the household is worthy only of man, not of woman, but the man must earn it by mastering necessity. Arendt is correct to point out that in Aristotle's view no human being can escape necessity; see *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 30–31, 48 n. 38.
Aristotle, are the biological ways females differ from males? (2) does he think that these biological differences are marks of inferiority? and (3) in the case of human beings, does he indicate that these differences bear on their moral and intellectual abilities and thus on their potential as political actors and thinkers? In this section I address the first two questions; I answer the third question in the course of examining what Aristotle says about women in his political works.

Three Definitions of Gender

According to Aristotle, male and female differ in three significant biological respects. In explaining the first, Aristotle comes remarkably close to the modern chromosomal theory of sex differentiation. He says that the principle (archê) of an animal—which is situated in the heart—determines its sex (GA 766a31–b4); gender is thus determined before the appearance of sexual parts.\(^5\) The possession of male or female parts is, nonetheless, the second significant respect in which male and female differ: “A creature, however, really is male or female only from the time it has got [such] parts” (GA 766b5–6). Thus, Aristotle approached saying that a male-coded embryo and a female-coded embryo appear to be the same until seven weeks after conception. Third, male and female differ in their reproductive functions: “By a ‘male’ animal we mean one which generates in another, by ‘female’ one which generates in itself” (GA 716a14–15). It is clear, then, that Aristotle regards sexual parts and reproductive functions as merely manifestations, not causes, of maleness and femaleness. At the same time, by noting the undetectability of the male and female principles, Aristotle leaves open the possibility of their ambiguity.

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\(^5\) According to Joseph Needham, *A History of Embryology*, 2d ed. (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), it was in fact Aristotle who “pushed back the origin of sex-determination to the very beginning of embryonic development” (54). For more on this topic, see Konrad Blersch, *Wesen und Entstehung des Sexus im Denken der Antike* (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1937), as recommended by Needham, and Erna Lesky, *Die Zeugungs und Vererbungs Lehren der Antike und ihr Nachwirken* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steinen Verlag, 1950). Needham claims further that “the depth of Aristotle’s insight into the generation of animals has not been surpassed by any subsequent embryologist” (42). For a discussion of some of Aristotle’s claims in this field that are “substantially modern” (48) and were profoundly influential, see especially 37–60.
Form and Matter: Contributions to Procreation

Though manifestations, reproductive functions are nonetheless notable features of gender. Aside from the one generating outside and the other inside itself, the most striking difference between male and female apparatuses is that during procreation the male provides the form, the principle of movement, or the soul, whereas the female provides the matter, material, or body (GA 729a10–12, b14–21, 735a9, 737a28–30, 738b20–27, 740b25, 765b9–15). It appears that the male provides an offspring’s being and the female merely nourishment for it. And is this not proof, as Keuls claims, that “Aristotle was one of the fiercest misogynists of all times, obsessed with the need to prove that women play no genetic part in reproduction”? No, it is not; the context of these statements reveals that they do not debase the female. It explains that the male provides sentient soul—only a part of the soul (GA 736b14–27). Moreover, the sentient part of the soul endows living beings (only) with sense perception—without it they would be lifeless limbs (GA 741a13–14). The male, then, through his semen, provides that part of the soul that “cannot be separated from the body” (DA 413a3–5). The semen also contains the rational part of the soul, but this part is generated not from the male himself but from “outside,” and is thus “partly separable” from physical matter (GA 736b30–39, 737a8–12). “Reason alone enters in, as an additional factor, from outside, and alone is divine; because bodily activity has nothing to do with its activity” (GA 736b27–29). A physical substance cannot alone yield a nonphysical entity.

6 Reign of the Phallus, 405.
7 Semen supplies reason in its potential state. At what point during gestation it becomes actualized Aristotle does not say; see Aristotle: Generation of Animals, trans. A. L. Peck (Loeb Classical Library, 1963), 169 n. a; W. D. Ross, Aristotle: A Complete Exposition of His Works and Thought (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 121. We can, however, infer at least that Aristotle does not think reason becomes actualized from the moment of conception, since in the Politics he indicates that abortions should be legal as long as they are “induced before perception and life arises” (1335b24–26). Despite this ambiguity, according to Needham, Aristotle’s “description of the entry of the various souls into the embryo was afterwards made the basis for the legal rulings concerning abortion.” Yet, Needham claims that Aristotle “did not think, however, that [the different sorts of souls] were in-breathed from any source external to the embryo.” He admits that Aristotle includes a final cause in his theory of causation but gives nonetheless the contrived explanation that “Aristotle alone was unharmed by Aristotelianism. . . . He himself knew how to change rapidly from metaphysician into physicist and back again, how to bow politely to the final cause and press on with the dissection” (History of Embryology, 40, 49–50, 56, 59).
8 See also John Leofric Stocks, Aristotelianism (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1925), 80.
In response to those who consider Aristotle’s science and its implications misogynistic, it is true that Aristotle maintains that the man contributes something more important to reproduction than the woman; both sense perception (“a sort of knowledge”) and reason contribute more to living well than does having a body (GA 731a32–34, 736b30–32, 732a4–10). Indeed, since the mental faculties constitute the essence of a human being, in Aristotle’s view a child could be said to be more the essence of his or her father than of his or her mother. But if arrogating the procreative function to the male, Aristotle seems hardly to intend the repression of the female; if it carries any social or political implications, the finding that the man is more the source of a child than the woman suggests that he ought to be the more important parent. If Aristotle indeed

