

Aristotle's concept of women

Can we call Aristotle's concept of women misogynistic?

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¹ Picture 1: a picture of a statue of Aristotle in Zagreb (capital city of Croatia).

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Chapter 1: Aristotle's concept of women: what's the problem?

'There is no doubt that Aristotle's texts are misogynist; he thought that women were inferior to men, and he said so explicitly.'²

In the article 'Feminist Philosophy' in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Charlotte Witt and Lisa Shapiro describe Aristotle's texts as a misogynist. The reason the article gives us for this is that 'he (Aristotle) thought that women were inferior to men, and he said so explicitly.'³ The first and foremost thing we could ask ourselves is why it would even be important what Aristotle thought of women. He was a philosopher that lived more than two thousand years ago. Maryanna Cline Horowitz gives us a reason for this. She mentions in her 'Aristotle and Woman' that the view of women in Aristotle's works has had a long-lasting effect on the treatment of women in Western societies.⁴ One of such influences is the description of the female body as 'a departure from the norm of the male body and deducing a characterisation of femaleness by lack of maleness, which finds its origin not in women's self-deprecation but in the embryology of Aristotle and his followers.'⁵

What was Aristotle's view on women? Of course, we can never know for sure, we can only hope to reconstruct his opinion through his works. We are left to our own interpretation. As if that isn't hard enough already, there is also the fact that Aristotle doesn't write that much about women in his works. Richard Mulgan stated in his 'Aristotle and the political rule of Women' from 1994, that after more than two decades of debate there still wasn't a scholarly consensus on the substance of Aristotle's views on women's proper social and political role.⁶ Mulgan tells us this is the case because Aristotle's references to women are brief and imprecise. Before the 1970's Aristotle was interpreted as a 'humane family man'. In this interpretation, Aristotle was seen as someone who regarded monogamy highly and argued for a traditional family of husband and wife. The advocates of this interpretation

² Witt & Shapiro, 2023, Chapter 1.1: Explicit Statements of Misogyny in Philosophical Texts.

³ Witt & Shapiro, 2023, Chapter 1.1: Explicit Statements of Misogyny in Philosophical Texts.

⁴ Horowitz, 1976, p. 184.

⁵ Horowitz, 1976, p. 185.

⁶ Mulgan, 1994, p. 179 – 202.

mainly focused on his description of the mutual and reciprocal friendship between husband and wife. After the 1970's a new interpretation came into play which calls out Aristotle's 'misogyny.' According to the advocates of this interpretation, Aristotle mainly emphasises women's inferiority when he writes about them, and this they find to make his texts misogynistic. Mulgan also describes a reaction to this trend: more recently, readers have concluded that they could see Aristotle in a more positive light and see him as a 'female sympathizer' and call his work 'crypto-feminist.' The advocates of this interpretation argue that the relationship between husband and wife that Aristotle sketches is one of mutual reciprocity rather than subordination. They emphasise the relative equality of women to men, which can be read in the different statements of Aristotle about women's place in society.⁷ Mulgan's article gives us reason to think that Witt and Shapiro were a bit too short-sighted in calling Aristotle's texts misogynistic. This leads us to the following question, which this paper will try to answer: Can we call Aristotle's concept of women misogynistic?

The concept of Misogyny

Before we can figure out if Aristotle's texts can indeed be called misogynistic, it is important to clarify the definition of misogyny we will use in our research. Misogyny is a broad and somewhat vague concept. In the Oxford Dictionary of Gender Studies, it is described as followed: 'The contempt for or dislike of Women.'⁸ The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology tells us that misogyny translates to 'hatred of women'. In this dictionary, we read that Kate Millet brought the idea of misogyny to the front in 'Sexual Politics' (1970), where she provided a broad theoretical base for radical feminism. She argued that patriarchal power creates a sexist society and that sexual politics grounded in misogyny result in women's oppression both within the private realm and within social institutions such as the class system and the education system.⁹

Samantha Pinson Wrisley says that the definition of misogyny is difficult to form. She tells us in her PhD-Thesis 'Feminist Theory and the Problem of Misogyny' that there is a

⁷ Mulgan, 1994, p. 179 - 183.

⁸ Griffin, 2017, "misogyny".

⁹ Scott, 2014, "misogyny".

'lack of clarity' about what misogyny is.¹⁰ According to her this stems from a general aversion to even look at the concept of misogyny. She mentions that Misogyny and sexism are often used in the same sentence. Wrisley argues that misogyny should be broadly understood as a negative affective or emotional orientation towards women as a group. Sexism should be understood as the institutionalized expression of individual misogyny.^{11 12}

We now have a baseline about what misogyny is, but we should make clear when a concept made out of textual sources can be called misogynistic. Witt and Shapiro use the fact that Aristotle describes women as inferior to men as an argument to call Aristotle a misogynist.¹³

If we look at Wrisley's remarks about the difference between sexism and misogyny, we should opt to work with the term 'misogyny' in this paper, since Aristotle and his works cannot be studied as an institution. Furthermore, the notion of negative affective and emotional orientation is difficult to study in texts. Because of this, we will focus on the scope of his remarks: do they encompass women as a whole and do they implicate women's inferiority to men or are they aimed at some women in particular?

The definition of misogyny that we will use in this paper, will be as followed: a concept can be called misogynistic if it systematically describes women as a group inferior to men. 'Systematically' should be added, because if a text entails just one remark about the inferiority of women to men, then we cannot call the text as a whole misogynist, nor the author of this text.

¹⁰ Wrisley, 2023.

¹¹ As examples Wrisley mentions the standard pay-gap for women and the systematic bad medical care women seem to receive.

¹² Wrisley, 2023.

¹³ Witt & Shapiro, 2023, Chapter 1.1: Explicit Statements of Misogyny in Philosophical Texts.

Status quaestionis

There have been and are a lot of authors who discussed the subject of women in Aristotle's works and how we can interpret these remarks. Maryanne Cline Horowitz states that Aristotle defines the female as a mutilated male. Horowitz says that Aristotle gives us several definitions of females and that they all have one thing in common: women and females are defined by their incapacities. Horowitz's definitions are mainly biological, she sometimes digresses to a political or psychological notion of women, but doesn't say a lot about women in these contexts. Her assessment of Aristotle's opinion is clear: his works are misogynistic.¹⁴

Richard Mulgan gives us a useful overview of the debate on the interpretation of Aristotle's writings about women in his time. He focuses mostly on the interpretation of Aristotle and not too much on how we can define the phenomenon of women in Aristotle's works. We've already discussed his article in the introduction of this paper. To summon his paper; he tells us that there are roughly three interpretations of Aristotle. In the earlier days, he was seen as a 'humane family man,' he was seen as an author and philosopher who deeply valued the morals of a family and who wrote what he wrote about women because of this. The second interpretation of Aristotle is of Aristotle as a misogynist. And the third one, which was a more recent reaction to the second interpretation, argued that Aristotle could be seen as a crypto-feminist.¹⁵

For a political description of Aristotle's ideas on women, we could look at William W. Fortenbaugh's 'Aristotle on slaves and women.' One of the chapters of his book from 2006 – in which he delves deeper into the political role of slaves and women in the ideal city-state according to Aristotle – seeks to explain the place of women and slaves in Aristotle's envisioned society. He doesn't necessarily give us a definition of what women are or are supposed to be in Aristotle's opinion.¹⁶

An interesting and recent work is that of Sophia M. Connell from 2021, called 'Aristotle on Women'. In her methodology she describes that the purpose of her work is 'to

¹⁴ Horowitz, 1976, p. 183 – 213.

¹⁵ Mulgan, 1994, p. 179 – 202.

