

ARISTOTLE SAID THAT WOMEN  
ARE INCOMPLETE MEN...  
WHY DON'T YOU HAVE  
A CASTLE?



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The reason for women's inferiority lies in a defect.

"Women are defective by nature" because they cannot reproduce semen which contains a full human being. When a man and a woman have intercourse, the man supplies the substance of a human being (the soul, i.e. the form), the woman only the nourishment (the matter).

Since it was a fundamental principle for him that, of the two factors or components in

every being, 'form' is superior to 'matter', sexual reproduction was considered beneficial, because it demanded that the one who gives the 'form' (the male) be separate from the one who supplies the 'matter' (the female). Thus the 'lower' is not mingled with the 'higher' in the same individual. Aristotle subscribed to what Caroline Whitbeck has called the 'flower pot theory' of human generation. The female, she is deficient in natural heat, is unable to 'cook' her menstrual fluid to the point of refinement, at which it would become semen (i.e. 'seed'). Therefore her only contribution to the embryo is its matter, and a 'field' in which it can grow. Her inability to produce semen is her deficiency: 'a woman,' Aristotle concludes, 'is as it were an infertile male' (*Generation of Animals*, I, 728a). 'A male is male in virtue of a particular ability, and a female in virtue of a particular inability' (*Generation of Animals*, I, 82f).

Caroline Whitbeck, 'Theories of Sex Difference', in Gould and Rifsky (eds.), *Women and Philosophy*, New York 1976, pp. 54-100; M. Maloney, 'The Arguments for Women's Difference in Classical Philosophy and Early Christianity', pp. 41-49.

According to Aristotle, man rightly takes charge over woman, because he commands superior intelligence. This will also

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ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν νοσηματώδες, διόπερ ὀλίγαις ὀλεγάκις συμβαίνει· τὰ δ' ὥς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ γινώσκειν μέλιστα κατὰ φύσιν ἐστίν.

"Ὅτι μὲν οὖν συμβάλλεται τὸ θῆλυ εἰς τὴν γένεσιν τῆς ἑλῆς, τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ τῶν κτηνῶν φύσει, τὰ δὲ καταμήνια περίεστι δῆλον.

XX "Ὅ δ' οἶονταί τινες σπέρμα συμβάλλεσθαι τῇ ἀπονοσῇ τὸ θῆλυ διὰ τὸ γίνεσθαι, ἀφ' οὗ σὺν τε χαρὸν ἐνίοτε αὐταῖς τῇ τῶν ἀρρένων ὁμοίαν ἵσχυρὴν ἀπόκρισιν, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ὑγρασία σπερμιακὴ ἀλλὰ τοῦ τόπου ἰδίως ἐκασταί.

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γὰρ τῶν ὑπερῶν ἔκκρισις, καὶ ταῖς μὲν γίνεσθαι ταῖς δ' οὐ· γίγνεται μὲν γὰρ ταῖς λευκοχρόαις θηλυκαῖς ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ εἰπεῖν, οὐ γίνεσθαι δὲ μελαιναῖς καὶ ἀρρενωποῖς. τὸ δὲ πλῆθος, αἷς γίνεσθαι, ἐνίοτε οὐ κατὰ σπέρματος πρᾶξις ἐστὶ ἀλλὰ πολὺ ὑπερβάλλει. ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἐδέσμευται

<sup>1</sup> γὰρ SZ: om. vulg.

\* Aristotle's notion that the menstrual blood is the source from which the embryo is formed remained unquestioned for many centuries. (It appears in the *Wonders of Nature*, vii. 2, "In the womb of a mother was I born into flesh in the time of ten months, being compact blood of the seed of man and the pleasure first came sleep.") It can be pictured in 16th century obstetric books such as the *De conceptu et generatione hominis* by Jacob Ruoff (1554). His fabrica was decisively demystified by William Harvey, who in his *Exercitationes de generatione animalium* (1651) describes his dissections of the uterus in King Charles the First's forests, at different stages after coitus. The expected mass of blood and seed never found: a source of great perplexity to Harvey but since the mammalian egg was not discovered until long

fit the women who depend on him. He compares this to the relationship between human beings and tame animals.

he best for all tame animals to be ruled by human beings. For this is they are kept alive. In the same way, the relationship between the and the female is *by nature* such that the male is higher, the female that the male rules and the female is ruled.' Aristotle, *Politica*, ed. Classical Library, 1254 b 10-14.

t we should notice in Aristotle's text is the phrase: *by nature*. Subordination is right because it corresponds to the things have been made. Aristotle also reckons that slavery natural because some people are by nature destined to be slaves.

person is by nature a slave who can belong to another person and only takes part in thinking by recognising it, but not by possessing it. living beings (animals) cannot recognise thinking; they just obey us. However, there is little difference between using slaves and using animals: both provide bodily help to do necessary things.'

totle then proceeds to describe a slave's position and it truly terrifying. A slave is no more than 'a tool of his master'. Together with the wife and the ox, a male or female slave is a householder's indispensable beast of burden. He or she should be kept well – for simple economic reasons. But slaves have no right to leisure or free time. They own nothing and can take no decisions. They have no part in enjoyment and happiness, and are not members of the community.

the same reason Aristotle also justifies wars to capture new slaves. For some people 'are by nature destined to be slaves, even though they resist it'; like wild animals that need to be tamed. He even says that all foreigners to some extent belong to this category.

is why the poets say: "It is correct that Greeks rule Barbarians"; *by nature* what is barbarian and what is slave are the same.' Aristotle, *Politica*, vol. 1; Loeb Classical Library, 1252 b 8. See A.TH. van Leeuwen, *De Macht van het Kapitaal*, Nijmegen 1984, pp. 182 - 205.

The prevailing tradition among Hellenists saw society, therefore, as layered in higher and lower forms of human being.

- Women were inferior to men by nature.
  - Barbarians were inferior to the civilised races by nature.
- Slaves were slaves because they were inferior by nature.