9 There is debate as to whether the ancient Greeks commonly supposed that the male parent makes the more important contribution to reproduction and to heredity and as to whether Aristotle thought so. According to Lloyd, the supposition prevailed before Aristotle, who then provided “massive support” for it (Science, 86). As evidence for its prevalence, Lloyd mentions Aeschylus’s Eumenides, in which Apollo defends Orestes against the charge of matricide by arguing that he was really the offspring of his father, Agamemnon, not of Clytemnestra: “She who is called the child’s mother is not its begetter, but the nurse of the newly sown conception. The begetter is the male.” Apollo then notes Athena as proof that “there can be a father without a mother” (658–64; trans. Hugh-Lloyd Jones [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970]). According to Alan H. Sommerstein, however, this was not a widespread view. Sommerstein claims that the Athenian public would have recognized and perhaps ridiculed the view as “the speculative theory of an advanced philosopher,” even if they would not have associated it in particular with Anaxagoras (to whom Aristotle ascribes it at GA 763b31–33), for they regarded the mother-child bond as closer than the bond between father and child; see Aeschylus, Eumenides, ed. Alan H. Sommerstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 206–8. Needham argues that “the denial of physiological maternity” may have originated among the Egyptians, that it prevailed a century before Aristotle (he also cites Eumenides), and that Aristotle’s own beliefs “are in striking contrast” to it (History of Embryology, 43–44). My aim is not to adjudicate the historical claims but merely to make clear that the doctrine of physiological paternity was at least not unheard of in Aristotle’s time and to point out that Aristotle seems neither to endorse it unequivocally nor dispute it entirely. It is true that he disagrees on some points with Anaxagoras, as well as with Empedocles and Democritus (GA 763b31ff.), but his findings nonetheless expand on their work (see Generation of Animals, trans. Peck, xvi). He does suggest that a mother provides genetic input to her offspring (contrary to Keuls, Reign of the Phallus, 145, and Lloyd, Science, 95–96, but see 96 n. 140)—thus siding with the majority of the Presocratics (see Eumenides, ed. Sommerstein, 208; Lloyd, Science, 86–111). But he distinguishes himself from them by claiming that the female does not contribute the same kind and amount of seed as does the male (see Lloyd, Science, 91–97). He thus manages to synthesize the two main scientific views of procreation.

10 Keuls, Reign of the Phallus, 145.

11 Working against this suggestion is Aristotle’s claim that male animals do not trouble over their young (GA 759b7–8) and that females, especially human females, are “more considerate in rearing the young” and “more compassionate” than males.
understands nature to be conferring the responsibility of raising children more on the father than on the mother, then Aristotle's biology could be understood to intend—if one assumes that child rearing is a burden—the repression of the male. Indeed, it is ironic that Keuls thinks it chauvinistic for Aristotle to claim that a father is more a father than a mother is a mother.\(^\text{12}\)

In addition, by saying that “the menstrual discharge is semen, though . . . it lacks one constituent, and one only, the principle of soul” (GA 737a28–30), Aristotle clearly means that woman’s matter—not the woman herself—lacks soul, and then again only sentient soul.\(^\text{13}\) Like males, she receives the principle of soul when conceived. A female results when the matter holds sway over the form (GA 766b15–17), but form still infuses the matter.\(^\text{14}\) Moreover, the principle of soul she receives is not wholly from her father but in part from outside. Finally, Aristotle gives no indication as to whether males and females receive equal or unequal measures or kinds of rational soul from outside; presumably, the amount or kind received varies from individual to individual regardless of gender.\(^\text{15}\) We cannot then attribute to Aristotle, as Okin contends, a “basic assumption that the male is always and in every way superior to the female.”\(^\text{16}\) Indeed, Aristotle says, it must be

\(^{12}\) Reign of the Phallus, 145, 405–6.

\(^{13}\) It is in this respect only that “the female is so to speak a deformed [or maimed] male” (GA 737a27–28, a remark that is frequently taken out of context). Thus, contrary to Lloyd’s assertion that Aristotle understood the relationship between male and female as an example of that between form and matter (Science, 99) while believing nonetheless that raising children is or ought to be a different enterprise. What is natural to most other animals may not be natural to us (see Clark, “Aristotle’s Woman,” 189).

\(^{14}\) See also Stocks, Aristotelianism, 79; Ross, Aristotle, 122; Clark, Aristotle’s Man, 210, and “Aristotle’s Woman,” 181. By the same token, even if a male results, nutritive soul—the female element—is still necessarily present.

\(^{15}\) Although Aristotle uses nous at GA 736b27, the context suggests that he means all forms of reason or intellectual virtue. On the various forms, see NE VI; on Aristotle’s three different usages of nous, see Terence Irwin’s glossary in his translation of the Nicomachean Ethics (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 429.

\(^{16}\) Okin, Women, 82; see also 86; Lloyd, Science, 104–5.
“granted that the female possesses the same soul [as the male]” (GA 741a7–8). Both receive nutritive soul from the mother and sentient soul from the father, and both may or may not receive soul from outside.

Women: A Different Species?

The preceding observations undermine Loraux’s and Lloyd’s contention that Aristotle shared and promoted the (allegedly) prevailing ancient Athenian view that women are a different species from men. According to Loraux, this view had its genesis in Greek myths. These myths, following the Hesiodic formula, told that all women were born of, or descended from, one woman. Women were not only self-reproducing but also unlike men in that they were introduced into the world rather than being already there. Loraux’s evidence that the ancient Greeks regarded women as a different species is that Aristotle presents as a contemporary belief the ‘rule’ that daughters resemble their mothers. Loraux contends, moreover, that although Aristotle refutes the possibility of female auto-reproduction, he too portrays women as being as different from men as birds are from fish. With respect to Loraux’s first point, Aristotle says in fact that females take after their mothers more than they do their fathers (GA 767b3–4), that some take after only their fathers (GA 767a37–b1), and that some take after neither parent (GA 767b4–5). The ‘rule’ allows for some resemblance between fathers and daughters and admits of—perhaps many—exceptions. Moreover, Aristotle makes no reference to common opinion (GA 767a36–b6). Second, his account of the developing embryo suggests that male and female human beings are much more alike than are birds and fish. His calling male and female “contraries” (GA 724b8–10, 766a22) and claiming that they have different natures (the female is, for example, “passive,” “weaker and colder”; GA 729b13–16, 775a14, 30–35) seems to support Loraux’s claim. Aristotle explains in the Metaphysics, however, that women differ from men not as footed from winged animals but as white from black swans (1058a31–37). Male and female of the same species differ merely physically; their “essence” and “for-

17 Lloyd cites Loraux (Science, 94–95).
18 Loraux, Enfants d’Athena, 76–78, 80–81, 91–92. “The first woman of the Theogony is not the ‘mother of humanity,’ but the ‘mother’ of women” (78).
mula” are not contrary (1058b8–10, 21–24). Again, “matter does not produce difference” (1058b7). Thus, Aristotle declares, “woman does not differ in species from man” (1058a29–31).

