

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A METAPHYSICAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN AND PHILOSOPHY WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO PYTHAGORAS, PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

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ABSTRACT

This article concerns itself with the gender gap which it regards as unfortunate. Sex is natural and for purpose, but gender is by nurture. The exclusion of female from philosophy is wanting and one may wonder why gender bias is so profound in academic philosophy than in any other academic field. While by nature no one can exclude the other from academic philosophy. By nurture academic philosophy or the philosophy acquired through school education has been reduced to a male preserve. The ensuing gap is undesirable and needs to be addressed. One of the surest ways of addressing the abhorred gaps is through philosophy. Ordinarily, human persons are characterized by rationality. It is this rationality that distinguishes humans from brutes. Philosophy is human tool for analyzing and resolving problems. One of such problems is the gender gap that has become a real phenomenon. And this disturbs. What is it in philosophy that has revealed a broad trend toward improvement in women's representation and standing in academia? This article, therefore, argues for not only rationality approaching the gender gap but also and mainly empowering the unfairly excluded females to participate in this debate rationally. This is by opening academic doors wide to females. This article, therefore, is an eye opener to correct this anomaly.

Key words:Female. Gap, Gender, Male, Philosophy, Rationality.

INTRODUCTION

It is empirically true that female philosophers are fewer compared to their male counterparts. The drop in proportion of the males and females in philosophy is seen during enrolment and registration for major and minor course as it is asserted by Julie. She says that, Philosophy remains the most male-dominated field of the humanities in the academy, and speculation abounds as to why that is. Is the profession unusually hostile to women, discouraging them from pursuing a career in this field? Does the relative paucity of female role models make the shortage of significant numbers if women a vicious self-fulfilling prophecy in philosophy.¹ Female philosophers are faced with the tradition that believes that there are no women philosophers and if there are any, they are unimportant. Women are not entirely absent from the history of philosophy, even though canonical philosophers have plenty to say about women. In general terms, the philosophical norms like reason and objectivity are defined in contrast to matter while the irrational or whatever a given philosopher associates with women and the feminine. Tradition tells explicitly in many words that philosophy; its norms of reason and objectivity exclude everything that is feminine or associated with women. In this article the researcher shall use metaphysics which is the highest branch in philosophy as a philosophical tool to elucidate the reasons why there are few women in professional philosophy. It shall only do a critical analysis of the same with reference to Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle during the classical period of philosophy.

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Historical Background: The history of philosophy and particularly ancient philosophy has been a history of men. The recorded beginnings before the era of Christ in the 6th century C.E. Miletus until the absorption by Christianity in the 13th century C.E. Western philosophy and its great historians created a history of men and by men. It is a reality observed that the traditional enslaving beliefs and cultures, subjugation of women and lack of educational opportunities especially in academic philosophy have made academic philosophy to be a male preserve. Admittedly, the fact that women are significantly unrepresented in philosophy is not a new phenomenon. The truth is that there existed women philosophers from time immemorial, yet observing with deep sympathy that a minimal number were accepted as philosophers during the ancient, medieval, modern and even contemporary period. In the *Canon of Greek Authors* alone have some 3,200 entries out of which only about a hundred are Greek and Roman women writers.² Comparatively, in the last 20th and 21st centuries no woman philosopher has entered a philosophical Western canon. Thus, identification of women authors is bound to be problematic.

The Physical Life of Women in Classical Age: During the ancient and classical age in Greece, it is observed that the identity of women is limited with many factors making it difficult to point out at an individual woman in Greece. This is because women were encountered only in *asides*, references or in vague generalizations. This then implies that very few are known as individuals and even fewer accorded the dignity of a name as claimed below that, Almost everything that we know about Greek women is derived ultimately from a masculine source—from the things which men said about women, from the images of women which they created in literature and art and

¹ Julie C. Van Camp, "Female-Friendly Departments: A Modest Proposal for Picking Graduate Programs in Philosophy," APA Newsletter (Spring 2004): Vol. 3, No. 2. 118.