¹⁶ Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 241 – 247.

counter the view that Aristotle, in stark contrast with Plato in his *Republic*, thought of women as morally and intellectually inferior to men.¹⁷ She claims that Aristotle's statements about women in his *'Politics'* have been misunderstood: Aristotle does not view women as inferior beings but describes women's nature as one that leaves more room for cooperation and harmony. These are traits that he values very highly, and they leave room for women to partake in philosophical activities.¹⁸

An even more recent publication is Marguerite Deslauriers' book dating from 2022: *'Aristotle on Sexual Difference: Metaphysics, Biology, and Politics.'* In this book, she explains to us Aristotle's theory on sexual difference through different categories: metaphysics, biology, and politics. She argues that Aristotle saw sexual difference as a good thing, that serves a telic end.¹⁹

Methodology

According to Richard Mulgan the reason that it is so difficult to figure out what Aristotle thought about women, is the fact that Aristotle's remarks on women are 'brief and imprecise.'²⁰ There isn't an abundance of passages to choose from and it is difficult to pick out which works should be studied. We will select the passages that we will use to give an idea of Aristotle's view on women based on the secondary literature that we touch upon in this paper. This means that we will look at the Greek passages that are often used in papers about Aristotle's view on women. We hope to place ourselves in the midst of the debate and focus on the pieces that have shaped this debate. We will look at the different researches that have been done about women in Aristotle's writings and figure out if they can help us with answering the main question of this thesis.

It is important to be as critical and objective as possible toward what we read in this paper. This can be achieved by trying to stay as close to the Greek texts as possible and to try to read them without modern-day values. In this research, it remains crucial that we are

¹⁷ Connell, 2021, p. 1.

¹⁸ Connell, 2021, p. 59.

¹⁹ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 1 – 206.

²⁰ Mulgan, 1994, p. 179.

aware that we are not analysing Aristotle's own concept of women, but rather making a concept of women ourselves based on his writings. It is also crucial that as much of the information from secondary literature that we use for our conclusion is backed up by primary literature, such as quotes and passages from Aristotle's own work. This thesis aims to give its reader a clear view of Aristotle's view on women and whether we can call this view misogynistic based on our definition of misogyny that is described in this first chapter. We will try to answer our question: 'Can we call Aristotle's concept of women misogynistic?' by focusing on three categories in which we can study women in Aristotle's work. Chapter 2 will focus on the biological concept of women in Aristotle's work. Chapter 3 will focus on the psychological concept of women and chapter 4 will focus on the political concept of women. We have chosen these categories based on what is discussed in secondary literature and which passages are mostly cited by Aristotle when discussing women. Aristotle talks about women mainly in these three contexts. It is helpful to first see what he says about women in these contexts specifically before we assess what Aristotle says about women in general. Using these three categories as coat hangers will give us guidance to form a concept of women and argue if this concept is misogynistic. In Chapter 5, we will formulate a final answer based on our findings in the former chapters.

Chapter 2: Women are wood, men are carpenters and babies are tables: Aristotle's Biological concept of women.

In this chapter, we formulate a biological concept of women based on Aristotle's writings. The first that needs some explaining is the discrepancy between the terms 'woman' and 'female'. First, let's delve into both terms. With women, we speak about female humans and the Greek word γυνή that Aristotle mostly uses to speak about women. By females we mean to refer to female animals. Aristotle talks about 'the female' which is mostly a term to characterise female animals or a term to describe the female essence. The Greek word Aristotle uses for this is θήλυ. We will make sure to keep a clear separation between the two terms and to signify which one Aristotle is referring to. In this thesis, we are forming a concept of women and not females. It is, however, desirable to talk about women as well as females in forming a biological concept of women. This is because one might argue that Aristotle projects certain character traits that in his view are essential to women unto female animals and vice versa. This is another question that I touch upon in this chapter. Can we make a comparison between what Aristotle says about human women and animal females? In this chapter, I will first focus on what the two sexes are and their biological differences. Secondly, I will investigate the 'biological character traits' that Aristotle seems to assign to both sexes and their relation to his theory on them and determine whether we can use these traits for our concept of women.

Aristotle's sexual difference

In 2022 Marguerite Deslauriers published her book 'Aristotle on Sexual Difference: Metaphysics, Biology, Politics.' In this book, she wrote a great deal about sexual differences in Aristotle's works. She doesn't seek to form a conclusion to the question of how we should interpret Aristotle's works. She seeks to explain his theory on sexual difference. Her opinion is that Aristotle thinks that the woman is inferior to the man, but that Aristotle doesn't view sexual difference as a negative thing. On the contrary, he views the separation of the sexes as

a positive thing.²¹ In her book, Deslauriers notes that Aristotle deviates from his predecessors by attempting to address this question about the sexes through the framework of his causal theory.²² Aristotle sets out the facts of sexual difference as he understands it, thereby giving us the first systematic account of sexual difference as a natural phenomenon. Deslauriers tells us that many of Aristotle's predecessors are convinced that women are simply inferior to men, and more strongly: that women have a bad influence on men.²³ In Aristotle's philosophy, according to Deslauriers, women are inferior to men, but they are valuable to men and the human species: 'Sexual difference is a feature that enhances a species in biological terms and promotes full human flourishing in the polis.'²⁴ It might be difficult to grasp what Deslauriers means when she says that Aristotle sees sexual difference as a positive thing, even though he describes the woman as inferior to the man. Deslauriers statement becomes more agreeable when one reads her reasoning behind this statement.

Deslauriers says that according to Aristotle sexual difference is a difference of matter, not a difference of essence. Men and women belong to the same genus, just as male and female animals do.²⁵ Genus is a term we can use here as a synonym for 'species.' What Deslauriers is saying here is that men and women do belong to the same species, but there is difference in their matter. This is something we can take into consideration for our biological concept of women: they are of the same genus as men. Aristotle, according to Deslauriers gives sexual difference two purposes. The first one is procreation, or as Deslauriers describes it 'to generate another animal like themselves.'²⁶ Deslauriers continues: 'The second aim that is achieved by means of sexual difference is the separation of the efficient causal principle in

²¹ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 259.

²² Deslauriers, 2022, p. 58.

²³ Only Plato seems to be the exception to this viewpoint, according to Deslauriers. Plato treats women and men as equals in his 'Republic'. He doesn't treat them as such in his other works, like for instance the 'Timaeus', but that is a whole other story. (Deslauriers, 2022, p. 58.)

²⁴ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 59.

²⁵ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 149.

²⁶ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 150.

generation from the material causal principle.²⁷ This is also the marker with which Deslauriers defines male and female: in procreation the female can be defined as the material cause and the male can be defined as the efficient and formal cause.²⁸ We can see an example of this in Aristotle's description of conception. The male brings the form to the embryo and the woman the matter. Deslauriers argues that the female again can be seen as inferior to the male, because matter is inferior to form, but that the existence of women and females is not a bad, but a good thing. Because the existence of females makes this separation of the material causal principle in procreation from the efficient causal principle possible.²⁹ Defining the woman as a material causal principle in the context of procreation can be backed by the following passages from Aristotle's 'Generation of Animals.' This work of Aristotle is described in the preface of the Loeb edition as the 'first systematic treatise on animal reproduction and embryology.'³⁰

τὸ γὰρ θῆλυ ὡσπερ ἄρρεν ἐστὶ πεπηρωμένον καὶ τὰ καταμήνια σπέρμα,
οὐ καθαρὸν δέ· ἐν γὰρ οὐκ ἔχει μόνον· τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρχήν.³¹

The reason for this is that the female is like a maimed male, and the menstrual fluid is seed, but (it is) not pure, because it misses only one thing: the principle of the soul.³²

In the passage here above, Aristotle is talking about how it is possible that the female sometimes gives birth to a boy and sometimes gives birth to a girl. One thing that Aristotle describes as different between females and males is their seed. The menstruation fluids of females are described as seed without the principle of the soul. This 'soulless sperm' doesn't contribute to the forming of the embryo's soul. Maryanne Cline Horowitz has written about

²⁷ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 150.

²⁸ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 71 – 72.

²⁹ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 150.

³⁰ Peck, 1942, p. viii.

³¹ Arist. *Gen. an.* 737a28 – 30.

³² This and all other translations of the Greek passages are of my own hand.

the difference in seed as well. In her 'Aristotle and Women' she adds that Aristotle can uphold male superiority in this way, since 'the spiritual holds a higher place in the hierarchy than material does.'³³ This is plausible because, on the one hand, it fits in well with the rest of the description of women: Aristotle seems to always describe women as inferior to men, and, on the other hand, it fits in well with his hierarchy of the causal principles in which the material cause is inferior.