Our Androgynous Natures

“Although male and female are indeed said in referring to the whole animal, it is not male or female in respect of the whole of itself, but only in respect of a particular faculty and a particular part” (GA 716a28–31). Apart from their sexual characteristics, human beings are neither male nor female; they are, more precisely, androgynous: “Things are alive in virtue of having in them a share of the male and of the female” (GA 732a11–12). It is not surprising, then, that “a boy actually resembles a woman in physique, and a woman is so to speak an infertile male” (GA 728a17–18); or that mutilating “just one part [of males] results in ... close approximation to the appearance of the female” (GA 766a26–29, 716b5–11). If Aristotle’s biology is misogynistic, then it must also be misanthropic.

Ultimately, then, Aristotle reconciles his apparently inconsistent claims that male and female souls are basically the same, that they are opposite, and that they are both mixed. ‘Male’ and ‘female’ are opposite principles, the one being of movement, the other of material cause (GA 715a5–7). But as archai they are abstractions; neither can exist without the other. They are compelled to unite. The result is necessarily a combination of male and female (GA 766b5–6). Nonetheless, male or female parts emerge (GA 766a37–b1), since “mixing is the coming to be one of what is mixed as they are changed.” In addition, ‘male’ and ‘female’ are qualities that generally attach to human beings having, respectively, male and female sexual parts. In sum, Aristotle seems to be claiming that, although there are male and female qualities, actual men and actual women manifest various combinations of these qualities. In-

19 It is not then evident why “[Aristotle’s] statement that women have fewer teeth than men (Hist. An. 501b)” is “the nadir” of his “misogyny parading as science” (Keuls, Reign of the Phallus, 145). Keuls, not Aristotle, seems to think that this is a statement about woman’s inferiority.
20 See also Generation of Animals, trans. Peck, xlv.
21 This is Clark’s paraphrase of On Generation and Corruption 328b22; he refers the reader to De Sensu 447a12; cf. III.3.11. As Clark explains, “the metaphysics of form and matter perverts, but does not quite obliterate the theory of mixture” (Aristotle’s Man, 208).
deed, Aristotle seems even to imply, paradoxically, that deviations from the norm are the norm (GA 767b10–12, Pol 1259b1–3).

**The Household: A Woman’s Domain**

Aristotle’s biological findings about the sexes inform his political understanding of men and women. Of most political relevance are his observations that men and women have both male and female qualities, and that men generally exhibit male, and women female, qualities. The latter is the reason (not given by Clark) that “Aristotle himself would commission men and women for the male and female roles.”22 What are these roles? Speaking generally, Aristotle regards the household, as some feminist scholars are quick to point out, as woman’s domain, and the domain outside the household as man’s. Left unqualified, this generalization is misleading. But it is helpful at this point because it indicates that Aristotle’s political understanding of men and women concerns the household. Since we know that household activities cultivate moral virtue, we have grounds for speculating about the capabilities and duties of women. More specifically, though Aristotle writes about woman largely with reference to her household tasks, he gives us reason to think that he believes her to be fit for life outside the household.

**A Pairing Being: A Wife**

To recall from Chapter 1, according to Aristotle a man and a woman form a household for many reasons: natural affection, reproduction, assistance. The ideal union not only realizes these aims but makes each partner more virtuous. Between two decent human beings, this happens naturally, for each imitates what in the other he or she approves of, corrects the other, and engages in virtuous activities (NE 1172a10–13).23 Pairing with another good human being is a means to self-perfection.24 This view is not the

22 Ibid., 211.
23 See also ibid.
24 We can be reasonably certain that Aristotle recommends either lifelong monogamy or (serial) monogamy for both sexes. He says that “love is ideally a sort of excess of friendship, and that can only be felt towards one person” (NE 1171a11–12).
same as that of Aristotle's contemporaries and predecessors for whom marriage was a religious act and union, the aim of which was to perpetuate the domestic worship. But it resembles that view in holding marriage in highest esteem. In this respect, Aristotle's view comes closer to that of an earlier age than to that of his own, if Fustel de Coulanges is right about the nuance between them: "In ancient times, instead of designating marriage by its particular name, gamos, they designated it simply by the word telos, which signifies sacred ceremony, as if marriage had been, in those ancient times, the ceremony sacred above all others." 25

In contrast to that view, however, the sacredness of marriage according to Aristotle coincides with its pleasurableness. For his contemporaries and ancestors, "marriage . . . was obligatory. Its aim was not pleasure; its principal object was not the union of two beings who were pleased with each other, and who wished to go united through the pleasures and the trials of life." 26 Insofar as pleasure and virtue are inseparable in Aristotle's view (NE 1175b27–28, 1176a15–19), the aim of marriage is pleasure. Through proper pleasure, the best marriage yields happiness.

One might, however, doubt that Aristotle means to convey that marriage should give pleasure and happiness to the woman. For, according to him, a husband should rule a wife (Pol 1259a39, 1260a10) and a human being cannot be happy without exercising reason or speech (logos) to the extent he or she is able (NE 1097b22–25, 1098a3–8). The "political rule" that should obtain between a husband and a wife cannot be the usual sort whereby "the ruler and the ruled interchange in turn," because husband and wife are not equals (Pol 1259a39–b10). But if they are not equal and should not take turns ruling, then why does Aristotle say that their proper relationship is political? Perhaps, as Arlene W. Saxonhouse proposes, Aristotle means that just as political order requires citizens who are equal to make some among them superior—by distributing power, titles, and honors—so the household requires that

Furthermore, friendship requires association; indeed "there is nothing so characteristic of friends as living together," and "one cannot live with many people and divide oneself up among them" (NE 1157b6–19, 1171a3). See also Chapter 1, note 23, p. 20.


26 Ibid., 43.
someone acquire the accoutrements and power to rule. Conventions more than nature or virtue may sustain the husband's rule.27

This interpretation is correct to suggest that Aristotle does not regard the difference between men and women as radical. As Saxonhouse notes, he says that nature only tends to make males fitter to lead than females (Pol 1259b1–3). One might note further that males are constituted without this superiority not seldom but sometimes (pote); and, in addition to these males, two other classes of males—the young and the old—are less likely to hold sway (kratein) over females (GA 767b11–12). Moreover, Aristotle does not speculate on the extent of the usual gap between male and female leadership capabilities. Nonetheless, he maintains their natural inequality in this area in particular (Pol 1259b1–2, 1260a10–12). Thus, we cannot account for Aristotle's considering the marital relationship political on the grounds that he deems the inequality characterizing it to be mostly superficial or conventional.

