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### *Deliberating Without Authority: Fortenbaugh on the Psychology of Women in Aristotle's Politics*

*This paper critically examines William Fortenbaugh's influential interpretation of Aristotle's claim that women have deliberative faculties that 'lack authority' at Pol. I.13 1260a13. According to Fortenbaugh, Aristotle is essentially stating there that women are unable to control their emotions. After setting out the primary motivation for this proposal, I examine two objections that have been raised against it, ultimately arguing that they are unsuccessful. I then proceed to develop my own objection, according to which Fortenbaugh's interpretation cannot explain why Aristotle ascribes to women partial authority in the household but not the polis. Though this implies that we should reject this common interpretation of the remark at 1260a13, I concede that there is evidence in the biological works which confirms that Aristotle does think that women are naturally unable to control their emotions. This naturally raises a question about whether the views in the Politics depend upon those in the biology or vice versa. I conclude with some reflections that must be borne in mind by any attempt to answer this important question.*

What is soul? What relation does it have to the body? Is the soul identical to the self or is the self some aspect of the soul? To a contemporary philosopher these questions will naturally seem antiquated. It is more fashionable nowadays to inquire about the mind. There are, no doubt, historical reasons for this, which have to do with Descartes' influential rejection of the scholastic conception of soul. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that many questions asked by contemporary philosophers of mind had analogues in antiquity. In addition to pondering what mind is, contemporary philosophers wonder about its relation to the brain and the physical world more generally. Similarly, ancient philosophers debated the nature of the soul, its relation to the body, and its place in nature. For this reason, even though contemporary problems in the philosophy of mind cannot be wholly solved by studying ancient debates about the soul, careful consideration of the latter may at least prove instructive food for thought for contemporary philosophers.

One ancient philosopher whose views about the soul are especially intriguing is Aristotle. Contemporary functionalists have even found a version of their view in

the *De Anima*, Aristotle's main treatise devoted to the soul<sup>1</sup>. It is quite controversial to say that Aristotle was a functionalist à la Putnam and company<sup>2</sup>. What is not controversial, however, is that Aristotle is one of the greatest thinkers to have ever lived and that his conception of soul deserves attention no matter how close it is to functionalism in the philosophy of mind.

According to Aristotle, soul is first and foremost a principle of life: it is what makes living things alive. Different living things are capable of different life activities, and these differences in life activities are ultimately due to underlying psychological differences (*De An.* II.3 414a 29-b19). For instance, plants are exclusively nutritive beings; they only possess nutritive soul. By contrast, animals are perceptual beings; they possess both nutritive and perceptual soul. Of all sublunary animals human beings are special, because they alone are rational. Thus, an understanding of Aristotle's conception of human rationality is important, because it promises to illuminate not only his ethico-political doctrines but his broader psychological views as well.

An important, albeit neglected, aspect of Aristotle's treatment of human rationality is his differentiation of humans into psychological sub-types. In *Politics* I Aristotle divides human beings into distinct sub-categories depending upon their roles in the household and corresponding psychological constitutions (see §1). Briefly, freeborn males are the natural rulers whose architectonic rational faculties suite them for the positions of ultimate authority in the household and polis. Natural slaves are manual laborers whose diminutive rational abilities only enable them to perceive the rational orders of their masters. Women, according to Aristotle, occupy an intermediate position between natural rulers and slaves; they are subordinate to the former but superior to the latter. Accordingly, Aristotle maintains that, unlike slaves, women have deliberative faculties, but, unlike natural rulers, they are 'without authority' (*akuron*) (*Pol.* I.13 1260a 13).

A comprehensive account of Aristotle's ethico-political psychology must address his psychological descriptions of all of these individuals. However, his conception of the psychology of women is especially perplexing. Aristotle was undoubtedly aware of Plato's more enlightened account of women in the *Republic*, but he was nonetheless unmoved by it (*Pol.* II.5 1264b 4-6). Despite Plato's pleas to the contrary, Aristotle thought that a woman's psychological profile only suits her for partial authority in the household, not the polis. This unfortunate aspect of his political theory is something that we must come to terms with and attempt to understand, because it underwrites his account of the dynamics of the household, which, in turn, feeds into his conception of the polis and civic virtue (cf. *Pol.*

1 See M. Nussbaum and H. Putnam, "Changing Aristotle's Mind", in M. Nussbaum and A. Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992, pp. 27-56.