εἰ οὖν τὸ ἄρρεν ἐστὶν ὡς κινουῦν καὶ ποιοῦν, τὸ δὲ θῆλυ [ἢ θῆλυ] ὡς παθητικόν, εἰς τὴν τοῦ ἄρρενος γονὴν τὸ θῆλυ ἂν συμβάλλοιτο οὐ γονὴν ἀλλ' ὕλην.³⁴

Thus, if the male serves as the effective and active, and the female, (qua female), (serves) as the passive, the female would not contribute sperm to the sperm of the male but material.

In this passage, Aristotle describes the female as passive. We can use this for our biological concept of female; she is described as passive, whereas the male is active. This is elaborated further by Aristotle with an interesting metaphor.

ἀλλὰ μὴν τό γε θῆλυ, ἢ θῆλυ, παθητικόν, τὸ δ' ἄρρεν, ἢ ἄρρεν, ποιητικόν καὶ ὄθεν ἢ ἀρχὴ τῆς κινήσεως. ὥστε ἂν ληφθῆ τὰ ἄκρα ἐκατέρων, ἢ τὸ μὲν ποιητικόν καὶ κινουῦν, τὸ δὲ παθητικόν καὶ κινούμενον, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τούτων τὸ γιγνόμενον ἔν, ἀλλ' ἢ οὕτως ὡς ἐκ τοῦ τέκτονος καὶ ξύλου ἢ κλίνη, ἢ ὡς ἐκ τοῦ κηροῦ καὶ τοῦ εἴδους ἢ σφαῖρα.³⁵

Surely the female, qua female, (is) passive, but the male, qua male, is active and from him (comes) the principle of movement. And so if the extremities of both are being considered, one active and moving, and the other passive and moved, the thing that

³³ Horowitz, 1976, p. 193.

³⁴ Arist. *Gen. an.* 729a30 – 33.

³⁵ Arist. *Gen. an.* 729b12 – 21.

originates from them, only does (ἐν) in the way in which a bed comes from the carpenter and wood, or a ball from the wax and the form.

The first word that Aristotle uses that may be difficult to grasp is ἡ, oftentimes translated as 'qua'. In this excerpt we may read 'qua female' as 'a female considered as female.' The addition of 'qua' means that the female and male are studied here as just that. With 'qua' Aristotle means that which is essential to a certain term. We may think of women as people with long hair. Aristotle would argue that long hair isn't something that is essential to a woman and thus does not belong to qua woman.

Horowitz says that this passage tells us that we can find Aristotle's reasons as to why the separation of the sexes is necessary in nature.³⁶ In this passage, Aristotle illustrates the role of both men and women in procreation. The role of the men is active, and the role of the woman is passive. Aristotle once again explains how this works and illustrates it with an example that fits perfectly in his metaphysics and theory of the Craftsman with the example of the man as the carpenter (the efficient cause), the woman as wood (material cause), and the babies as the table. In the context of procreation and conception the women can be described as the material cause. The description of men as the efficient cause, might cause some confusing as the sculptor of a figure is often described as the moving cause and not the efficient cause. In Sedley's 'Creationism and its critics in antiquity', however, we read that in nature the four causes are much more difficult to view separate from each other than they are in the craft analogy.³⁷ According to Sedley, the moving cause in nature belongs to the father of the babies, just like it does to the sculptor of the sculptures.

³⁶ Horowitz, 1976, p. 196.

³⁷ Sedley, 2007, p. 174.

Horowitz mentions that Aristotle describes the woman as an 'impotent male.'³⁸

Ἔοικε δὲ καὶ τὴν μορφὴν γυναικὶ παῖς, καὶ ἔστιν ἢ γυνὴ ὡσπερ ἄρρεν ἄγονον·
ἀδυναμία γάρ τιτι τὸ θῆλυ
ἔστι τῷ μὴ δύνασθαι πέττειν ἐκ τῆς τροφῆς σπέρμα τῆς ὑστάτης³⁹

But a boy looks like a woman regarding appearance, but a woman is like an impotent male. For it is because of a certain incapacity that she is female, that (the female) is not capable to ripen sperm from the final stage with the nutrition.

In Horowitz's notes, she says that ἄρρεν ἄγονον may be rendered 'impotent male' or 'infertile male.' At first, the translation 'infertile' seems more plausible because with impotence it would imply that the woman has an active role in conceiving, which she doesn't in Aristotle's biological theory. But if we look at the sentences after this statement 'impotent' seems a better solution because Aristotle talks about women's incapacity to produce potent seed. Which makes 'impotent' a perfect translation of 'ἄγονον'.

According to Horowitz the passage implies that because in procreation male contributes to form and the female contributes matter, Aristotle identifies maleness with form and femaleness with matter.⁴⁰

Another difficulty with this passage is the translation of 'μορφὴν.' It's translated here as 'appearance'. It is, however, tempting to translate it here with 'matter' because that seems most logical in his biological theory of sexual difference. As the difference between men and women seems to be a difference of matter and not of essence. Deslauriers uses to term 'μορφὴ' to describe that sexual difference is not a difference in essence (εἶδος) but a difference in matter (μορφὴν).⁴¹ The translation 'matter' would suffice as well in this context.

Horowitz asks us if the diligence in society (women providing food and clothes and men going out to discuss politics and to study) has something to do with the division of

³⁸ Horowitz, 1976, p. 192.

³⁹ Arist. *Gen. an.* 728a 17 – 20.

⁴⁰ Horowitz, 1976, p. 196.

⁴¹ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 149.

matter and form linked to the sexes.⁴² This question cannot be answered easily. We could argue that Aristotle suffers from a confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is a concept that describes people's 'tendency to process information by looking for or interpreting information that is consistent with their existing beliefs.'⁴³ In this case his views on women in his time would be his 'existing beliefs' and the processed information would be what he sees in female animals. It is something that is quite plausible, but it is a question that deserves a thesis all on its own. Thereby, the answer to this question is not necessary for figuring out our concept of woman in Aristotle's work, it just gives us an origin for his view on women.

Biological character traits

Next to Aristotle's theoretical take on women and male and female, we can place the following passage from 'History of Animals', a book in which over 500 species of animals are described.⁴⁴ In this passage Aristotle doesn't really try to explain his biological theory but merely provides us with biological traits, that he himself calls 'mental characteristics' of the two sexes.⁴⁵

Ἀθυμότερα δὲ τὰ θήλεα πάντα
τῶν ἀρρένων πλὴν ἄρκτου καὶ παρδάλεως· τούτων δ' ἡ θήλεια
δοκεῖ εἶναι ἀνδρειότερα.⁴⁶

The females are overall less fiery than the males, except for a bear and a panther, of these the females seem to be fierier.

In this piece, Aristotle sums up that the females are ἀθυμότερα. This word can be translated as 'less passionate', or 'calmer'. 'Calmer' seems a positive translation. 'Less passionate', is a

⁴² Horowitz, 1976, p. 212.

⁴³ Luebering & Casad, 2023, "confirmation bias".

⁴⁴ We can read this in the introduction of 'History of animals' on website from Loeb Classical Library.

⁴⁵ Arist. *Hist. an.* 608a22.

⁴⁶ Arist. *Hist. an.* 608a33 – 35.

more negative translation of the word. The latter translation seems more fitting because, θυμός is a positive word, which is negated here. It is interesting that Aristotle mentions that female bears and panthers do not match this category. It could be that panthers and bears are considered very dangerous animals in the first place, which is why Aristotle doesn't feel the need to mention any difference based on the sex of said animals.

Ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις γένεσι τὰ θήλεα
μαλακώτερα καὶ κακουργότερα καὶ ἥττον ἀπλᾶ καὶ
προπετέστερα καὶ περὶ τῶν τέκνων τροφήν φροντιστικώτερα,
τὰ δ' ἄρρενα ἐναντίως θυμωδέστερα καὶ ἀγριώτερα καὶ
ἀπλούστερα καὶ ἥττον ἐπίβουλα. ⁴⁷

But within other kinds, the females are weaker and more malicious and more complicated, less contemplative, and more caring about rearing the young. But the males on the other hand are more passionate and wilder and simpler and less treacherous.