Furthermore, it is not evident that a central or defining presupposition of political rule is equality (for example, "intellect rules appetite with political and kingly rule"; Pol 1254b5–6). Of additional importance to Aristotle's definition of political rule is, as noted, the notion of reciprocity or alternation between ruler and ruled (Pol 1261a30–31, 1277b9–10, 1279a8–10; NE 1132b33–34). Thus another problem arises: if the husband stands always as ruler to his wife (naturally or conventionally), then in what sense can political rule obtain between them?

To see that Aristotle is not contradicting himself one must first appreciate that equality may be proportional or arithmetic (NE 1134a26–28),28 allowing marital rule to be not only political but "aristocratic" (NE 1160b32–33, 1161a22–25).29 Second, as Mary P. Nichols points out, "[Aristotle's] concept of political rule does not necessitate that rulers and subjects exchange positions. To rule and

27 “Family, Polity, and Unity: Aristotle on Socrates' Community of Wives,” Polity 15, no. 2 (1982), 205–6. R. G. Mulgan also proposes this interpretation but does not think that Aristotle is committed to it since he presents the household as arising out of natural differences; see Aristotle's Political Theory: An Introduction for Students of Political Theory (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 46–47.

28 See also Mulgan, Aristotle's Political Theory, 37, and Mary P. Nichols, Socrates and the Political Community: An Ancient Debate (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 159, which cites Mulgan.

29 According to Saxonhouse, the accounts of the marital relationship in the Politics and in the Nicomachean Ethics are somewhat different ("Family, Polity, and Unity," 206 n. 5).
be ruled in turn may mean that rulers recognize their subjects' independence. Thus, while [a ruler] rules them, he is also ruled by them—his rule is only partial, or 'in part.' He is limited by his subjects' desires and opinions, which he must take into account in his choices and actions."30 Or, as Clark says, the man "should rule as would one destined to take his turn as subject."31

The husband-wife relationship is reciprocal and approaches equality also in that each partner compensates for (NE 1160b33–35, 1162a22–24) and corrects the other's deficiencies.32 Each equally needs the other to achieve wholeness. What is required for a union to be satisfactory, then, is not necessarily the leadership of the male but the couple's "mutual help and comfort."33

Useful for understanding Aristotle's conception of marriage is Hegel's. As Aristotle believes, Hegel points out that it is the difference between the sexes and among individuals not of the same blood lines that makes a union between a man and a woman both possible and ethical; for only a union of differences can give rise to separate wholenesses and only separate wholenesses emerging from a mixture of differences can unite. In the best marriage each individual freely surrenders "immediate exclusive individuality" for inclusive individuality.34 Ideally, according to Aristotle, it seems, marriage should effect a dynamic equilibrium between male and female virtues not only in a household but within a husband and a wife themselves.

AN ETHICAL BEING: A HOUSEHOLD MANAGER

For the sake of survival, marriage leads to the acquisition of a house and domestic servants (Pol 1252a30–34, b9–14). The husband should rule the household only insofar as delegating the task

30 Socrates, 159, emphasis added. Nichols is, however, describing Aristotle's view of the relationship between a statesman and his subjects.
31 "Aristotle's Woman," 184. Clark, however, takes Aristotle to mean that only in some matters would a husband listen to a wife: their rule is "in part" insofar as "they share the rule of the household, not by turns but by role-division."
32 See also Xenophon, Oeconomicus, trans. E. C. Marchant (Loeb Classical Library, 1923), 422–23.
33 Clark, Aristotle's Man, 209; see also Xenophon, Oeconomicus, 418–19.
to his wife (Pol 1255b19, 1260a10, 1277b24–25; NE 1160b34–35), which is the just treatment she is due (NE 1134b16). He warrants the title of household manager along with her, however, because he supplies provisions (Pol 1277b24–25). This division of labor is natural (NE 1162a20–24). Thus, Aristotle would regard Xenophon’s Ischomachus as exemplary, for he takes responsibility for the household’s “incomings” and directs his wife “to remain indoors and send out those servants whose work is outside, and superintend those who are to work indoors, and to receive the incomings, and distribute so much of them as must be spent, and watch over so much as is to be kept in store, and take care that the sum laid by for a year be not spent in a month.”

Evidently, along with Xenophon, Aristotle thinks that women tend to have the virtue of thrift, which is not stinginess but the ability to use property “with moderation and liberally” (Pol 1265a32–37). This ability is choiceworthy, as is the character it presupposes (Pol 1265a35–38; NE 1120a2–3, 1121b3–10). But Aristotle also evidently thinks that wives can and ought to acquire prudence and justice, for superintending servants well requires, to recall from Chapter 2, instilling as much virtue as possible in them by reward, admonishment, and if necessary punishment. Having only the deliberative element (to bouleutikon) without authority (akuron) (Pol 1260a12–13), perhaps the female (to thēlu) alone would have difficulty ruling servants, but as a wife she acquires authority. And over time, through experience, she develops her deliberative capacity into prudence (phrōnēsis) (NE 1141b8–10, 1142a14–

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35 Xenophon, Oeconomicus, 388–89, 424–25; see also 420–23, 444–45.
36 See also Clark, Aristotle’s Man, 210, and “Aristotle’s Woman,” 182.
37 Thus I propose a variation of the view that a woman’s deliberative capacity lacks authority because it would not prevail, would even be scorned, in the society of men. Another interpretation of Aristotle’s claim is that a woman’s emotions often overrule her reason. W. W. Fortenbaugh dismisses the first view (while noting that it would be “true enough”) and proposes the second in “Aristotle on Slaves and Women,” in Ethics and Politics, vol. 2, Articles on Aristotle, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield, and Richard Sorabji (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1977), 138–39. Saxonhouse, citing Fortenbaugh, notes both views but commits to neither; she points out, however, that kuros does not mean “is superior to” but “has authority over” (“Family, Polity, and Unity” 208). See also Horowitz, “Aristotle and Woman,” 207–12, which gives evidence that Aristotle uses the adjective akuros “both as a political term implying lack of legitimate power or authority and as a biological and medical term implying inadequacy of capacity” (207). Thus, Horowitz concludes, a woman has no right to deliberate because her deliberative faculty is impotent (207, 211).
16, b28–33). Having temperance, justice, and prudence, Aristotle’s ideal woman, like Ischomachus’s wife, not only “is quite capable of looking after the house by herself,” but perhaps, as Ischomachus says of all masters, can be made fit to be a king (Pol 1277a14–15, b16–18).38

