

ІСТОРІЯ ФІЛОСОФІЇ

УДК 177.61

DOI 10.35423/2078-8142.2021.1.2.03

Vitalii Turenko,

*Candidate of Philosophical Sciences (Ph.D.), Researcher,
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv,
Kyiv, Ukraine*

e-mail: vitali_turenko@ukr.net

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0572-9119>

ARISTOTELIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE WOMEN'S (IN)PERFECTION

The article makes a detailed analysis of the understanding of women in the philosophical works of Corpus Aristotelicum. It is established that the specificity of the view of this ancient thinker on the problem of research is due to the fact that he considers it in the whole body of his philosophical works, reflecting on it in logical, ethical-aesthetic and socio-philosophical aspects. It has been found that the key issue around which Stagiritic reflects on women is the concept of «domination». In the context of reflections on domination, he emphasizes that in the ontological context, women are not inferior to men, but in marital and family relations, a woman must obey a man. At the same time, it is proved that Aristotle speaks only briefly about the possible need for education and upbringing of women, and mentions it not for the benefit and self-development of women, but only to avoid all sorts of chaos and disorder in a particular society. However, he notes that a woman can hold a high position if she has a good reputation and authority among citizens who pursue politics. It is argued that the ancient thinker emphasizes that there are a number of issues, namely those concerning children, in which women clearly understand each other better, and emphasizes that they should deal with them and resolve disputes under their guidance. It is interesting that in the context of this issue, Aristotle mentions there is an image of a Delphic knife [Polit.1252b1–7], because he used in various aspects - military, domestic and sacred. As we can see, this ancient philosopher continues Plato's opinion that it is

impossible to «spray» on certain goals and objectives, because, mainly, it leads to mistakes, tragedies, etc. Everyone, including women, must do their job, which is given to them by nature. This does not diminish this or that personality, but on the contrary makes it unique and inimitable among all creations.

Keywords: *woman, Aristotle, ancient philosophy, social life, nature of woman.*

When we talk about the Aristotelian view of the essence and nature of woman, for the most part, we emphasize the misogynic vector of his reflections. So, we can mention a number of works in which they explicate the Aristotelian understanding of women – E. Hall [4], P. Schollmeier [5], F. Sparshott [6], C. Staves [7] – but they emphasize more on the ethical aspects of nature and the meaning of feminine nature.

However, whether this is really the case of misogynic view of Stagirite, we will try to reveal in the context of the multifaceted philosophical works of this philosopher. It is important to note that thoughts about women can be found not only in the ethical and political tracts of the ancient Greek thinker but also in natural science and logic. In particular, this applies to the understanding of women in the coordinates of domination and subjugation.

In particular, in «Politics» Aristotle writes: «But to resume – it is in a living creature, as we say, that it is first possible to discern the rule both of master and of statesman the soul rules the body with the sway of a master, the intelligence rules the appetites with that of a statesman or a king and in these examples it is manifest that it is natural and expedient for the body to be governed by the soul and for the emotional part to be governed by the intellect, the part possessing reason, whereas for the two parties to be on an equal footing or in the contrary positions is harmful in all cases. Again, the same holds good between man and the other animals: tame animals are superior in their nature to wild animals, yet for all the former it is advantageous to be ruled by man, since this gives them security. Again, as between the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject. And the same must also necessarily apply in the case of mankind as a whole» [Polit.1254b4-16] [8].

It would seem, at first glance, that the ancient philosopher clearly and unambiguously speaks of the hierarchy of society. However, everything is not so simple, because in the «Categories» we meet the exact opposite point of view: «The term 'to have' is used in various senses. In the first place it is used with reference to habit or disposition or any other quality, for we are said to 'have' a piece of knowledge or a virtue. Then, again, it has reference to quantity, as, for instance, in the case of a man's height; for he is said to 'have' a height of three or four cubits. It is used, moreover, with regard to apparel, a man being said to 'have' a coat or tunic; or in respect of something which we have on a part of ourselves, as a ring on the hand: or in respect of something which is a part of us, as hand or foot. The term refers also to content, as in the case of a vessel and wheat, or of a jar and wine; a jar is said to 'have' wine, and a corn-measure wheat. The expression in such cases has reference to content. Or it refers to that which has been acquired; we are said to 'have' a house or a field. A man is also said to 'have' a wife, and a wife a husband, and this appears to be the most remote meaning of the term, for by the use of it we mean simply that the husband lives with the wife» [Cat.15b17-30].