Aristotle continues. He mentions that within other kinds of animals the females are milder, (μαλακώτερα), more malicious (κακουργότερα), more complicated (ἥττον ἀπλᾶ), less contemplative (προπετέστερα), and more caring about rearing the young (περὶ τὴν τῶν τέκνων τροφήν φροντιστικώτερα). The picture of females that he sketches here is that of less intelligent and eviler members of the species, but the female's forte it seems, is her caring about the upbringing of the young.

The males of an animal's species are (θυμωδέστερα) more passionate, and wilder, but less complicated and less treacherous. The picture of the male that is being sketched here is that of a more intelligent, less complicated, and less treacherous member of the species. Aristotle is just writing about what he sees in nature. He doesn't argue why he places these character traits onto the sexes. He doesn't give us examples. We could say that it is again his confirmation bias that makes him describe female and male animals a certain way. But we can only say this rightfully when we have figured out what exactly he has to say about men

⁴⁷ Arist. *Hist. an.* 608a35 - b3.

and women.

It is important to see that what's he doing here is essentializing and naturalizing character traits and ascribing them to the two sexes. He divides different character traits into groups of two and presents them as only natural and as obvious for a certain sex without giving an argumentation as to why these divisions are obvious.⁴⁸ It is very plausible that we can interpret the things Aristotle writes about female animals as things that he also holds true in discussing women. This becomes clear in the following passage:

Τούτων δ' ἴχνη μὲν τῶν ἠθῶν ἐστὶν ἐν πᾶσιν ὡς εἰπεῖν, μᾶλλον δὲ φανερώτερα ἐν τοῖς ἔχουσι μᾶλλον ἦθος καὶ μάλιστα ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ· τοῦτο γὰρ ἔχει τὴν φύσιν ἀποτετελεσμένην, ὥστε καὶ ταύτας τὰς ἕξεις εἶναι φανερωτέρας ἐν αὐτοῖς. Διόπερ γυνὴ ἀνδρὸς ἐλεημονέστερον καὶ ἀρίδακρυ μᾶλλον, ἔτι δὲ φθονερώτερον καὶ μεμψιμοιρότερον, καὶ φιλολοῖδορον μᾶλλον καὶ πληκτικώτερον.⁴⁹

But traces of these character traits are found in all, but they are most clearly seen in those who have the most character and most of all in the human: Indeed, they have the most complete nature, wherefore also these temperaments are found more clearly in them. Because of this, a woman is more compassionate and easier moved to tears than a man, but she is also more jealous and more complaining, fonder of reviling, and more prone to physical abuse.

Aristotle tells us that these 'biological character traits' are most visible within the human species. Why? Because the human has the most complete nature (τὴν φύσιν ἀποτετελεσμένην). It is important to note that Aristotle also switches from 'female' to 'woman' in this passage. The importance of telos is also interesting. According to Deslauriers Aristotle thinks that the generation of the female in animal species is as much the achievement of the telos of generation as is the generation of a male animal. Which seems plausible, because Aristotle rarely mentions something that is not in accordance with his

⁴⁸ For my discussion of essentializing and naturalization I've used Chapter 1 from 'Theorizing Gender' written by Alsop et al, 2002, p. 12 – 38.

⁴⁹ Arist. *Hist. an.* 608b4 – 11.

theoretical framework, and his framework is at its core telic. This is in accordance with Horowitz's work which also mentions that Aristotle writes that both males and females serve a telic end.⁵⁰ Horowitz does however mention that despite this fact, Aristotle's norm is that the active principle dominates the passive principle, as we've seen in the passages before.

Ἔστι δὲ καὶ δύσθυμον μᾶλλον τὸ θῆλυ τοῦ ἄρρενος καὶ δύσελπι, καὶ ἀναιδέστερον καὶ ψευδέστερον, εὐαπατητότερον δὲ καὶ μνημονικώτερον, ἔτι δ' ἀγρυπνότερον καὶ ὀκνηρότερον, καὶ ὅλως ἀκινήτοτερον τὸ θῆλυ τοῦ ἄρρενος, καὶ τροφῆς ἐλάττωνός ἐστιν. Βοηθητικώτερον δὲ καί, ὥσπερ ἐλέχθη, ἀνδρειώτερον τὸ ἄρρεν τοῦ θήλεός ἐστιν, ἐπεὶ ἐν τοῖς μαλακίοις, ὅταν τῷ τριῶδοντι πληγῇ ἢ σηπία, ὁ μὲν ἄρρην βοηθεῖ τῇ θηλείᾳ, ἡ δὲ θήλεια φεύγει τοῦ ἄρρενος πληγέντος.⁵¹

The female is also less virtuous and less hopeful than the male and more shameless, and more deceitful, and more ready to cheat and she has a better memory, she is more wakeful and more idle, and more difficult to get into action, and she needs less food. But the male is more helpful, like is said before, and manlier than the female is, for instance in molluscs when the cuttlefish gets hit by a trident, the male will help the female, but the female will flee when the male is hit.

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In this last piece of this passage, Aristotle goes on to summon a few more character traits of the female. This time, he seems to be talking again about female animals. The female is more shameless, more mendacious, more deceiving, more watchful, and less active than the male. The male is more helpful and more



⁵⁰ Horowitz, 1976, p. 201.

⁵¹ Arist. *Hist. an.* 608b11 – 18.

⁵² Picture 2: a cuttlefish.

courageous, (ἀνδρειότερον) which is an interesting word in this context, because it has the word 'man' (ἄνδρός) in it and can literally be translated to 'more manly'. The interesting thing about this segment is that Aristotle does give an example to support his findings. He tells us that when a female cuttlefish gets hurt by a trident the male cuttlefish will help it, but when a male cuttlefish gets hit by a trident, the female one will hurry away. This will almost make you think that Aristotle himself has tried to prick cuttlefish with a trident, a kind of lurid hobby. With this example, Aristotle's confirmation bias could again play a role. Because one could interpret Aristotle's assessment of this occurrence as him looking for typically male and typically female behaviour and assigning them to the two sexes without further ado.

A biological concept of women

Women are wood? Yes, at least in Aristotle's metaphor which he uses to explain why women can be seen as the material causal principle in procreation. Let's look at the biological concept of women we can form based on Aristotle's works. An overall notion that we can make is that women and females are biologically inferior to men and males, according to Aristotle. Women belong to the same genus as men but differ in matter from them, as do females. In the context of Aristotle's theory of procreation, women and females seem to embody the material causal principle. Women and female animals possess 'soulless sperm'. The female is described as passive whereas the male is described as active. If we look at the biological character traits Aristotle assigns to females, we can conclude that in Aristotle's view, they are less fiery but also more malicious, whereas men are more fiery but less malicious. The only good trait that Aristotle assigns to females is their 'talent for rearing the young.' These traits are even more clearly visible in humans. We can conclude from this that we can interpret things Aristotle says about the biological character traits of female animals as things that he also ascribes to women. If we want to give a single-sentence biological concept of women in Aristotle's works, we could say that women, according to Aristotle, are of the same genus as men, that they embody the material causal principle in the context of generation, that they are passive and that they possess less agreeable character traits than men do.

Chapter 3: Women must behave like women (and men must behave like men): Aristotle's psychological concept of women.

In the last chapter, we looked at the biological remarks Aristotle makes about women. In this chapter, we will look at the psychological remarks Aristotle makes about women.

'psychological' contains the Greek word ψυχή, which means soul. In this chapter, however, we will not just look at the things Aristotle has to say about the soul of women, but also about their behaviour as well as their mental capacities. It is important to note that Aristotle's biological and psychological remarks are not entirely separated. It's oftentimes the case that Aristotle's biology influences his take on psychology and vice versa.

Woman's personality: incorporeal character traits

δεύτερον δὲ τὸ ἀρμόττοντα· ἔστιν γὰρ ἀνδρείαν
μὲν τὸ ἦθος, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἀρμόττον γυναικὶ οὕτως ἀνδρείαν ἢ δεινὴν εἶναι.⁵³

Secondly (it is necessary that it (the character) is) appropriate: for instance a character can be courageous, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be courageous or terrific in this manner.