**An Educated Being: A Parent?**

Assigning his wife the duties of overseeing their household property and directing their servants, the husband should not charge her also with the full responsibility of raising their children. Aristotle gives at least three reasons why the father should assume in fact the greater share of child rearing.39 The first is the husband’s obligation to treat his wife justly (NE 1134b16). Second, a child needs a leader (ton hēgoumenon) (Pol 1260a31–33), and “the male is by nature fitter to lead [hēgemonikōteron] than the female” (Pol 1259b2). Third, and similarly, raising children is difficult; directing servants to do things (which they know how to do) (Pol 1255b31–35) is easier than minding and teaching (generally intemperate and uncooperative) children (NE 1162a4–7, 1179b32–34; Pol 1260b6–7).40

Accordingly, when Aristotle explicitly mentions the parent-child relationship in the Politics he uses patrikē (paternal rule) to characterize it (1253b10, 1259a38),41 and in the Nicomachean Ethics he refers to rule over children in the household as patrikē (1180a19).

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38 For Xenophon, see Oeconomicus, 414–15, 472–73. Although ruling over nonfree persons does not provide the experience required to be a good (political) ruler (Pol 1277b7–9, 13–16), the experience of being ruled as a free person does (Pol 1277b9–13). Moreover, as shown, the wife does in part rule her husband. The suggestion that in Aristotle’s view women might be capable of ruling does not deny that he thinks they will usually not rule as well as men.

39 See also E. Barker, The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle (New York: Dover, 1959), 398, which states similarly that “there are times when Aristotle seems almost ready to think that the father may suffice for the moral instruction of his children.”

40 Indeed, the task is so difficult it requires help from the regime (NE 1180a14–22, Pol 1337a11–12, 22–27).

41 There is dispute among translators over whether the term at 1253b10 should read patrikē (paternal rule) or tekno-poietikē (parental [rule]). I follow Dreizehnter’s reading because, (1) when enumerating the roles of household members at 1253b6–7, Aristotle lists “master, slave, husband, wife, father, and children”—“mother” does not appear; and (2) Aristotle himself seems to confirm this reading by using patrikē (undisputably) at 1259a38 when again discussing household relationships.
Moreover, he states that “rule over the children is kingly; for the male parent is ruler on the basis of both affection and of seniority” (Pol 1259b10–12).42 Listing the types of rule in the household, he states that “the man rules the child” (Pol 1260a10). He connects “children” and “male parent” or “father” (Pol 1259b16–17, 1260b9) and couples the phrase “rule over children” with “and wife” (Pol 1259a39, 1278b37–38). One argument he gives against elderly men becoming fathers is that they are not able to give their children paternal assistance (tôn paterôn boêtheia) (Pol 1334b40–1335a1).43 Finally, the discussion of the parent-child relationship in the Nicomachean Ethics (1161b16–1162a9), in which Aristotle uses—by contrast—the term “parents” (goneis), is mostly about the love between parents and children.44 Thus, Aristotle supports in his political works a possible social implication of his finding that the male is physiologically the more important reproductive partner.45

Yet Aristotle points out that children are a “common good” (koinon agathon) (NE 1162a28); husband and wife seem to be, as Ischomachus says, “partners [koinōnous] in their children.”46 In one place Aristotle says that household management includes giving “serious attention . . . to the virtue of free persons” (Pol 1259b18, 21, 1259a39–40).47 If a woman is to instill in her children the virtue befitting a free person, then she herself must be educated. In fact, “both children and women must necessarily be educated looking to the regime” (Pol 1260b15–16). But the reason for educating women is the excellence of the city (1260b16–18). A woman’s excellence can contribute directly to that of the city only if she is active in one of the two ways most befitting a free person (Pol 1255b36–37, 1260b18–19). Otherwise, her education can indirectly serve the city through her education of her children, the future partners (cit-

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42 According to Aristotle, a father should be twenty years older than the mother of their children (Pol 1335a28–29, 33–34).
44 This interpretation may account for the assertion that “a father”—not a mother—“may disown a son” (NE 1163b19). On this interpretation, a child, as a kind of student of the father, and not so much of the mother, is more likely to disappoint the father than the mother; also, mothers tend to love their children more than fathers do (NE 1161b26–27, 1168a25–26).
45 Aristotle seems then to be criticizing the general practice in ancient Greece of a male youth being “socialized not through identification with his father, but through the erastes relationship” (Clark, “Aristotle’s Woman,” 186).
46 Xenophon, Oeconomicus, 422–23.
47 This is another reason the husband warrants the title of household manager.
izens, homemakers, and parents) of the regime (1260b19–20).48

Apparently, then, the ideal way of life for a woman resembles the way of life of the “king” bee (GA III.10).49

**A Speaking Being: A Citizen?**

Aristotle’s portrait of woman as wife, household manager, and mother maintains that a woman may have not only temperance, generosity, justice, and prudence but also the capacity for speech. She rules her husband in turn by voicing her opinions—about, perhaps, his deficiencies in virtue, the servants he has acquired, or his child rearing; she directs her servants, explains to the best, and admonishes the worst; and she helps to teach her children. In fact, Aristotle indicates, a household cannot thrive, perhaps even exist, without speech (logos) (Pol 1253a18), by which he means not simply communication but the ability to perceive and to explain or make known (deloun) the good, the bad, the just, and the unjust (1253a14–15). What is more, the city cannot thrive without speech that improves human beings.