2 For resistance to the idea that Aristotle's hylomorphic psychology is a version of contemporary functionalism, see A. Code and J. Moravcsik, "Explaining Various Forms of Living", in M. Nussbaum and A. Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992, pp. 129-45.

I.13 1260b13-24). Why did Aristotle think that women are incapable of political participation? What exactly does their deliberative ‘lack of authority’ amount to?

The current paper mounts an oblique examination of these questions<sup>3</sup>. In what follows I critically investigate the most famous and influential interpretation of the psychological feature ascribed to women at *Pol.* I.13 1260a13. This is the interpretation defended by William Fortenbaugh according to which a woman’s deliberative faculty is ‘without authority’ insofar as it is naturally unable to control her emotions<sup>4</sup>. Fortenbaugh’s ‘intra-personal’ interpretation is no longer universally accepted<sup>5</sup>, but its merits are nonetheless worthy of careful consideration. For, his view is still the most widely accepted interpretation of the remark at 1260a13; the main objections brought against it are inconclusive; and the scholars that reject it often fail to consider whether there might be some grain of truth in the interpretation. Below I aim to offer a balanced assessment of Fortenbaugh’s well-known interpretation, one which highlights both its strengths and its weaknesses. Although I shall conclude that we must reject his claim that Aristotle is referring to a woman’s inability to control her emotions at 1260a3, I concede that there is evidence outside of the *Politics*, specifically in the biological works, which suggests that Aristotle did view women on balance as more emotionally uncontrolled than men. This concession naturally raises a question about the relation between the psychological views about women contained in Aristotle’s biological works and those in his *Politics*, and I conclude by making some observations that bear on this important question.

1. According to Aristotle, a woman’s proper place in society is the household. So, it would perhaps be best to begin with an overview of his conception of that community. This will give us insight into how Aristotle thinks women compare

3 A more direct investigation of these questions can be found in J. Karbowski, “Aristotle on the Deliberative Abilities of Women”, «Apeiron», forthcoming. This paper serves as a companion to the former piece, which paves the way for its positive proposals by critically examining the most influential interpretation of the remark at 1260a13.

4 See W. Fortenbaugh, “Aristotle on Slaves and Women”, in J. Barnes, M. Schofield, and R. Sorabji, *Articles on Aristotle – 2: Ethics and Politics*, Duckworth, London 1971, pp. 135-39. Note that Fortenbaugh was not the first to endorse this particular interpretation of 1260a13, cf. W.L. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle: Volume II*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1887, p.218. However, he offered the most developed and influential defense of it, and so it naturally became associated with him.

5 For alternative interpretations, see M. Deslauriers, “Aristotle on the Virtues of Slaves and Women”, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 25, Winter, 2003, pp. 213-31; J. Karbowski, “Aristotle on the Deliberative Abilities of Women”; R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, pp. 286-87, n.22; D. Scott, “One Virtue or Many? Aristotle’s *Politics* 1.13 and the *Meno*”, in V. Harte, M.M. McCabe, R.W. Sharples, and A. Sheppard, *Aristotle and the Stoics Reading Plato, BCIS Supplement*, 107, 2010, pp. 101-22. Nicholas Smith accepts a ‘hybrid’ version of Fortenbaugh’s interpretation combined with an inter-personal interpretation in N. Smith, “Plato and Aristotle on the Nature of Women”, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», 21, 4, 1983, pp. 467-78.

to the other members of the household, which is crucial for understanding his infamous remark about their deliberative faculties at 1260a13.

In Aristotle's view the household is a natural community whose aim is the satisfaction of everyday needs (*Pol.* I.2 1252b12-4). Households arise when men and women join for the sake of procreation, and masters and slaves come together for survival (*Pol.* I.2 1252a26-31). When the first sub-community achieves its procreative end, children come into being. Consequently, Aristotle ultimately analyses the household into three main 'parts' or relations: 1) master-slave; 2) husband-wife; and father-child (*Pol.* I.3 1253b4-7, I.12 1259a37-b1).