In Chapter 2, we've discussed certain character traits that could be linked to the sexes, according to Aristotle. We find something about women's incorporeal character traits in Aristotle's 'Poetics'. This work is an ancient example of literary criticism in which he, among other things, describes what good poetry should be like.⁵⁴ He describes for instance what a good character in a tragedy should behave like. One of the key elements a character should fulfill is appropriateness, as we read in the passage above. For a female character that means that she isn't 'courageous' (ἀνδρείαν) or 'terrific' (δεινὴν) in a manly way. Aristotle seems to refer in this passage to Antigone. Antigone is the main character of the famous Greek

⁵³ Arist. *Poet.* 1454a22 – 24.

⁵⁴ Halliwell et al, 1995, p. 3.

tragedy 'Antigone', which he talks about a few sentences earlier.⁵⁵ This description of women seems to be different from the biological character traits that Aristotle sums up for female animals. It would be interesting to consider whether these character traits are just something that female characters in poetry must uphold, or if these character traits should also be displayed by non-fictional women. The latter is more probable, because we see in the next chapter, that women should be quiet and reserved and we can compare this to the fact that Aristotle also calls animal females less courageous as we saw in Chapter 2. We see another example of this in his 'Politics.' We could say that Aristotle in this instance is just describing the traits of women he saw in most Greek tragedies. We could however view this as a prescription for female characters, rather than a description because the whole of his 'Poetics' seems to be a prescriptive work on how to write good poetry. Furthermore, it is important to mention that Aristotle says that it is more important that characters should be expanded and idealized versions of real-life humans, than that they are realistic. The characters should be written as better than they are in real life. He compares the playwright to a painter who paints things like themselves, but more beautifully.⁵⁶

ὥσπερ ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς ἑτέρα σωφροσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία (δόξαι γὰρ ἂν εἶναι δειλὸς ἀνὴρ εἰ οὕτως ἀνδρεῖος εἶη ὥσπερ γυνὴ ἀνδρεία, καὶ γυνὴ λάλος εἰ οὕτω κοσμία εἶη ὥσπερ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἀγαθός· ἐπεὶ καὶ οἰκονομία ἑτέρα ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικός, τοῦ μὲν γὰρ κτᾶσθαι τῆς δὲ φυλάττειν ἔργον ἐστίν).⁵⁷

Just as temperance and courage of man and woman are different (for a man would look like a coward if he would be brave in the way a woman is, and at the same time a woman would seem like a chatterbox if she would be modest in the same way a good man is. Indeed, even the management tasks of the household that belong to a man are different from the ones that belong to a woman, for he is to procure and she is to preserve the goods).

⁵⁵ Arist. *Poet.* 1454a1.

⁵⁶ Arist. *Poet.* 1254b8 – 10.

⁵⁷ Arist. *Pol.* 1277b21 – 25.

The passage above comes from Aristotle's 'Politics'. In his 'Politics' Aristotle tells us about his philosophical ideas of city-states and politics.⁵⁸ In this passage, Aristotle is describing courage. Courage is something that according to him typically belongs to men. The same courage that men possess would not be desirable in women. Next to this, women should be way more modest than men. If a woman is modest in the same way a man is, she would be a chatterbox (λάλος). We see again that the same characteristics in men can be seen as something unwanted in women. Aristotle doesn't really give us arguments for these statements. It is difficult to decide whether Aristotle in this passage talks about ways women and men should behave or how women and men are in fact behaving. Presumably, we can again conclude that Aristotle here is talking about how men and women should behave, rather than how they behave in real life. That isn't to say that he hasn't based his prescriptions on what he saw around him. We can however state that Aristotle mainly describes how a city-state should look like, so we can conclude that in this instance Aristotle also describes how men and women should be behaving.

Reason and virtue

Another question that comes to our minds is the question of reason. Do women possess reason? Aristotle's answer is yes, but he answers this question with a few sidenotes. In earlier chapters of her book, Deslauriers tells us that sexual difference is a difference in matter, not in form. Later she asks us the question: 'If sexual difference is a difference in matter, and the rational faculty is not a difference in matter, then we would not expect to find sexual differences in the capacities or operations of reason. And, in Politics, Aristotle suggests just that.'⁵⁹ Deslauriers answers this question by stating two possibilities. The first possibility is that Aristotle saw a woman's political inferiority as separate from her biological inferiority. The second is that there is indeed a connection between the two. Deslauriers opts for the latter because there are parallels between the two concepts of women and secondly because Aristotle's description of sexual difference as a difference in the matter of the genus

⁵⁸ Rackham, 1932, p. xvii.

⁵⁹ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 150.

resembles the fact that Aristotle not only ascribes biological inferiority unto women but political inferiority as well.⁶⁰ Deslauriers mentions that this link can be found in the thumos of a woman.⁶¹ Aristotle must maintain that women have a reason, even in a limited capacity, because women do not differ from men in essential features, only in material ones. Fortenbaugh says that Aristotle states that women's deliberative capacity lacks authority because it is often overruled by her emotions or alogical side. Her decisions and actions are too often guided by pleasures and pains, so she is unfit for leadership and very much in need of temperance.⁶² Fortenbaugh writes that women can deliberate, so the logical half of her soul is not deficient. According to Fortenbaugh, however, Aristotle seems to imply that the logical half cannot control the alogical half of a woman's soul.⁶³ Fortenbaugh compares Aristotle's psychological characterisation of women who possess a logical half of the soul which cannot control the alogical half of their soul to the character Medea from Euripides' play 'Medea': In this play, Medea chooses, after long deliberation, when killing her children, to do the irrational thing, rather than the rational thing.⁶⁴

διὸ τὸν μὲν ἄρχοντα τελέαν ἔχειν δεῖ τὴν ἠθικὴν ἀρετὴν...⁶⁵

Because of this it is necessary that the ruler has a complete intellectual virtue.

The ruler must have a complete intellectual virtue. As Aristotle does not describe women as rulers, as we see in the passage below, we might argue that it can be said that women do not possess a complete intellectual virtue, which sets them apart from men.

We will see what kind of political implication the passage here below has in Chapter 4.

⁶⁰ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 256.

⁶¹ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 256.

⁶² Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 245.

⁶³ Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 253.

⁶⁴ Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 253.

⁶⁵ Arist. *Pol.* 1260a17.

ἔτι δὲ τὸ ἄρρεν πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ φύσει τὸ μὲν κρείττον
τὸ δὲ χεῖρον, καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄρχον τὸ δ' ἀρχόμενον. τὸν
αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι καὶ ἐπὶ πάντων ἀνθρώπων.⁶⁶

Next to this, the male is naturally stronger than the female, and one ruler, the other subject. And in the same way, it is necessary for this to apply to all human beings.

Women, slaves, and children

In the discussion of women's psychological capacities, it is interesting to compare her psyche to that of other groups in society. In this paragraph, we will discuss different groups of humankind that have one thing in common, according to Aristotle: they have an incomplete virtue and they do not have full access to reason. Richard Mulgan tells us that women's psyche is compared to that of slaves in Aristotle's works.⁶⁷ He thinks that Aristotle's description of slaves can tell us something about how the psychological capacities of women were seen by Aristotle because Aristotle compares women to slaves earlier in his books. Fortenbaugh links Aristotle's discussion of slaves to Aristotle's discussion of women as well.⁶⁸ The comparison of women to slaves isn't unique. Simone de Beauvoir makes this comparison in her work as well.^{69 70}

⁶⁶ Arist. *Pol.* 1254b13 – 16.

⁶⁷ Mulgan, 1991, p. 181.

⁶⁸ Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 241.

⁶⁹ De Beauvoir comes to a different conclusion though; she says that the master-slave dynamic is different from the male-female dynamic because a slave can see a world without his master, but a woman cannot see her world without a man. It isn't necessary relevant to our definition, but it is interesting to see that the women-slave comparison isn't a unicum here. It is used more often when discussing women's position in society.

⁷⁰ De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 164.

ἔστι γὰρ φύσει δοῦλος ὁ δυνάμενος ἄλλου εἶναι (διὸ καὶ ἄλλου
ἔστίν), καὶ ὁ κοινωνῶν λόγου τοσοῦτον ὅσον αἰσθάνεσθαι ἀλλὰ μὴ ἔχειν.⁷¹

Since someone who is capable of belonging to another is by nature a slave (and that's why he is of another), and he who participates in reason in so far as to apprehend it but not to have it.