² Ian Michael Plant, ed. *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: An Anthology*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 1.

from the informal rules and legal regulations which they constructed in order to deal with women. Both as a group and as individuals, the women of ancient Greece are to a large extent creatures who have been invented by men.³ The social-cultural settings in Greece played a vital role in shaping the lives of women in Athens. Thucydides best exposes and explains on the “place of women” and their achievements. He states that “the greatest glory for women is to be least talked about among men, whether in praise or blame.”⁴ In ancient Greece, women were referred to as the “muted group” this is not an inference that there is a deprivation of a valuable source of information of what women did in the privacy of their own homes. Instead it also implies that women’s subjectivity has been denied to them.⁵ A great set back to us then is that the way in which women viewed themselves, their menfolk and the world in which they were living in, is almost entirely inaccessible to us. Subsequently, women were obliged to live as per men’s rule and advice. Greece was a male dominated entity thus bringing an understanding of a history of the subordination of women but on the other hand broadening our knowledge of the history of ancient Greece.

Women in this period lived in a patriarchal culture and as such faced a myriad of challenges keeping in mind that men were responsible for all most all texts and artifacts.⁶ It is noted that there were specific diseases attributed to men and women, the Hippocratic doctors while treating women viewed women “as a special case, a deviation from masculine norm.”⁷ It is sad that only until marriage were women considered to have grown since their fathers remained their guardian until marriage. While men’s average age to get married was 30 and that of a woman was only 14 years. They had no right to property and were not entitled to full citizenship because entitlement to civil and political rights was defined in relation to property.⁸ Nevertheless, they would not transact even petty trade, thus gender too become a great barrier to citizenship in ancient Athens. The women were excluded both in principle and practice.⁹ Their day to day experience was predicated of the following with no exemption for noble women simply because it was noted that, Women of high standing in Athens very rarely showed up in public places. Noble women occupied themselves with domestic matters and spent their free time receiving guests. Their most important tasks consisted of bringing up children, managing the house and fulfilling religious obligations.¹⁰ Marriage for women was compulsory, and those who became defiant to this practice suffered seriously in case of delay or failure to get a partner.¹¹ Subsequently, according to the Greeks, matters related to sexual intercourse, was a source of mutual enjoyment to both male and female. Nevertheless, the posture created during the act depicted male as superior and female as subordinate; “it is clear that some Greek men did not approve of female sexual desire as far as wives were concerned. Married women were

thus subjected to the double bind of being limited to a biological role, and being criticized if they showed too much appreciation of the sexual act.”¹² Absolutely, Greek women had submissive role in sexual relationship.

Women and Politics in Greece: It was not only until the mid-5th century C.E. that Athens democratic system was radically formalized and characterized by participative rather than representational in essence. Additionally women lacked political and equal rights, no legal personhood or conduct any legal procedure, they were part of the *oikos* (household) whereas the men (*kyrios*) were masters.¹³ It is observed vividly that only men had legal rights to attend and vote in the assembly, hence executive and administrative functions were accorded to men. The slave’s resident and non-Athenian women were not included.¹⁴ Women were totally excluded from the operations of democracy, they had no political status. They were identified with boys because of the similarity of their place with boys. The fact is that many regulations imposed on women evidently restructured their mannerism.¹⁵ Athens thus remained the cradle of philosophy and this field was ground for anyone to become a poet, scholar, politician or artists except the so called women.

Pythagoras: In contrary, the Pythagorean female authors were addressed as ‘renowned women’ which clearly and succinctly was a description “of the ways in which women ought to develop as moral individuals.”¹⁶ Therefore “Apart from the mainstream Pythagoreans treaties, we do not hear about ones attributed to women, it seems that if a single woman was involved in the life of a philosophical school she did not play any role in the development of doctrine.”¹⁷ It is believed that most of the Pythagorean writings which were attributed to women were written in a way that they authentically tackled women related issues especially on morals and virtues. One of the most outstanding of the Pythagorean female philosophers was Theano the wife to Pythagoras. The fact that “access of individual women to philosophy was probably mediated by the tastes of their fathers, brothers and husbands”¹⁸ one can allude that the Pythagoreans were accommodative to women especially in the field of philosophy and that is why in their school there existed a good number of women philosophers.¹⁹

Plato: Plato’s position is very ambiguous, (his) dualistic nature is difficult to reconcile, at one point Plato claims that women are “by nature” twice as bad as men and at the same time advocating women to be included among the exalted philosophic rules of the ideal state.²⁰ The latter is not warranted because seemingly Plato wanted to enhance the efficiency of the state and not because there was a proper reason to subjugate women. This can be traced back from the time of ancient antiquity. It is observed that “respectable” women, wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of classical

³ Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 10.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Greece (Date accessed 8th November 2018)

⁵ Cf. Blundell, *Women in Greece*, 11.