Contrary to the claims of Okin and Elshtain, then, Aristotle affirms that women can and should engage in political speech. Aristotle states at the beginning of the Politics that free women and natural slaves do not have the same natural constitution (1252a34–b1); having the ability to deliberate (to bouleutikon) and not simply to understand (sunesis), women have the capacity for their own judgments, not merely right opinion. They are clearly not “methodologically and politically struck dumb by being shunted into a sphere Aristotle declares devoid of significant speech if not speechless.”50

48 See also Saxonhouse, “Family, Polity, and Unity,” 209.
49 By describing queen bees as kings (basileis), Aristotle may be reacting against what Loraux and Keuls identify as a Greek misogynistic literary convention of portraying a good woman as an industrious bee (la femme abeille) (Enfants d’Athena, 82, 108–17; Reign of the Phallus, 230–31). Aristotle in fact explains at length that the kingly queen bees are ladies of leisure: “The bees attend upon the kings—because the bees are generated from the kings”; “they allow the leaders to do no work,” including that of raising the young (GA 760b16–20, 759b7–8).
50 Elshtain, Public Man, 49; see also 47 and 50. See also Okin, Women, 91; Okin gives Politics 1277b as a reference, meaning apparently lines 28–29, in which Aristotle says that true or right opinion is a virtue of the ruled—among which, as has been shown, women are not always or strictly speaking.
If Aristotle finds in women all the makings of citizens, then why does he fail to say so explicitly? According to Loraux, the Hesiodic genre of myths imbued the Greeks, including Aristotle, with images of women that served to justify their political exclusion. Not only are women a different species from men, but they are a plague disrupting their world: by seducing men, women once made and continue to make men sexual, and thus more distinct from the gods and separate from each other. \(^51\) In fact, Aristotle points out that separateness is politically salutary (Pol 1261a16–24) and that the right degree of fraternity is likely to come about among men who have wives (1262b1–2). More to the point, however, Aristotle is reluctant to propose that women be eligible for citizenship for prudential and philosophical, not psychological, reasons. First, by including such a provision in his best regime he might risk not having its other provisions taken seriously. Second, making the proposal explicit might give the appearance of contradicting his claim that women should perform domestic duties. According to Okin, Aristotle’s critique of Plato in Book II of the Politics conspicuously virtually ignores Plato’s proposal for women’s equality because Aristotle has already (in Book I) established women’s domestic role. By contrast, Saxonhouse suggests that Aristotle’s inattention to the proposal indicates his basic endorsement of it. \(^52\) In fact, both explanations are correct. Aristotle’s defense of the household (and therewith of the roles of all its members) neither presupposes the innate inferiority of women nor intends their political subordination. Arguing that women should uphold certain domestic responsibilities implies their political exclusion as much or as little as arguing that men should uphold certain domestic responsibilities implies their political exclusion.

Plato avoids the appearance of contradiction merely by proposing women’s equality in the Republic and their domesticity in the Laws; but he in fact avoids contradiction by revealing in the Laws a stronger commitment than in the Republic to the natural potential of women. The Laws shows that reinstating the private and the role of women in it does not undermine their worth. \(^53\) Aristotle follows

\(^51\) Loraux, Enfants d’Athena, 76–81.
\(^52\) Okin, Women, 85–86; Saxonhouse, “Family, Polity, and Unity,” 209.
\(^53\) See Okin, “Philosopher Queens and Private Wives: Plato on Women in the Family,” in Elstain, ed., The Family in Political Thought, 43, 49. Contrary to Okin’s view, I do not think that the changed role of women in the Laws is a “significant
up by hinting that women might perform both domestic and political roles.

**An Intellectual Being: A Philosopher?**

Women have moral virtue, but are they fit for the highest intellectual activity—theoretical speculation? If so, should they undertake it?

*Femaleness Revisited*

According to Aristotle, to grasp the first principles and proceed to their origin (*NE* 1141a18–19, b2–3), one needs intuitive reason (*nous*) (*NE* 1141a7–8, 19–20) (bestowed, to recall, from outside) as well as moral virtue (mainly so as not to be distracted by appetites and desires) (*NE* 1170a2–4, 1178a1–b7). Evidently, then, at least some women could philosophize. What a woman thinks lacks only the validation that comes from recognition or citizenship (*Pol* 1260a13). And, as Aristotle observes, "virtue and intuitive reason, the sources of excellent activities, do not depend on the possession of power" (*NE* 1176b18–19). In fact, the possession of power, honor, or reputation would seem to distract a human being from contemplation, which is a self-sufficient and thus solitary activity (*NE* 1177a27–34, *Pol* 1325a16–17) sustained only by reason itself (*NE* 1177a20–21). By contrast, one must cultivate recognition. By assigning citizenship only to men, then, Aristotle reduces their opportunity, and increases women’s, to contemplate.

But if, as seems to be the case, men and women have, as far as any human being can figure, the same chance of receiving and developing a constitution fit for theoretical speculation, then what justifies the assignation of politics to men? The answer lies in Aristotle’s understanding of the differences between male and female natures. The male is, to recall once more, by nature better at leading than the female. This suggests that men are more likely than women to covet honor, which results from and facilitates leadership. According to Aristotle, the ambitious attempt noble actions...
(though they are not capable of them), advertise their good luck (expecting to be honored for it), and are ostentatious (NE 1125a28–32). By contrast, those with proper pride (megalopsuchia) attempt few deeds, do not speak about themselves, and are independent (NE 1124b25, 1125a5–6, 1124b31–1125a1). Does Aristotle mean to remind us, by this juxtaposition of natures, of the active male and the passive female natures? If so, if he thinks that women tend to need others less, or need fewer others, than men, if he thinks that women tend to be morally self-sufficient, then he seems to envision a connection between female and philosophical natures.54

Put another way, a female virtue seems to be, not the capacity to resist stoically the lure of the public, but an absence of desire—indeed a disinclination—to participate; abstention from public participation does not pain the female nature (NE 1104b4–9, 1102b27–28). As Aristotle says of the virtuous person, “such a person wishes to spend time with himself, for he does so with pleasure” (NE 1166a23–24).55

Other differences Aristotle detects between male and female natures further suggest a connection between contemplation and femaleness: the female’s natural (that is, civilized) manner of life is sedentary and she is physically weaker than the male (GA 729b12, 775a30–35, 14, 19–20; Rh 1361a2–3); she is also more apt to learn, less simple, more retentive in memory, more wakeful, and more difficult to rouse to action, and she needs less food; by contrast, males are more spirited, wilder, more simple, more ready to help,  

54 There is, however, debate on whether megalopsuchia is a virtue proper to the philosopher. For arguments that it is, see R.-A. Gauthier, Magnanimité: L’idéal de la grandeur dans la philosophie païenne et dans la théologie chrétienne (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1951), 56–117. For opposing arguments, see D. A. Rees, “‘Magnanimity’ in the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics,” in Untersuchungen zur Eudemischen Ethik, ed. Paul Moraux and Dieter Harlfinger (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 231–43, as recommended by Carnes Lord in Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 201 n. 25; Lord agrees with Rees.