The relation between a master and slave is despotic and primarily instrumental. Natural slaves are living tools naturally suited to perform manual labor for their masters (*Pol.* I.2 1252a32-4, I.4 1254a14-7), and their masters are naturally free individuals with the foresight to put them to use to secure the necessary means for survival (*Pol.* I.2 1252a31-2). So conceived, this relation primarily benefits the master (*NE* VIII.11 1161a35-b1), but Aristotle acknowledges that it also coincidentally benefits the slave (*Pol.* I.5 1254a21-2, 1254b6-9, I.6 1255b4-9, III.6 1278b33-7), presumably because it offers the slave the best opportunity for developing virtue (*Pol.* I.13 1260b3-5).

Aristotle believes that men are naturally superior to women and have a claim to authority over them (*Pol.* I.5 1254b13-4, I.12 1259b1-2). However, he goes to great lengths to emphasize that women are not living tools or property to be used primarily for their husbands' benefit (*Pol.* I.2 1252a34-b9). They assist men in promoting the well-being of the household (*Pol.* I.13 1260a23), and, unlike natural slaves, they are naturally free (*Pol.* I.12 1259a39-40, I.13 1260b18-9) and even have authority over certain domestic affairs (*NE* VIII.10 1160b32-1161a1). In the *Politics* Aristotle compares the marital relationship to the relation between citizens in a polis and describes it as 'political' (*Pol.* I.12 1259b1), but that analogy is misleading because he thinks men rule women permanently, unlike typical instances of political rule wherein ruler and subject alternate (*Pol.* I.12 1259b1-10). Elsewhere Aristotle more accurately describes the marital relation as 'aristocratic', which better reflects the hierarchical and permanent nature of this power dynamic (*NE* VIII.10 1160b32-35, VIII.11 1161a22-5).

The third and final constitutive relation of the household is the parental relation. It is conceived primarily as a relation between the father and his male heir(s). Aristotle compares it to the relation between a king and his subjects, because it is based upon age and affection (*Pol.* I.12 1259b10-17; *NE* VIII.10 1160b24-7), and primarily for the benefit of the child (*Pol.* III.6 1278b37-1279a2). However, he emphasizes that the sort of benefits a father confers upon his son are far greater than those of king to his subjects, because a father is responsible for the existence and education of his son (*NE* VIII.11 1161a15-7).

These power relations reflect the different domestic statuses of their members: 'for the forms of rule are different for different [sc. types of] individuals' (*NE*

VIII.10 1160b31-2). Ultimately, for Aristotle they are determined by natural psychological differences<sup>6</sup>:

It is clear, then, that the same holds in the other cases as well so that most instances of ruling and being ruled are natural. For free rules slaves, male rules female, and man rules child in different ways; because while the parts of the soul are present in all these people, they are present in different ways. The deliberative part of the soul is entirely missing from a slave; a woman has it but [it is] without authority (*akuron*); a child has it but it is incompletely developed. (*Pol.* I.13 1260a7-14)

Natural slaves are living tools subject to despotic rule by their masters *because* they wholly lack the deliberative part of soul. Women are subordinate domestic partners subject to political or aristocratic rule by their husbands *because* they have deliberative faculties which are ‘without authority’ (*akuron*). And, finally, children are subject to kingly rule by their fathers *because* they have incompletely developed deliberative faculties. Although these psychological descriptions are supposed to illuminate the unique functions and virtues of these members of the household<sup>7</sup>, they are notoriously obscure and demand elucidation. Excellent work has been done to help us understand Aristotle’s views of the intellectual abilities of natural slaves<sup>8</sup>, but our main focus is Aristotle’s conception of the distinctive psychological orientation of women. What exactly does he mean by labeling a woman’s deliberative faculty ‘*akuron*’ or ‘without authority’?

2. In a short but very rich paper William Fortenbaugh offered an answer to this question which eventually became the orthodox interpretation of Aristotle’s view of the psychology of women<sup>9</sup>. Fortenbaugh’s main aim in his essay is to show that Aristotle’s views about the proper roles and virtues of the members of the household result from an application of a newly developed bipartite theory of the human soul (p.135). In the course of exploring how this theory influences Aristotle’s view of women he offers his proposal about what it means for their deliberative faculties to be ‘without authority’ (*akuron*):

Similarly in the case of women a reference to their psychological make-up combined with their bodily condition explains their role within the household and therefore ultimately their peculiar kind of virtue... their deliberative capacity is *akuron*, that is to say it lacks authority and is overruled easily. In stating this lack of authority Aristotle is

6 My translations of the *Politics* follow C.D.C. Reeve, *Aristotle: Politics*, Hackett, Indianapolis and Cambridge 1998, though sometimes with slight emendations.