If we take what Aristotle says about slaves as something we could also say about women, we could conclude that women are capable of belonging to someone else, and she participates in reason so far as she apprehends it, but she would not possess it. It is important to consider the things that Aristotle says about slaves when discussing women. We must not be, however, under the impression that we can just view what he says about slaves as something that he would also necessarily say about women. Namely, because Aristotle doesn't explicitly state such a sentiment himself. We will see in the next passage, that there is more reason to not consider what Aristotle says about slaves as something relevant to what he thinks about women. There is a difference between women and slaves: Slaves do not have a deliberative faculty, women do. In stating this lack of authority Aristotle is not referring to inter-personal relationships but rather to intra-personal relationships, according to Fortenbaugh.⁷² Aristotle does not dispute the cleverness of women. He recognizes that women can think things through and even give reasoned advice, according to Fortenbaugh. Aristotle's point is not that women deliberate only in some vague and illogical way, but that their deliberations and reflections are likely not to control their emotions.⁷³

Sophia M. Connell mentions Fortenbaugh's description of Medea as well and notes, as well as Fortenbaugh, that Aristotle describes women's deliberative faculty 'lacks authority.' She discusses the intrapersonal and interpersonal interpretation of the women's deliberative faculty being described as 'unauthoritative' (ἄκυρον). According to the intrapersonal view, women are physiologically and psychologically impaired by being chronically weak-willed.

⁷¹ Arist. *Pol.* 1254b20 – 23.

⁷² Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 245.

⁷³ Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 245.

According to the interpersonal reading, women are unable to control those outside themselves to make their decisions have any immediate external impact.⁷⁴ Sophia M. Connell says the main reason to resist the intrapersonal reading is that it states that natural factors cannot be resisted by habit and reason, but according to her Aristotle seems to imply that natural factors certainly can be resisted by habit and reason. This is why Connell opts for the interpersonal reading of Aristotle's notion of women's deliberative faculty as 'ἄκυρον'⁷⁵

Fortenbaugh mentions that in his 'Politics' Aristotle pretty much ignores his biological theory on inferiority. According to Fortenbaugh Aristotle seems guided mostly by 'recent advances in philosophical psychology and in particular by his newly developed distinction between reasoning and emotional halves of the soul.'⁷⁶

Johannes Fritsche doesn't agree with this in his 'Aristotle's Biological justification of slavery in politics I.' In this work, Fritsche argues that Aristotle does build on his biological theory when describing slaves and barbarians.⁷⁷ We could argue that since Aristotle does use his biological theory in his description of slaves and barbarians, he might as well have used his biological theory in his political and psychological assessment of women.

ἄλλον γὰρ τρόπον τὸ ἐλεύθερον τοῦ δούλου
ἄρχει καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν τοῦ θήλεος καὶ ἀνὴρ παιδός, καὶ πᾶσιν
ἐνυπάρχει μὲν τὰ μόρια τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀλλ' ἐνυπάρχει
διαφερόντως. ὁ μὲν γὰρ δοῦλος ὅλως οὐκ ἔχει τὸ βουλευτικόν,
τὸ δὲ θῆλυ ἔχει μὲν, ἀλλ' ἄκυρον, ὁ δὲ παῖς ἔχει μὲν,
ἀλλ' ἀτελής.⁷⁸

Indeed, the free rules the slave, the male the female, and the man the child all in a different way. And all possess parts of the soul but possess them in different ways.

⁷⁴ Connell, 2021, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Connell, 2021, p. 40.

⁷⁶ Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 246 (see footnote '8').

⁷⁷ Fritsche, 2019.

⁷⁸ Arist. *Pol.* 1260a9 – 15.

Indeed, the slave has no deliberative faculty at all, but the female has (it), but without authority, and the child has (it), but (it is) underdeveloped.

In this passage, Aristotle gives us a hierarchy: The free rule the slave, so slaves are at the bottom of our hierarchy. The male rules the female. The free woman stands above the slave in this hierarchy. Next is the child, this one is also ruled by the free man. We have our hierarchy of adults (from lowest to highest): slave (woman/man) - free woman - free man. In this passage, at least, Aristotle doesn't seem to make a difference between male and female slaves. The child is an interesting category when discussing a certain hierarchy. It is ruled by the free man, Aristotle states nothing more about it in this passage. He also does not distinguish any difference between male and female children. Slaves are at the bottom of the hierarchy because they do not have a deliberative faculty, according to Aristotle. Women do have such a faculty, but they don't have it with full authority. A child has it, but in an underdeveloped form. In this passage, we've seen that there is a crucial difference between (free) women and slaves. Aristotle doesn't even seem to recognize sexual difference in slaves and slaves and women do not belong to the same category. To summarize, Aristotle's concept of woman: The woman has a place above the slave in the hierarchy Aristotle gives us. This does however only count for the free women, who are not slaves. The free man is at the top of this hierarchy. He rules the slave, the woman, and the child. This ruler possesses virtue in completeness.

Aristotle's psychological concept of women

Women are psychologically weaker, according to Aristotle, than men are. He also views the behaviours of women and men differently, as we can see in his 'Poetics.' Men do have the capacity to have authority over their reason, whereas women don't. We can see men as authoritative figures, whereas we cannot see women as authoritative figures. The same level of bravery in women is seen as a weakness in men and the same level of chattiness is seen as modesty in men. The woman should be, according to Aristotle a modest, quiet, non-ruling figure, next to a man who should be brave, who should speak up from time to time, and who is fit to rule. Sexual difference seems to have no influence on the treatment of slaves. The same seems to be the case for children.

Chapter 4: Women as political beings: Aristotle's political concept of women.

καὶ ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον,⁷⁹

and that the human is by nature a political being.

As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, Aristotle thinks that women are biologically and psychologically weaker than men. As we can read in the quote above, Aristotle thinks that politics are a key element of being human, as he describes the human as a political being: πολιτικὸν ζῷον. How do women fit in this description? Can they also be described as political beings? Another plausible translation of ὁ ἄνθρωπος that many translations use is 'man' (a male human). In this chapter, it will be our strife to figure out what the political role of women in Aristotle's works entails and if there even is a political role for women in his city-state. In doing so, we will figure out the best translation of this word in the context of Aristotle's thoughts.

Men as Rulers and women as subjects

In the passage below from Aristotle's 'Politics', which is almost always mentioned in the discussion of Aristotle's political woman, Aristotle claims that men rule over women by nature.

ἔτι δὲ τὸ ἄρρεν πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ φύσει τὸ μὲν
κρείττον τὸ δὲ χειρὸν, καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄρχον τὸ δ' ἀρχόμενον.⁸⁰

Next to this, the male is stronger and the female (is) by nature weaker, and the first the ruler, the latter the subject.

⁷⁹ Arist. *Pol.* 1253a2 – 3.

⁸⁰ Arist. *Pol.* 1254b13 – 14.

We could argue that Aristotle sees this hierarchy between men and women as a biological fact and not just as a political prescription. It is tempting to make a comparison between this political division and Aristotle's biological division between women as passive and men as active. One would think that these are connected to each other. Aristotle doesn't reference his own earlier assessments of women's passivity and men's activeness from his biological works, however. Aristotle bases the capacity of someone to rule over another on their sex. In the following passage, he describes to us exactly how women (and children) should be ruled by men:

καὶ γὰρ γυναικὸς ἄρχει καὶ τέκνων, ὡς ἐλευθέρων μὲν ἀμφοῖν, οὐ τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον τῆς ἀρχῆς, ἀλλὰ γυναικὸς μὲν πολιτικῶς τέκνων δὲ βασιλικῶς⁸¹

and to rule over wife and children, over both as over free men, but not in the same manner of command, but (to rule over) a woman befitting a statesman and (to rule over) children like a king.