Accordingly, we see that the thinker does not agree to speak of a relationship with a woman as a relationship of power. And this is quite justified. After all, «power in love declares itself in the way of managing and presenting power, the excess of being, its eventful formation. The situation of love can be described in terms of two power channels: tenderness (refusal of pressure, force embracing the Other) and passion (open demonstration of force presented as a challenge). Tenderness, participation, understanding in a love relationship are connected with tenderness. This type of force gives birth to the protective nature of power in love interaction. Passion directs, and tenderness enchants, passion gives energy, tenderness controls and distributes. With passion in a close circle are sexuality, jealousy, aggression and other phenomena – the power of love constitutes a special power - the power of enchantment and recognition of the Other, in love power does not prevail, but pre-offends the power of existence» [3, p. 25–26]. Therefore, in this work, the ancient Greek thinker saw that a woman is outside the relationship of domination and submission, she is for life, to create a common being.

Therefore, we see that Aristotle sees in a woman – not just an empty object of desire for a man, which can be changed constantly. It does not exist for the satisfaction of male sexual instincts, but for a much deeper relationship, which consists not only in bodily pleasures, but in order to create common happiness. As G. Bataille rightly remarks: «The greatest dizziness is associated with the uniqueness of a beloved creature... Dizziness from the uniqueness of a beloved creature is associated with joy that decimates it. Of course, as a result, uniqueness (feature) is lost, emptiness becomes complete and joy turns into sorrow. But beyond the lost uniqueness another kind of uniqueness begins; beyond the joy that has become sorrow, new beings in joy again exchange dizzying discoveries... Desire and love are mixed: love is the desire of an object according to the totality of desire» [1, p. 162].

Thus, Aristotle's condemnation of relations with other women is appropriate: «But seeing that a man may commit injustice without actually being unjust, what is it that distinguishes those unjust acts the commission of which renders a man actually unjust under one of the various forms of injustice, for example, a thief or an adulterer or a brigand? Or shall we rather say that the distinction does not lie in the quality of the act? For a man may have intercourse with a woman knowing who she is, yet not from the motive of deliberate choice, but under the influence of passion; in such a case, though he has committed injustice, he is not an unjust man: for instance, he is not a thief, though guilty of theft, not an adulterer, though he has committed adultery, and so forth» [Eth.Nic.1134a16-23].

This vision is due to the fact that he was categorical about the phenomenon of pleasure, including and in relation to women: «Besides those things however which are naturally pleasant, of which some are pleasant generally and others pleasant to particular races of animals and of men, there are other things, not naturally pleasant, which become pleasant either as a result of arrested development or from habit, or in some cases owing to natural depravity. Now corresponding to each of these kinds of unnatural pleasures we may observe a related disposition of character. I mean bestial characters, like the creature in woman's form that is said to rip up pregnant females and devour their offspring, or certain savage tribes on the coasts of the Black Sea, who are alleged

to delight in raw meat or in human flesh, and others among whom each in turn provides a child for the common banquet; or the reported depravity of Phalaris [9]. These are instances of Bestiality. Other unnatural propensities are due to disease, and sometimes to insanity, as in the case of the madman that offered up his mother to the gods and partook of the sacrifice, or the one that ate his fellow slave's liver. Other morbid propensities are acquired by habit, for instance, plucking out the hair, biting the nails, eating cinders and earth, and also sexual perversion. These practices result in some cases from natural disposition, and in others from habit, as with those who have been abused from childhood. When nature is responsible, no one would describe such persons as showing Unrestraint, any more than one would apply that term to women because they are passive and not active in sexual intercourse; nor should we class as Unrestraint a morbid state brought about by habitual indulgence» [Eth.Nic.1148b15-35].