7 These psychological differences underwrite or explain why the members of the household are subject to different kinds of character virtues *by* explaining why they have different roles and statuses in the household. For further discussion of how these psychological descriptions contribute to the argument of *Pol.* I.13, see Scott, “One Virtue or Many? Aristotle’s *Politics* 1.13 and the *Meno*”, pp. 108-10.

8 See M. Heath, “Aristotle on Natural Slavery”, «Phronesis», 53, 3, 2008, pp. 243-70; Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, ch.8.

9 Fortenbaugh, “Aristotle on Slaves and Women”.

not referring to inter-personal relationships but rather to an intra-personal relationship. Just as he looks within a slave to explain his social position, so he looks within the woman to explain her role and virtues. Her deliberative capacity lacks authority, because it is often overruled by her emotions or allogical side. Her decisions and actions are too often guided by pleasures and pains, so that she is unfitted for leadership and very much in need to temperance. (Fortenbaugh, "Aristotle on Slaves and Women", p.138)

According to Fortenbaugh, a woman's deliberative faculty is 'without authority' insofar as it lacks the power to control her non-rational impulses. He is keen to emphasize that this deficiency does not compromise her ability to deliberate<sup>10</sup>. Women, he maintains, can be extremely crafty and can often determine the right thing to do via deliberation. However, their emotions and allogical part of soul are naturally stronger than their practical deliberations and consequently tend to control their behavior more often than reason does.

Fortenbaugh observes that his interpretation has precedent in Greek literature and offers Medea as an example of it (p.139). Others have also found support for his view in Aristotle's own biological works (*HA IX.1 608b6-18*)<sup>11</sup>. I will examine the biological evidence below (see §6). For now, it is important to note that Fortenbaugh himself views its textual fidelity and explanatory power as the main support for his interpretation:

At first glance it may appear that Aristotle is simply referring to the subordinate position of women (1259b2, 1260a23). He may seem to be saying that while women possess reason, it does not prevail in the society of men. This would be, of course, true enough...But this truth does not do justice to Aristotle's point...The problem is on a more fundamental level – namely, why different kinds of people have different functions or roles in society. (Fortenbaugh, "Aristotle on Slaves and Women", p.138)

The alternative approach reads the 'akuron' adjective as making an empirical or conventional point about a woman's lack of authority in a male dominated society. However, that interpretation is problematic because the psychological descriptions at 1260a12-4 mention *natural* facts about the members of the household, and ones which *explain* why they have different roles in society<sup>12</sup>. Fortenbaugh duly acknowledges these details about the context of 1260a12-4 and tailors his interpretation accordingly. His 'intra-personal' interpretation construes

10 'Aristotle is not impugning the cleverness of women...His point is not that women deliberate only in some vague or illogical way, but that their reflections are likely not to control their emotions' (Fortenbaugh, "Aristotle on Slaves and Women", pp. 138-9).

11 See D.K. Modrak, "Aristotle: Women, Deliberation, and Nature", in B. Bar On, *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1994, pp. 207-22, at p. 213.

12 In order to account for this observation proponents of an inter-personal interpretation have accordingly modified their view and consequently read Aristotle as saying that women *by nature* (as opposed to convention) lack authority over men at 1260a13, see M. Deslauriers, "Aristotle on the Virtues of Slaves and Women", p. 229; R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, p. 286n.22; D. Scott, "One Virtue or Many? Aristotle's *Politics* 1.13 and the *Meno*", pp. 112-3.

a woman's deliberative lack of authority as a natural condition which explains her particular role in society. On his interpretation, the fact that a woman has a functioning deliberative capacity explains why, in contrast to a natural slave and child, Aristotle assigns her a role that 'is neither servile or puerile' (p. 139), and the inability of her deliberative faculty to control her emotions explain why, in contrast to a man, she is 'unfitted for leadership and very much in need of temperance' (p. 138).

3. Fortenbaugh's intra-personal interpretation is still running strong to this day, but it by no means commands universal assent. Some scholars find certain aspects or implications of his interpretation problematic. In this section and the next I consider two objections that have been raised against Fortenbaugh's interpretation. Although they are inconclusive, they prove instructive because they help clarify the central commitments of his interpretation.