In this passage, Aristotle is explaining to us how a household should be governed. We find the same hierarchy as we found in Chapter 3: the free man is above the woman and above the child. In the context of a household, the husband should rule over his child as a king, but he should rule over his wife as a statesman. Aristotle describes the ruling of women as comparable to the rule befitting a statesman which is an interesting comparison. It could mean that Aristotle intends that children have no say in the household, and certainly cannot go against the judgment of their father. Women, wives in this context, might have some say in matters, under the democratic rule of their husbands, comparable with the participation that male citizens have in the government of a city-state.

Connell tells us that some suggest that the relationship between husband and wife was one of mutual rule.⁸²

Deslauriers mentions that in the vision of Aristotle, political differences based on sexual difference are not complementary because these differences are not value-neutral. She

⁸¹ Arist. *Pol.* 1259a39 – 41.

⁸² Connell, 2021, p. 68.

says that Aristotle clearly believes that the differences between men and women constitute a hierarchy in which men, who have fully operative deliberative faculties, are better than women, whose deliberative faculties lack authority. She says that there can be no doubt that Aristotle sees the woman as politically inferior. She does however mention that it is not Aristotle's goal to point out women's inferiority but rather to show that in spite of their inferiority, they do have a function and serve a purpose that supports the ultimate telos of the city-state.⁸³

Leah Bradshaw tells us in her 'Political Rule, Prudence and the 'Woman Question' in Aristotle' that Aristotle depicts the proper relationship between husband and wife in the household as a political one, but more importantly as an equal one.⁸⁴ In Aristotle's view the relationship between men and women, even if he depicts the men as ruling over the women, is one of equal contribution towards the city-state. Women are inferior to men in almost every way, but they do contribute just as much to the human species as men do. Bradshaw does say, however, that this of course doesn't mean that women and men are allowed the same political influence in Aristotle's ideal state. She questions how much equality is possible in the relationship between husband and wife and men and women in general when Aristotle goes to lengths to convince us of women's unsuitability to rule.⁸⁵ She concludes that Aristotle does not give us any biological ground as to why women are not fit to rule and partake in political activity, which is, according to Aristotle himself, the 'highest virtue humans can achieve.'⁸⁶

We've discussed the difference in the capacities of ruling of men and women mostly in the context of the household. When talking about ruling outside of the home, Sophia M. Connell mentions that Aristotle never mentions a female political ruler in his 'Politics.'⁸⁷

⁸³ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 204.

⁸⁴ Bradshaw, 1991, p. 563.

⁸⁵ Bradshaw, 1991, p. 564.

⁸⁶ Bradshaw, 1991, p. 573.

⁸⁷ Connell, 2021, p. 70.

Women's political role

According to Deslauriers Aristotle seems to think that women engaging in politics might undermine the common good. She explains this by comparing Aristotle's visions to that of Plato who does say that women and men can have the same roles in his ideal city-states which he describes in his 'Politics'. Deslauriers tells us that Aristotle sees political differences based on sexual difference as bound to the household structures. Neglecting these sexual differences, by treating women as equals, would uproot these structures.⁸⁸ Deslauriers says that for Aristotle the difference between living in nature without sexual division and living in a household with sexual division is what makes humans, humans.⁸⁹ Women do not need to be excluded from the city-state and the household, but their roles should be different from that of men. Let's return to a sentence from a passage that we discussed in Chapter 3:

(... ἐπεὶ καὶ οἰκονομία ἑτέρα ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικός, τοῦ μὲν γὰρ κτᾶσθαι τῆς δὲ φυλάττειν ἔργον ἐστίν).⁹⁰

(... Indeed, even the management tasks of the household that belong to a man are different from the ones that belong to a woman, for he is to procure, and she is to preserve the goods).

In the last sentence, Aristotle describes the rule of the women in the household. He tells us that the function of a man is to procure and hers is to preserve. Fortenbaugh relates this division in household tasks to the character dispositions that Aristotle gives to women in his other works. Fortenbaugh states that the role Aristotle gives to women is in line with the fact that they should be less courageous and less chatty, as we've read in the passages from chapter 3.⁹¹

Connell tells us in her work that it is often thought that this division in household tasks is linked to the differences in courage, which both men and women possess, as we saw with

⁸⁸ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 188.

⁸⁹ Deslauriers, 2022, p. 189.

⁹⁰ Arist. *Pol.* 1277b24 – 25.

⁹¹ Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 244.

Fortenbaugh for instance. She thinks this is wrong, however, because women must bear children and with bearing children there's a lot of courage needed. She takes a passage from Euripides' 'Medea' where Medea tells us that she would rather go to war three times than give birth once for example.⁹² Forming a household with a husband and (preferably) with children seems to be an important aspect of women's political role in Aristotle's works.

How the division in tasks between men and women in the household in Aristotle's works came to be is not something that we should look for in his own works. We could, and maybe should, argue that this division isn't built on something theoretical, but more on something practical. We argue that this division is based on the division in household tasks that could be found in Aristotle's own time. Therefore, even though it is interesting to investigate Aristotle's argumentation as to why women have the role in the household that they do, it will probably lead us nowhere. The answer to the question as to why the division is the way it is in Aristotle's 'Politics', could deepen our answer to our main question, but the answer to this 'why question' isn't necessary to answer our main question, so we leave it here.

Now we will discuss the next important task of women: childbearing. Horowitz mentions the importance for women of preserving the household but also the importance of bearing children as we can read in the following passage from Aristotle's 'Politics'.⁹³ In this passage Aristotle tells us that women have a great deal of influence on their unborn child. He compares them to the 'earth' from which plants grow. The plants are a metaphor for children in this context. He tells us that a mother's body affects her unborn child just as the earth does with the plants which grow from it. This is perfectly in line with the description of women as the material cause of procreation, which we discussed in Chapter 2. What makes this part of the political role of women, and not only her biological role? This passage, starting with $\chi\rho\iota\eta$, can easily be read as a prescriptive for women who are with children.

⁹² Connell, 2021, p. 51.

⁹³ Horowitz, 1976, p. 194.

χρὴ δὲ καὶ τὰς ἐγκύους ἐπιμελεῖσθαι
τῶν σωμάτων, μὴ ῥαθυμούσας μηδ' ἀραιᾶ τροφῇ χρωμένους.

....

τὴν μέντοι διάνοιαν τοῦναντίον τῶν σωμάτων ῥαθυμοτέρως ἀρμόττει διάγειν·
ἀπολαύοντα γὰρ φαίνεται
τὰ γεννώμενα τῆς ἐχούσης ὥσπερ τὰ φυόμενα τῆς γῆς.⁹⁴

And it is also necessary that pregnant women take care of their bodies, they should not avoid exercise nor adopt an insufficient diet ... But it suits their mind, however, opposite to their bodies, to pass time while taking things easy. For it seems that the children that are developing are affected by her who has them just as plants that are growing are affected by the earth.

In the following passage, we do however read that the producing of children is not just a woman's responsibility:

ἐπεὶ δ' ἡ μὲν ἀρχὴ τῆς ἡλικίας ἀνδρὶ καὶ γυναικὶ διώρισται πότε ἀρχεσθαι χρὴ τῆς συζεύξεως, καὶ πόσον χρόνον λειτουργεῖν ἀρμόττει πρὸς τεκνοποιίαν ὠρίσθω.⁹⁵

And since the starting point of the suitable age for a man and woman is decided when it is necessary that they start their union, let us decide for how long it is suitable for them to serve the state by bringing forth children.

A second important aspect of women's political role seems to be the birthing of children. In this manner, they can serve the state. This is not to say that Aristotle leaves the entire responsibility of procreation to rest on the woman's shoulders as we've seen that the man also has a part. We saw an example of man's responsibility in procreation in Chapter 2, where we concluded that man is responsible for giving the soul to the embryo. And now we see the man's responsibility in procreation in the passage above, where Aristotle states that

⁹⁴ Arist. *Pol.* 1335b 12 – 19.

⁹⁵ Arist. *Pol.* 1335b26 – 30.

both men and women serve their state by producing offspring. We could argue, however, that Aristotle, places more responsibility on the mother as we saw in the passage before this one, where he argues that the body of the mother affects her child during pregnancy. These two statements in his 'Politics' are in line with his biological character trait of rearing the young we saw in Aristotle's 'History of Animals' (Hist. an. 9, 608a33 - b18) as well as his description of women as the material cause in his 'Generation of Animals' where he describes women as wood in a metaphor (Gen. an. I. 21 729b 12 - 21).