As we see, Aristotle clearly understands that happiness is not bought in suffering or through the restriction of desires, but it is a necessary element of the development of the soul. Aristotle also does not equate pleasure and happiness, in general, he clearly distinguishes between the emotional side of human life (related to the soul in the sense of reason) and the moral side of life (related to the soul in the sense of purpose). He, without making direct criticism, but dissociates himself from the hedonistic interpretation of happiness as pleasure, because, having one basis (the human soul), their essence is still different: pleasure can be considered only in the context of mental processes, happiness – in the context of emotional and rational nature [2, p. 13].

Continuing his reflections in this regard, Stagirite notes the following: «The same holds good of Self-restraint and Unrestraint. It is not surprising that a man should be overcome by violent and excessive pleasures or pains: indeed it is excusable if he succumbs after a struggle, like Philoctetes [10] in Theodectes when bitten by the viper, or Kerkyon in the Alope of Karkinos [11], or as men who try to restrain their laughter explode in one great guffaw, as happened to Xenophantus. But we are surprised when a man is overcome by pleasures and pains which most men are able to withstand, except when his failure to resist is due to some innate tendency, or to disease: instances of the former being the hereditary effeminacy⁵⁸ of the royal family of

Scythia, and the inferior endurance of the female sex as compared with the male» [Eth.Nic. 1150b6-16].

As we can see, Aristotle already says that women are inferior to men, because the former, in his opinion, do not know how to exercise restraint and do not have such moderation as the latter. It should be emphasized that he builds such a hierarchy in accordance with the psychological specifics of the male and female sexes, but not physically.

To confirm this, there is a rather extensive quote from «Metaphysics», in which he describes what is the distinction: «The question might be raised as to why woman does not differ in species from man, seeing that female is contrary to male, and difference is contrariety; and why a female and a male animal are not other in species, although this difference belongs to «animal» per se, and not as whiteness or blackness does; «male» and «female» belong to it qua animal. This problem is practically the same as «why does one kind of contrariety (e.g. «footed» and «winged») make things other in species, while another (e.g. whiteness and blackness) does not?» The answer may be that in the one case the attributes are peculiar to the genus, and in the other they are less so; and since one element is formula and the other matter, contraries in the formula produce difference in species, but contraries in the concrete whole do not... Surely it is because there is contrariety in the definition, for so there also is in «white man» and «black horse»; and it is a contrariety in species, but not because one is white and the other black; for even if they had both been white, they would still be «other in species». «Male» and «female» are attributes peculiar to the animal, but not in virtue of its substance; they are material or physical. Hence the same semen may, as the result of some modification, become either female or male» [Meth.1058a30... 1058b25].

Along with reflections on the nature of women, namely in the context of understanding concepts such as «domination», «pleasure», Stagirit pays considerable attention to reflections on her social status. Accordingly, in his opinion, the nobility and «purity» of a person depends on both the male line of ancestors and the female. Thus, in «Rhetoric» the ancient thinker wrote the following: «Noble birth, in the case of a nation or State, means that its members or inhabitants are

sprung from the soil⁴⁹, or of long standing; that its first members were famous as leaders, and that many of their descendants have been famous for qualities that are highly esteemed. In the case of private individuals, noble birth is derived from either the father's or the mother's side, and on both sides there must be legitimacy; and, as in the case of a State, it means that its founders were distinguished for virtue, or wealth, or any other of the things that men honor, and that a number of famous persons, both men and women, young and old, belong to the family. The blessing of good children and numerous children needs little explanation. For the commonwealth it consists in a large number of good young men, good in bodily excellences, such as stature, beauty, strength, fitness for athletic contests; the moral excellences of a young man are self-control and courage. For the individual it consists in a number of good children of his own, both male and female, and such as we have described» [Rhet.1360b20-1361a4].

At the same time, it allows for the possibility of a woman ruling, if the latter enjoys great respect in a particular society. He gives the following example in «Rhetoric»: «Another, from induction. For instance, from the case of the woman of Peperethus, it is argued that in matters of parentage women always discern the truth; similarly, at Athens, when Mantias the orator was litigating with his son, the mother declared the truth; and again, at Thebes, when Ismenias and Stilbon were disputing about a child, Dodonis declared that Ismenias was its father, Thettaliscus being accordingly recognized as the son of Ismenias. There is another instance in the «law» of Theodectes: «If we do not entrust our own horses to those who have neglected the horses of others, or our ships to those who have upset the ships of others; then, if this is so in all cases, we must not entrust our own safety to those who have failed to preserve the safety of others». Similarly, in order to prove that men of talent are everywhere honored, Alcidas said: «The Parians honored Archilochus, in spite of his evil-speaking; the Chians Homer, although he had rendered no public services;¹⁶⁸ the Mytilenaeans Sappho, although she was a woman; the Lacedaemonians, by no means a people fond of learning, elected Chilon one of their senators; the Italiotes honored Pythagoras, and the Lampsacenes buried Anaxagoras, although he was a foreigner, and still hold him in honor...The Athenians were happy as long as they lived under the laws of Solon, and the