Some scholars have objected that Fortenbaugh's interpretation is incompatible with a woman's potential for virtue:

...[Aristotle] could not distinguish women from those who are weak of will [on Fortenbaugh's interpretation], and yet he needs to if he is to attribute virtue to women, as he does. If women cannot subject their appetites to reason (even if the reason is not their own), then women cannot be virtuous; and yet we know that Aristotle wishes to claim that they can be virtuous. (Deslauriers, "Aristotle on the Virtues of Slaves and Women", p. 223)

According to Aristotle, virtue requires the proper subordination of non-rational desire to reason. However, on Fortenbaugh's interpretation, this configuration is absent in women because of the strength of their non-rational desires. Consequently, his view seems to entail that women are naturally weak willed or akratic, which is incompatible with them being virtuous. What, then, are we to make of Aristotle's talk of the virtues of women on this proposal?

If Fortenbaugh's interpretation did imply 1) that women are weak willed and 2) that this condition is permanent, it would problematically entail that they are incapable of virtue. But his interpretation does not have either of these implications. Firstly, while it cannot be denied that women are very similar to weak willed *men* on this interpretation, and that Aristotle would describe a man whose emotions overpowered his reason as weak willed, these claims do not necessarily imply that *women* are weak willed too. Aristotle is explicit in *Pol.* I.13 that men and women have different standards of virtue and vice (1260a14-24). Thus, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as 'virtue', 'vice', 'strength of will' or 'weakness of will' *simpliciter* which is commonly shared between them. Instead, men have one sort of virtue, vice, etc. and women have a different sort of virtue, vice, etc. (This is why Aristotle sides with Gorgias at 1260a27-31). Therefore, we cannot conclude that a woman exhibits the weakness of will proper to a woman from the fact that she is weak willed relative to a man's standards.

Secondly, even if Fortenbaugh's interpretation implied that women were weak willed relative to their own womanly standards, this condition would not necessarily be a permanent obstacle to their virtue. For, it is merely the *natural* state of women, which implies that it is their initial state from birth, not that it cannot be altered or improved. Like the other natural character states mentioned in *NE VI.13*, the natural weakness exhibited by a woman (if we wish to call it that) should be subject to modification via habituation. Fortenbaugh may wish to claim that it is ultimately impossible for a woman's reason to exert complete control over her emotions and that there will be some recalcitrant overly emotional tendencies even in virtuous women<sup>13</sup>. But, again, that would only imply that women are not capable of the virtues proper to a man. Provided that these sporadic emotional bouts did not prevent women from performing their domestic duties, they would not compromise their claims to womanly virtue (*Pol. I.13* 1260a14-7).

4. Dominic Scott has recently developed another objection to Fortenbaugh's interpretation which challenges the 'fit' between the psychological condition it ascribes to women and the confined domestic role attributed to them by Aristotle:

Here it is crucial to highlight an implication of taking '*akuron*' to refer to the failure of the rational part to control the *alogon*: there is nothing internally wrong with a woman's rational part; so long as it is not disrupted by wayward desires, it will be as good at deliberating as a man's....Even if there is always a risk that her passions will win out, she should still be given some role within the city, not just the household—not ultimate control, but something lower down. (Scott, "One Virtue or Many? Aristotle's *Politics* 1.13 and the *Meno*", p. 115)

On Fortenbaugh's interpretation, the main flaw that makes women unsuitable for political participation is the inability of their deliberative faculties to control their emotions, not the intrinsic power of their deliberative faculties *per se*. Consequently, his view leaves it open that women are the intellectual equals of men, albeit not their moral or emotional equals<sup>14</sup>. However, if women are on a par with men deliberatively, Scott wonders, why should they not have some role in politics? He concedes to Fortenbaugh that, in view of their inability to control their emotions, women should not participate in the highest political offices, but he effectively challenges the latter to explain why, on his interpretation, women should similarly be excluded from 'something lower down', e.g. participation in the assembly or law courts.

Admittedly, Scott's question is legitimate, but Fortenbaugh has an answer readily available. In general, Fortenbaugh's interpretation is based upon the presumption that intelligence by itself yields no claim to authority. The qualities that make

13 Cf. D. Modrak, "Aristotle: Women, Deliberation, and Nature", p. 217; D. Scott, "One Virtue or Many? Aristotle's *Politics* 1.13 and the *Meno*", p. 115.