Judith A. Swanson states in her 'Women, the Public and the Private' that although women make up one-half of a city-state, Aristotle only mentions women in terms of housekeeping and childrearing.⁹⁶ Swanson argues that the rearing of children is a women's full responsibility. A women's education of her child can indirectly serve the city through her education of her children, the future citizens of the polis, and future rulers, if we're talking about male children.⁹⁷ Swanson mentions that the woman rules her husband in turn by voicing her opinions.⁹⁸ We can compare this statement to the example Connell gave us where she was discussing that the relationship of a husband and wife, could be described as a relationship of mutual rule.⁹⁹ Swanson's description of the wife's influence on her husband is a bit more careful, than Connell's interpretation of mutual rule between husband and wife.

Connell states that Aristotle makes the parents responsible for raising their children and educating them. A lot of readers of Aristotle seem to want to divide the education of children into a rational one, which is given by the father, and more of a nurturing one which is given by the mother. Connell says that this kind of division is unnecessary because Aristotle doesn't mention this division anywhere.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Swanson, 1991. p. 44.

⁹⁷ Swanson, 1991, p. 58.

⁹⁸ Swanson, 1991, p. 59.

⁹⁹ Connell, 2021, p. 68.

¹⁰⁰ Connell, 2021, p. 67.

Aristotle's political concept of women.

In this chapter, we've tried to answer the following question: can women be defined as political beings, or did Aristotle only mean the man, with *ὁ ἄνθρωπος*? We can conclude that it is plausible that he did in fact talk about women as well. Women do have a part in Aristotle's ideal polis and thus can be defined as political beings. Women's role in politics is different from that of men, however. Women should not rule as opposed to men who are, according to Aristotle, naturally fit to rule. Another big part that women contribute to society is that of conceiving and giving birth to children. Men have this as a duty as well, but Aristotle seems to give extra attention to the role of women in this. In conclusion, women can be defined as political beings in Aristotle's works, but to be a political being means something different for women than it does for men.

Chapter 5: Can Aristotle's biological, psychological, and political concepts of women be called misogynistic?

A Biological, psychological, and political concept of Woman

In our second chapter, we saw that women and females are biologically inferior to men and males. A biological concept of women in Aristotle's work would entail that she is of the same genus as men: the human species. The female is passive and possesses less agreeable character traits than men.

If we look at Aristotle's psychological concept of women, we can conclude that Aristotle describes women as psychologically weaker than men. We see that women should encompass modesty and certainly shouldn't be brave. In other words, they shouldn't behave too 'manly.' Women do not lack a deliberative faculty, but theirs is without authority, which makes them unfit to rule over others. It is important to note that this psychological concept of women only talks about free women. Slaves and children are each discussed as another category by Aristotle.

In the last chapter, we were mostly attempting to answer the following question: can women be defined as political beings? The answer is yes, they can. Their political role is different from that of men, however. Women do not rule. They serve their state by birthing children, and they serve their husbands by preserving their procured goods.

Aristotle's concept of women in general is one of inferiority and difference. She is mostly characterised by her comparison to Aristotle's main subject: the free man. He also rarely speaks about females on their own in his biological works. The few notions in which he describes female animals are about how they differ from male animals and about how they are inferior to male animals.

Can Aristotle's biological, psychological, and political concept of women be called misogynistic?

To answer this question, we must return to our own concept of misogyny, which we've formed in the introduction of this thesis. We defined misogyny as followed: a concept can be called misogynistic if it systematically describes women as a group as inferior to men. As we've concluded, Aristotle systematically describes women (and females) as inferior to men

(and males). He does so within his biological works and within his political works. He doesn't talk about one woman individually but addresses women as a group in the passages that we've discussed in this thesis. Furthermore, he also bases a lot of the things he says about women on the fact that they are women. For instance, in discussing that women have a deliberative faculty that lacks authority, Aristotle doesn't tell us why the deliberative faculties of women lack authority, he just simply states that this is the case.

Modern authors like Deslauriers and Connell argue that Aristotle is interpreted incorrectly and is wrongly written off as a misogynist. We keep however seeing that he describes women as the lesser sex. I do agree with Deslauriers that Aristotle doesn't necessarily describe sexual difference as a bad thing, but that doesn't make his texts any less misogynist, because he still systematically describes women as inferior to men. Furthermore, I can agree with Connell that not everything that Aristotle says about women is misogynistic. I think it is important that even though his remarks about women that we've looked at in this thesis can most certainly be classified as misogynistic, we mustn't instantly label everything Aristotle writes about women as misogynistic. One must always stay critical and not let earlier interpretations of Aristotle's notions of women guide them in their verdict.

The conclusion of this paper is clear, however; Aristotle's concept of women, as discussed in this thesis, can be called, according to our definition of misogyny as is described in the introduction of this thesis, misogynistic.

Critical notes to the conclusion

The first question which comes into mind when conducting such research as this is: 'Is it even possible to form a sensible concept of women in Aristotle's writing?' In this thesis, we've succeeded in creating such a concept, but there always remain caveats to such a concept. There is in the end enough to be found in Aristotle's writings about women that can be used to at least give a broad concept of what women are and to chart what he says about them. It is, however, difficult to give a definite concept of what women are in his works because he himself never intended to do so. We're making a concept of women out of texts of someone who wasn't necessarily trying to define women as a separate phenomenon that needed a definition. We can see this for ourselves: Aristotle gives a lot of explanations about other concepts. In his 'Politics', he defines what a city-state is and how an ideal state

functions. He gives us no such explanations for his remarks on women. It is important to keep in mind that this concept of women is something that we've coined based on texts written by Aristotle. It is not a concept that he gave us himself. It is and will always be an interpretation. The thing that speaks for the validity of our concept of women that we've coined, however, is that his notions of women often can be placed in his theoretical framework, which made it possible for us to still study the concept of women in his works without necessarily having to make interpretations on our own. We could link our findings to his overall theory and compare what he said about women biologically to match with what he says about women politically and psychologically. From this follows that the concept that we've formed of women in Aristotle's writings is sufficient and thus our conclusion is valid.

Further research

During the writing process of this thesis, we came across a lot of subjects that would need further research. Sadly, there was not enough space for these questions and their answers in this paper. Therefore, we will describe them here, so someone else might investigate these questions.

The first thing that would be interesting is the formation of a concept of men based on Aristotle's writings. It would be interesting to compare this concept to the concept of women that we've formed in this thesis. We've compared men and women from time to time in this paper and we've described what Aristotle wrote about men and male animals as well from time to time, but not as excessively as we did describe Aristotle's notions of women and females.

Another very interesting problem we encountered was Aristotle's discussion of slaves. There seem to be no differences made between male and female slaves. It would be interesting to look further into the question of whether Aristotle says anything about the role of sexual difference when discussing slaves and children for that matter.

With the question mentioned above we find ourselves in the territory of intersectional research. Intersectionality is a relatively recent term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw.

Crenshaw argues that we cannot study gender in isolation from other social differences.¹⁰¹ When studying, for example, the gender of slaves one could look not only at the role that sexual difference plays in Aristotle's discussion of slaves but also at the role that sexual difference plays combined with their identity as slaves.

We've come to the end of this research. In this thesis, we've defined Aristotle's concept of women and figured out if this concept could be called misogynistic. I want to end this thesis by saying that this statement is in no way meant to tell the readers of this paper that because of this conclusion, Aristotle's works shouldn't be read anymore. This is not the case. This thesis aimed to contribute to the debate about the interpretation of Aristotle's remarks about women. It was to inform its reader of the different arguments that have been made in this debate so far and to give the reader a (hopefully) satisfying answer to the question that started this debate.

¹⁰¹ Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139 – 167.

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Pictures

Picture 1:

Reinders, L. (2023, May 1). *Picture of a statue of Aristotle in Zagreb*.

Picture 2:

Hillewaert, H. (2008, March 16). *Sepia officinalis (aquarium).jpg*. Wikimedia Commons.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sepia_officialis_\(aquarium\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sepia_officialis_(aquarium).jpg)

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