55 Saxonhouse, “Eros and the Female in Greek Political Thought,” Political Theory 12, no. 1 (1984), suggests that Plato and Aristotle associate philosophy and the female by associating “eros . . . with creativity and the feminine” (22, 24). She points out that “the beautiful itself,” like a child, is in their view engendered; the language associated with philosophy is that of reproduction. The female is “erotic, desirous of giving birth, pregnant with life, and loves what she has created” (24). Thus, Socrates is androgynous; see 13, 17, 19, 21, 25, and also Clark, “Aristotle’s Woman,” 187, 190. Although this view may hold for Plato, Aristotle links philosophy not with the feminine principles of creativity and birth but with privacy.
and more courageous (HA 608a21–28, 33–b18). Moreover, though Aristotle in another passage lists self-control (sōphrosunē) among the moral excellences of both the man and the woman, he identifies (again) courage as a male virtue but industry (philergia) as a female one. Women at their best, however, do not love all work, only unservile or liberal work (aneu aneleutherias), work becoming a lady (or a gentleman) (Rh 1361a3–7). Thus, although the peculiarly male virtues of strength, fitness, and courage serve the community, a community is not fully happy unless it secures the female virtues as well (Rh 1361a1–3, 7–11).

Finally, suggesting once again that female and philosophical virtues intersect, Aristotle repeats Sophocles’ declaration that “silence is a woman’s crown” (Pol 1260a30).

In short, although Aristotle nowhere implies that one gender is more likely than the other to receive intuitive reason, he suggests that, if possessed, it is facilitated more by a female than by a male nature. The inclination to privacy, quietude, or a “passive” way of life is both a female and a philosophical one. The female nature does not, unlike the male nature, resist the quiet life essential for thought. Aristotle is not, then, as Clark contends, “disposed to regard femaleness as a privative rather than a positive attribute”; femaleness is positive because it prefers privacy.

The Woman’s Role Revisited

Some women may be capable of philosophy, and female nature may even be conducive to it, but ought women to philosophize? To find out, one might consider whether the social arrangement Aristotle recommends encourages women to philosophize. First, not only do household activities cultivate the moral virtues needed for

56 On the other hand, Aristotle includes in this passage adjectives that depict the female as more emotional, cunning, and deceitful than the male; at least the first would tend to work against her contemplating, but perhaps no more and maybe less than would the male’s more restless nature.

57 See John Henry Freese’s note on aneleutheria, in Aristotle: The “Art” of Rhetoric (Loeb Classical Library, 1926), 50 n. a.

58 For a different explanation of this quotation, see Saxonhouse, “Family, Polity, and Unity,” 209; for relevant commentary, see Fortenbaugh, “Aristotle on Slaves and Women,” 138–39.

59 Aristotle’s Man, 207. That Aristotle thinks also that women may be suited for political life does not undermine this contention; it underscores his view that men and women manifest combinations of maleness and femaleness, are drawn variously to publicity and to privacy.
philosophy, they seem also to do so better than political activities in that the latter are more diverse, demanding, and so distracting. Moreover, the philosopher does not need many other human beings (NE 1178a20–28, b1–7). Second, it is good for a household to have servants because it is barbaric to treat women like natural slaves (Pol 1252b5–6, 1252a34–b1); women should have time to satisfy their desire to work in a way befitting a free person.60 Furthermore, having the assistance of both her husband and the regime’s educational programs (Pol 1337a11–12, 22–27) in raising her children, the silence that so becomes a woman and fosters philosophy could be hers. Thus, in addition to her private nature, life in a well-constituted household, like a queen bee’s, facilitates a woman’s intellectual activity.61

One might point out, however, that according to Aristotle philosophical inquiry must begin with opinions, which a woman in the household does not have access to. This problem might suggest, on the one hand, that women ought to be citizens. On the other hand, Aristotle says that philosophy should begin with reputable opinions (Top 100a29–30). These may be found among citizens but are found among the wise (Top 100b21–28) and therefore (ideally) in the liberal arts,62 which can be voluntarily pursued in private. Thus, Aristotle hints how women should be educated—a question he raises by declaring that they should be educated (Pol 1260b15–16), but one he does not explicitly answer. The possibility that some women should undertake theoretical activity also helps explain Aristotle’s view that they are half of the free persons of a city; as only wives, household managers, and parents, women would contribute only indirectly and partially their share of the noble actions for which the political partnership exists (Pol 1281a2–8).

Aristotle leaves no doubt that men would contribute their share

60 To recall from Chapter 2, Aristotle’s main justification for natural slavery is to provide free persons (the man and the woman) with the opportunity for politics and philosophy (Pol 1255b35–37). It is perhaps no accident that the first mention of philosophy in the Politics occurs in a discussion of the household.

61 That Aristotle recommends that women not exert their minds when pregnant (Pol 1335b16–18) indicates at least that he assumes they can exert them, and perhaps that he thinks they should when not pregnant—which in a good regime, with laws limiting childbirth (Pol 1265b6–7, 1335b22–23), would be most of their lives.

to the best regime, but he leaves some doubt that their contributions would be philosophical; after all, they spend their youth as soldiers, their middle years as public officials, their late middle years as fathers, and their last years as priests \((Pol\ 1331b4-5, 1329a2-17, 1332b35-42, 1335a28-34, b34-37)\). On the other hand, Aristotle seems to suggest that legislators should promote the best way of life by allowing a choice between serving the city in the capacity of either office holder or philosopher \((Pol\ 1324a29-35, 1325b14-21, 27-32)\). In short, he leaves open the possibility that the best regime would include male philosophers for the same reason he leaves open the possibility that it would include female citizens; not even if all human beings were either purely female or purely male could it be established a priori who should philosophize and who should govern.