14 Cf. Kraut's objection that Fortenbaugh's interpretation implies that Aristotle is "making an astonishing concession to the intellectual powers of women [sc. for his time]" (R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, 287n.22).

someone ‘fitted for leadership’ are not restricted to intellectual skills or abilities; they also include non-intellectual character traits as well<sup>15</sup>. For instance, in addition to being intelligent or wise, a good leader should be open-minded, deliberate, and considerate of others and their needs, values, and interests. This is surely not an exhaustive list, but it already suggests that someone impetuous or unable to control their emotions would not be an ideal candidate for a position of power or leadership. That, or something close to it, is the background assumption fueling Fortenbaugh’s interpretation, and it is not restricted to the highest political officials; it applies to jurors, members of the assembly, and anyone else in a position of political power. Consequently, Fortenbaugh could plausibly defend his interpretation from Scott’s objection by insisting that a woman’s inability to control her emotions *does* preclude her from political power *tout court*. The ability to control one’s emotions is a desideratum at every rung in the political ladder, and the fact that women by nature lack that ability makes them unsuitable for rule at any level of the polis.

5. The previous response effectively neutralizes Scott’s objection. However, I submit that it does so at the cost of making Fortenbaugh’s interpretation vulnerable to another, more difficult objection. We can plausibly grant that leadership requires a variety of non-intellectual skills and qualifications and that this is true of any position of political power, no matter how great or small; but we cannot plausibly restrict these qualifications to the political realm alone. For, they seem to be desiderata of individuals in positions of power or authority as such, not political leaders specifically. Rulers or leaders play a privileged, authoritative role in a larger setting, and their decisions affect the whole group of which they are parts, not only themselves. Consequently, authorities at any social level and venue must not only be able to identify what’s best for everyone involved; they must be able to achieve the common good in practice, which requires a host of character traits that, among other things, promote the successful execution of one’s plan and the subordination of one’s peculiar desires and interests to those of the group<sup>16</sup>. If that is correct, then Fortenbaugh’s interpretation not only implies that women are wholly unsuited for political power; it also entails that they are wholly unsuited for power or authority *in the household* (or any other social venue for that matter). But that implication conflicts with Aristotle’s attribution of partial domestic authority to women (see *NE VIII.10 1160b32-1161a1*).

Fortenbaugh has no easy response to this problem. The insight about the various character qualifications of rulers or authorities is perfectly general. Thus, any attempt to restrict it to the political realm would most likely be *ad hoc*. Moreover, if Fortenbaugh were to appeal to the intrinsic deliberative abilities of women in order to explain why Aristotle ascribes them partial domestic authority, he would

15 This is presumably why recommendation forms have distinct boxes for intellectual ability and leadership ability.

16 Cf. Socrates’ famous plea at *Republic* 341c-342e that the true ruler looks to the benefit of his subordinates, not himself (*contra* Thrysamachus).

be faced with an unfortunate dilemma. Recall that his interpretation leaves open that women are deliberatively on a par with men. Consequently, if Fortenbaugh were to claim that women deserve some authority in the household because of the strength of their deliberative faculties, but not ultimate authority because of their inability to control their emotions, one could legitimately ask why women do not likewise deserve partial authority in the polis<sup>17</sup>. If, however, Fortenbaugh were to modify his view of their deliberative abilities and propose that, according to Aristotle, women deserve partial authority in the household but not the polis because they are deliberatively inferior to men, he would have a plausible explanation of their social position, but at the cost of abandoning his original interpretation. As Fortenbaugh himself admits, the *'akuron'* adjective at 1260a13 refers to the condition that underwrites and explains a woman's distinctive social position. However, the characteristic shouldering the explanatory burden on this modified explanation is the inherent weakness of a woman's deliberative capacity, not its inability to control her emotions. Thus, if Fortenbaugh went the latter route, he would be committed to claiming that the *'akuron'* adjective at 1260a13 refers to the former characteristic, not the latter.