⁶ Bonnie Maclachlan, *Women in Ancient Greece: A Source Book*. (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), ix.

⁷ Blundell, *Women in Greece*, 98.

⁸ Cf. Blundell, *Women in Greece*, 101.

⁹ Cf. Blundell, *Women in Greece*, 101.

¹⁰ OzkayGunseli, *From Captivity to Freedom: Women’s Fight*. Translated by Mehmet Djafar, (Ankara: T. W. A. Publications, 1981), 97.

¹¹ Cf. Blundell, *Women in Greece*, 101.

¹² Cf. Blundell, *Women in Greece*,

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Greece

¹⁴ Blundell, *Women in Greece*, 96.

¹⁵ Cf. Blundell, *Women in Greece*, 130.

¹⁶ Annette Bourland Huizenga, *Moral Education for Women Pastoral and Pythagorean Letters*. (Boston: IDC Publishers and MartinusNijhoff Publishers, 2013), 31.

¹⁷ W. Martin Bloomer ed. *A Companion to Ancient Education*. (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015), 31.

¹⁸ Bloomer, *Ancient Education*, 31.

¹⁹ Cf. Bloomer, *Ancient Education*, 31.

²⁰ Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19.

Greece, were not allowed to participate in the educational, cultural, or political life of their communities.”²¹ It is said “from the cradle to the grave they were kept in oriental seclusion, enjoying virtually no rights or protection under the law saves as the property of man.”²² Thus, “women were regarded as not fit to participate in serious discussion, with the consequence that the denial to them of intellectual experience continued through adulthood.”²³ According to Plato women were incapable of rational, deductive and deliberative philosophical dialogue. Hence, “Women were denied access to all those places where the boys and men discussed and learned about civic and intellectual affairs- the ‘gymnasia’ the market place, the law courts and symposia.”²⁴ Evidently, men were the owners of nearly everything “all the higher elements of spiritual and mental activity and the conditions under which a generous passion was conceivable, had become the exclusive privileges of men... the exaltation of the emotions was reserved for male sex.”²⁵ In his dialogues Plato depicts women or the female sex in a degrading manner, a sex that is inevitably inferior, “however there are also passages in the dialogues that imply more than adverse judgment against the women of Athenian society, and indicate a general belief on the author’s part that the female sex is inevitably and innately inferior to male.”²⁶

Seemingly “the fact that no woman participates in any of the dialogues in person merely constitutes evidence of the prevailing attitudes of the time and characteristics of Athenian life they produced.”²⁷ Plato in his prior philosophical period did not include women in the guardianship of the polis; he categorizes them in the class of animals, the weak and the sick. Even though Plato in his later philosophical edifice describes or seeks equality in both men and women both in social and educational opportunities. It is asserted that women during his time had to dress as men in order to attend lectures. Notably, it is revealed that “Axiothea of Philesia student of Plato was reputedly forced to dress as a man in order to attend his lectures.”²⁸ Conclusively, we see that in Plato’s political state women had totally no place, and his move for equality of both men and women is illogical and contra-truth. All in all women were instruments and tools for entertainment, procreation, intellectual dwarfs, conspicuously unrepresented in any other activity apart from the household. This portrays without fear of contradiction the existence of male chauvinism that flourished in Greek society.

Aristotle: In Aristotle’s politics and ethics he insinuates that women by nature are morally inferior to men and he claims that, Women’s natural function is to reproduce the species and care for the daily needs of her household and her virtues makes her good for this function; man’s function is to live a life in the Polis that offer him opportunities for rational activity, higher learning, leisure and the exercise of the virtues suitable for such political activities.²⁹ Aristotle who studied under Plato would not have escaped the social-cultural views of his