**Feminist Claims Revisited**

According to Elshtain and Okin, Aristotle derived his view of the role of women in society from his own culture and sought to justify the status quo. This accounts for his depiction of woman as subsumed and defined by the household. As Okin puts it, “Aristotle’s assumption that woman is defined by her reproductive function and her other duties within the household permeates everything he has to say about her.” In Aristotle’s view, she continues, “women’s work is clearly regarded as in no way compatible with the life

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63 I agree with P. A. Vander Waerdt that Aristotle regards politics as unleisured but disagree with him that Aristotle thinks all citizens in the best regime would be released from politics by the permanent rule of a king; see “Kingship and Philosophy in Aristotle’s Best Regime,” *Phronesis* 30, no. 3 (1985), 249–73. Aristotle makes clear that in the best regime citizens in their later prime would rule, implying that nature makes this arrangement fair: “Nature has provided the distinction [between rulers and ruled] by making that which is the same by type have a younger and an older element, of which it is proper of the former to be ruled and the latter to rule. No one chafes at being ruled on the basis of age or considers himself superior, particularly when he is going to recover his contribution when he attains the age to come. In one sense, therefore, it must be asserted that the same persons rule and are ruled, but in another sense different persons” \((Pol\ 1332b36-42, 1333a2-3)\). The only way to reconcile this with Aristotle’s advocacy of the philosophical life is to infer that ruling extends to making philosophical contributions to the regime. For other arguments against Vander Waerdt’s thesis, see Chapter 5, “Political Laws: Offices and Entitlement,” pp. 119–31.
of excellence.” 64 Elshtain and Okin agree that Aristotle, by absorbing woman completely within the household, “precludes the possibility for female self-transformation over time” or provides for “the obliteration of the woman’s [personality].” 65 Their conclusions impute to Aristotle not only an uncritical mind but a belief in a modern public-private dichotomy and a rigid determinism.

One should note, however, that there is no textual evidence for the claim that Aristotle is simply trying to justify the status quo. 66 He never holds up the Athenian household or women as models, whereas often in the Politics he illustrates his points with historical examples. Apparently he did not find laudable traditional practices concerning women. It is not the case, then, as Elshtain implies, that Aristotle’s idealism permeates only half his political theory, that his (alleged) “ideological justifications of a way of life” are separable from his “logic of explanation (Aristotle on politics as a form of action).” In her view, this implicit division allows and justifies disregarding particular dimensions of Aristotle’s theory (such as his views on women and slavery) “without so eroding the overall structure of the theory that one’s favored alternatives are dropped.” 67 In fact, since Aristotle’s idealism permeates the whole of his political theory, since his object is not to defend the practices of his culture but to propose better ones, it is, for the purpose of understanding his political proposals, beside the point whether, as Keuls claims, “Aristotle . . . like other Athenian men, had little insight into the reality of the activities in the women’s quarters.”

Neither knowledge nor ignorance of the (alleged) fact “that the typical women’s part of the house was a sweatshop, and a labor ethos was instilled in women from childhood on” would have

64 Okin, Women, 86, 89; see also 73–96 and Elshtain, Public Man, 41–51, “Aristotle,” 52–56. Among the difficulties with arguing that Aristotle believes “the female’s primary function is reproduction” (Okin, Women, 81) is that he recommends that polities limit by law the number of children per couple and legalize abortion as a means to compliance with the law (Pol 1265b6–7, 1335b22–25).
65 Respectively, Elshtain, Public Man, 41 (see also “Aristotle,” 55), and Okin, Women, 94.
66 Similarly, “it would be a mistake to think that Aristotle’s view is simply the creation of a prejudiced male” (Fortenbaugh, “Aristotle on Slaves and Women,” 139).
67 Public Man, 51, 53.
prevented him from speculating about what a woman’s way of life ought to be like.68

As noted at the outset of the chapter, the widespread feminist interpretation also assumes wrongly that Aristotle associates freedom with the public and unfreedom and the household with the private. In so assuming, Elsh tain and Okin draw the wrong conclusions from Aristotle’s teleological understanding of the world.69 Simply, they see that in Aristotle’s view nature assigns woman a domestic function and conclude that he thereby regards her as subhuman.

Furthermore, although Aristotle believes that nature gives every living being a purpose, potential, or developmental destination, one must keep in mind that he finds in every class exceptions and aberrations,70 and that he believes a being’s environment can either foster or impede the realization of its potential. Thus, no entire class and no individual being is completely determined; or rather, the real potential of any being is the end that being would reach in the best environment imaginable. To support her thesis, Okin, like Elshtain, must maintain that Aristotle is inconsistent, that “in spite of his expressed beliefs in the power of the environment to shape and alter the human character and abilities, he is no more interested in applying these beliefs to women than in applying them to slaves.”71 In this and the previous chapter I have sought to show just how consistently he does apply these beliefs.

A point of clarification is perhaps in order: by suggesting that women could be citizens and philosophers, Aristotle is not advocating matriarchy. He is not promoting maternal thinking as the basis for political consciousness (as some contemporary social fem-

68 Keuls, *Reign of the Phallus*, 124. As Saxonhouse points out, “rather than see the philosophers as apologists for their societies, as spokesmen for a political order that suppressed and segregated women, we must see them as critics and analysts, discovering for the Athenians the foundations of their society and discoursing on the adequacy as well as the inadequacy of those foundations” (“Eros and the Female,” 9; see also 24–25).

69 An understanding that Okin calls Aristotle’s “functionalism” (*Women*, 78) and Elshtain, more accurately, his “teleological determinism” (*Public Man*, 42; see also “Aristotle,” 54). Elshtain makes explicit the mistaken assumption about the nature of the public and the private at *Public Man*, 45, 47, 49, and “Aristotle,” 52, 53, 56, 65.


71 *Women*, 93.
inists, such as Elshtain, advocate); nor is he recommending the politicization of female consciousness (as other contemporary feminists, such as Mary Dietz, urge). Nor is Aristotle suggesting, as Clark claims, “that dominance relationships of the kind embodied either in patriarchal or matriarchal culture can be seen as peripheral to the central concerns of human society.” For not only are both male and female virtues invaluable to the household and the city, so is their rule. Moreover, Aristotle teaches us that both male and female virtues should rule within our souls; for our own well-being, we should try most of all to achieve within a dynamic equilibrium between the public and the private.

72 For a discussion of the goals of feminism as understood by some contemporary feminist scholars, see Mary Dietz, “Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking,” Political Theory, 13, no. 1 (1985), 19–37, especially 33–34.

73 “Aristotle’s Woman, 191.