Lacedaemonians under those of Lycurgus; and at Thebes, as soon as those who had the conduct of affairs became philosophers, the city flourished» [Rhet.1397a33-1397b12].

The ancient Greek thinker admits that in certain matters women are much better understood than men, although they do not say anywhere, unlike his teacher, that a woman should receive an education. Aristotle limits the range of women's issues and problems related to procreation and everything related to it, including litigation. He understood that men are not so concerned with children psychologically and morally, they are more responsible for the social development of the individual. While a woman, as a woman who bore a child during pregnancy, feels much more certain aspects related to children, the relationship of parents/society to them.

That is why Aristotle emphasizes in the following opinion that «For since every household is part of a state, and these relationships are part of the household, and the excellence of the part must have regard to that of the whole, it is necessary that the education both of the children and of the women should be carried on with a regard to the form of the constitution, if it makes any difference as regards the goodness of the state for the children and the women to be good. And it must necessarily make a difference; for the women are a half of the free population, and the children grow up to be the partners in the government of the state» [Polit.1260b12-21].

Thus, summarizing a brief overview of Aristotelian understanding of the essence and meaning of women in the context of its multifaceted philosophical heritage, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. The specificity of the view of this ancient thinker on the research problem is due to the fact that he considers it in the whole body of his philosophical works, reflecting on it in logical, ethical-aesthetic and socio-philosophical aspects.

2. Thus, the key issue around which Stagirite reflects on women is the concept of «domination.» In the context of reflections on domination, he emphasizes that in the ontological context, women are not inferior to men, but in marital and family relations, a woman must obey a man.

3. Aristotle only briefly speaks of the possible need for education and upbringing for women, and he mentions this not for the benefit and self-development of women, but only to avoid all sorts of chaos and disorder in a particular society. At the same time, he notes that a woman can hold a high position if she has a good reputation and authority among the citizens of the policy.

4. At the same time, the ancient thinker emphasizes that there are a number of issues, namely those related to children, in which women are clearly better understood and emphasizes that they should deal with them and resolve controversial situations under their guidance.

REFERENCES

Solovieva, S.V. (2011). Phenomena of power in human existence: *Dissertation Abstracts International*. Samara, 40 p. [In Russian].

Vrublevskaya-Toker, T. I. (2016). The moral status of pleasure in the ethics of Aristotle. *Philosophy and Social Sciences*, 1, 11-15. [In Russian].

Bataille, J. (1994). Catechism of Dianus. In *Treatises on Love*. O. P. Zubets (Ed.) (pp. 158-172). Moscow: IF RAS. [In Russian].

Hall, E. (2016). Citizens But Second Class: Women in Aristotle's Politics (384-322 B.C.E.). In *Patriarchal Moments: Reading Patriarchal Texts*. Cesare Cuttica (Ed.) (pp. 35-42). Mahlberg: Bloomsbury Academic.

Schollmeier, P. (2003). Aristotle and Women: Household and Political Roles. *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek and Roman Political Thought*, 20(1-2), 22-42.

Sparshott, F. (1983). Aristotle on Women. *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*. Retrieved from <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/107>

Staves, C. (2015). Is Aristotle a Misogynist. *Athene Noctua: Undergraduate Philosophy Journal Issue*, 3. Retrieved from <https://www.fau.edu/athenoc-tua/pdfs/Christopher%20Staves.pdf>

ЛІТЕРАТУРА ТА ПРИМІТКИ

1. Батай Ж. Катехизис Диануса. *Трактаты о любви* / сост. О. П. Зубец. Москва : ИФ РАН, 1994. С. 158–172.