predecessors. His assertions on women are very comprehensive because of his predecessor’s social-cultural presuppositions of superiority of the male over the female sex. Aristotle’s views about the female “are as a product of ideological bias specifically of a misogynist ideology typical of ancient Greek men.”³⁰ G. E. R. Lloyd asserts that Aristotle’s, “account of women in particular and of the female sex in general provides some kind of rationalization or accommodation of widespread Greek social attitude.”³¹ It is also confirmed that, “there were no peripatetic women philosophers, no female followers of Aristotle, albeit a great metaphysician and logician denigrated woman the most.”³² According to him a female by nature was inferior to a male. Female nature was allegedly rationally defective and undeveloped, incapable of making rational inquiries in order to understand the quiddity of things simply because of being sensuous and irrational. Aristotle’s view on women influenced Western thinkers who quoted him as an authority until the end of the Middle-Ages. This influence has been an important topic in women’s history. Aristotle saw women as subject to men, but higher than slaves. In chapter twelve of his politics he writes “the slave is wholly lacking the deliberative element; the female has it but it lacks authority; the child has it but it is not complete.”³³ Aristotle’s assertions about women implies that because of his intellectual rationalization he basically draws from the social and political beliefs and interests of some kind of arguments and conclusively summons them to the court of reason as truth in principle and practice. Suggestively, one would say that the day to day experience, social and spiritual, legal and economic position and the manner in which women were regarded by men played a major role in molding women’s thinking and acting. Above all the roles apportioned to women by men, the ideals constructed for them and anxieties and restrictions expressed about them is a light shed on the cultural dynamics of a male dominated society that prevailed in Greece.

Analysis of Women and the Classical Period of Philosophy: In a nutshell, one would argue that from the domineering historical gestures and perpetuation of unwarranted physical life the women in Greece underwent is worth not living in this age and time. The physical standardization and external organs that female are freely adorned with are misused by male gender who take advantage thus making them think and feel superior is not warranted. Thus the end result is stamping women as tools for work and objects of pleasure diminishes the very purpose of our being as substantially created. The political arena which brings about the issues pertaining to democracy was accorded to men alone. Strictly speaking, democratic rights belong to all. The kind of representative government in Greece was one sided and it did not adapt all people into her governance. Instead it extremely oppressed the female gender that legal rights were entirely accorded to men simply because they men were considered as rational beings. This kind of thinking would make one wonder if there is a rational soul for men and irrational soul for women and if metaphysics teaches that composite substances consists of incomplete substantial parts which are distinct among themselves yet the union results in a single unified nature. For

²¹Ethel M. Kersey, Calvin O. Schrag, consulting editor, *Women Philosophers, A Bio-Critical Source Book*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989). 3.

²² Kersey, *Women Philosophers*, 3.

²³Okin, *Women in Western Thought*, 19.

²⁴Okin, *Women in Western Thought*, 19.

²⁵Okin, *Women in Western Thought*, 19.

²⁶Okin, *Women in Western Thought*, 22.

²⁷Okin, *Women in Western Thought*, 22.

²⁸Okin, *Women in Western Thought*, 22.

²⁹ Helene P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 110.

³⁰Robert Mayhew, *The Female in Aristotle’s Biology: Reason and Rationalization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1.

³¹ Foley, *Female Acts*, 110.

³²Kersey, *Women Philosophers*, 4.

³³ Thornton Lockwood and Thanassis Samaras, eds. *Aristotle’s Politics: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 47.

example man is made of human body united with human soul. Then one cannot imagine of a human body uniting with irrational soul, it is absurd! Is the essence of a woman's soul different from that of a man? What human being would this be if the fact is that it is the soul that informs the body? It is then desirable if not imperative to basically claim that history, physical structure (external organs), democracy and culture should not be used to ascertain our rationality and capability as was in the case of the Greeks.

Conclusion

This is a problem regarding intellectual inclination; a problem that filters that women are not specifically popular with philosophy is a social-cultural historical fact. The question that is disturbing is, does the entries in the corpus used as a measuring rod to justify the capability for women philosophers? The fact that no entries has been made in the Western canon in the last 20th and 21st centuries does not ascertain there have been no women philosophers. It was not until the late 18th century; however, that the first encyclopedia appeared that was devoted exclusively to the history of women's achievement in the natural sciences and medicine.³⁴ In the ancient period of philosophy, with Plato and Aristotle women were put in seclusion and philosophy was predominantly a male preserve, thus male chauvinism flourished in the Greek society. Conclusively, the researcher found out that even though from the advent of philosophical thought, femaleness was undermined in relation to rationality and socio-cultural beliefs. It is clear that from the turn from Modern to Contemporary eras and specifically since the 20th century C.E., immeasurable transformation of the thinking patterns have taken place not only in the Western philosophy but in the field of philosophy as a whole. Women's active participation has greatly been felt and a lot of their philosophical works and discourses published and easily accessed.

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³⁴<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/494323>

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