2. Врублевская-Токер Т. И. Нравственный статус удовольствия в этике Аристотеля. *Философия и социальные науки*. 2016. № 1. С. 11–15.
3. Соловьева С. В. Феномены власти в бытии человека: автореф. дис. ... д-ра филос. наук: спец. 09.00.11. Самара, 2011. 40 с.
4. Hall E. Citizens But Second Class: Women in Aristotle's Politics (384–322 B.C.E.), *Patriarchal Moments: Reading Patriarchal Texts* / ed. Cesare Cuttica. Ed. Gaby Mahlberg : Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. P. 35–42.
5. Schollmeier P. Aristotle and Women: Household and Political Roles. *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek and Roman Political Thought*. 2002. Vol. 20: Issue 1–2. P. 22–42.
6. Sparshott F. Aristotle on Women, *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*. URL: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/107>
7. Staves C. Is Aristotle a Misogynist, *Athene Noctua: Undergraduate Philosophy Journal Issue*. 2015. No. 3. URL: <https://www.fau.edu/athenenoc-tua/pdfs/Christopher%20Staves.pdf>
8. The citation of Aristotle's treatises is from Aristotle in 23 Volumes, translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd.
9. Falaris (ancient Greek: Φάλαρις) was a tyrant in Akraganta in the second half of the 6th century BC. He was known for his incredible cruelty. The ancient Greek poet Pindar, historians Polybius and Diodorus of Sicily, and other authors said that he slowly roasted people he hated in a copper bull, ate babies, and ordered the captured Leontians to be thrown into the throat of Etna, etc. [Pythian 1].
10. Theodectes of Lycia (ancient Greek Θεοδέκτης) was a disciple of Isocrates and Plato, an orator, and a tragic poet; in 352 BC he was invited by Queen Artemisia to deliver a tombstone speech over her husband Mausoleum. He placed a boastful inscription on his magnificent tomb near Athens that he had won 8 times in 13 competitions.
11. Karkinos the Younger (ancient Greek: Καρκίνος, 4th century BC) was an ancient Greek tragedian and a member of a well-known wealthy family, including Xenocles (father or uncle) and his grandfather Karkin the Elder of Agrigento. He received the prize for only one of his one hundred and sixty plays, many of which were written at the court of Dionysius II of Syracuse. Only nine of his plays have survived with related fragments: Achilles, Aeropa or Tiest, Ajax, Alopa, Amphiarad, Oedipus, Orestes, Semela, and Tyro. Aristophanes mockingly washed him and his sons (all three of whom became playwrights) at the end of *The Wasp* and *the Peace*.

В. Е. Туренко

кандидат філософських наук, молодший науковий співробітник філософського факультету Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка; м. Київ, Україна, e-mail: vitali_turenko@ukr.net; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0572-9119>

Погляд Арістотеля на (не)досконалість жінки

Анотація

У статті детально проаналізовано розуміння жінки у філософській частині *Corpus Aristotelicum*. Встановлено, що специфіка погляду Арістотеля на дану проблематику зумовлена тим, що він розглядає її у цілому комплексі своїх філософських праць, розмірковуючи про неї в логічному, етико-естетичному та соціально-філософському аспектах. Було виявлено, що ключовим питанням, навколо якого Стагіріт міркує про жінку, є концепт «влади», а точніше «панування». У контексті роздумів про владарювання античний мислитель підкреслює, що в онтологічному контексті жінки не поступаються чоловікам, але в шлюбно-сімейних відносинах жінка повинна підкорятися чоловікові. Водночас доведено, що Арістотель лише побіжно говорить про можливу потребу в освіті та вихованні жінок і згадує це не задля користі та саморозвитку жінок, а лише для того, щоб уникнути різного роду хаосу та безладу в певному суспільстві. Однак давньогрецький філософ відзначає, що жінка може обіймати високу посаду, якщо має добру репутацію та авторитет серед громадян, які займаються політикою. Стверджується, що засновник перипатетизму підкреслює, що існує низка питань, а саме – тих, що стосуються дітей, в яких жінки чітко розуміють одна одну, і наголошує, що їм слід мати справу з ними та вирішувати суперечки під їхнім керівництвом.

Ключові слова: жінка, Арістотель, антична філософія, соціальне життя, природа жінки.