Ultimately, Aristotle's conception of a women's place in society is complex: he wholly excludes her from political power but attributes to her limited domestic authority. This poses a very difficult problem for Fortenbaugh's interpretation. As it stands, that interpretation cannot explain this asymmetry, i.e. why Aristotle attributes to women partial authority in the household *but not* the polis. The most promising way for Aristotle to explain the complex status he ascribes to women in society is to assume that women have intrinsically deficient deliberative faculties, which are only capable of operating within the narrow sphere of the household but not the polis. Though I cannot argue for it here, I believe that two passages confirm that Aristotle did indeed view women as deliberatively inferior to men in this way (cf. *Pol.* I.13 1260a14-24, III.4 1277b21-30)<sup>18</sup>. This observation favors a very different interpretation of the *'akuron'* remark at 1260a13, one that construes that adjective as somehow referring to the intrinsically limited status of a woman's deliberative faculty.

I have explored the latter proposal in more detail elsewhere<sup>19</sup>. Currently, I wish to examine the evidence in the biological works that some scholars have brought forward as support for Fortenbaugh's interpretation. This is important for a fair and balanced assessment of his interpretation. Many scholars who reject Fortenbaugh's interpretation of the *'akuron'* qualification altogether deny that Aristotle thought that women were naturally unable to control their emotions<sup>20</sup>. But this may be too

17 This essentially re-introduces Scott's objection.

18 I discuss these passages in J. Karbowski, "Aristotle on the Deliberative Abilities of Women", §4.

19 See J. Karbowski, "Aristotle on the Deliberative Abilities of Women", §7.

20 See M. Deslauriers, "Aristotle on the Virtues of Slaves and Women", p. 223; R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, pp. 286-7n.22; Scott, "One Virtue or Many? Aristotle's *Politics* 1.13 and the *Meno*", p. 115, n.31.

quick. After all, Aristotle could have most certainly believed that the deliberative faculties of women naturally lack authority over their emotions, *à la* Fortenbaugh, without intending to signify that specific psychological feature by means of the ‘*akuron*’ adjective at 1260a13. I will argue below that this is in fact the case.

6. Unfortunately, Aristotle says next to nothing about the character traits of women in the *Politics*. He admits that they are amenable to character virtues coordinate with their subordinate domestic status in *Pol.* I.13 and briefly contrasts their forms of temperance and courage with those of men (*Pol.* I.13 1260a20-4, III.4 1277b21-5). The latter remarks betray the assumption that women are naturally more cowardly than men, which was traditionally used to support their fitness for indoor tasks (cf. Xen. *Oec.* VII.25.1-4). However, for Aristotle’s most explicit discussion of the natural character traits of women we must look to the biological works and in particular the following passage in the *History of Animals*:

In all cases, except those of the bear and leopard, the female is less spirited than the male; in the two exceptional cases the superiority in courage resides with the female. With all other animals the female is softer, more mischievous, less simple, more impetuous, and more attentive to the nurture of the young; the male, on the other hand, is more spirited, more savage, simpler, and less cunning. The traces of these characteristics are more or less visible everywhere, but they are especially visible where character is more developed and most of all in man. For the nature of man is most rounded off and complete, and consequently in man the qualities above referred to are found most clearly. Hence woman is more compassionate than man, more easily moved to tears, at the same time is more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and to strike. She is, furthermore, more prone to despondency and less hopeful than the man, more void of shame, more false of speech, more deceptive, and more retentive of memory. She is also more wakeful, more shrinking, more difficult to rouse to action, and requires a smaller quantity of nutriment. (*HA* IX.1 608a33-b15)

Aristotle begins by describing the character traits exhibited by the male and females of sexed zoological kinds in general and then proceeds to identify traits peculiar to human men and women as such towards the end of the passage. He mentions a host of specific character traits, but they can be lumped under four main umbrella characteristics<sup>21</sup>:

1. Fearfulness: being less spirited, wakeful, more shrinking, difficult to rouse to action.
2. Emotional Sensitivity: softer, attentive to young, more compassionate, more easily moved to tears, proneness to despondency, lack of hope.
3. Impulsiveness: being impetuous, jealous, querulous, apt to scold and strike.

21 Robert Mayhew offers a similar four-fold classification of these features, though my category ‘Emotional Sensitivity’ replaces his category of ‘General Inferiority’, see R. Mayhew, *The Female in Aristotle’s Biology: Reason or Rationalization*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2004, p. 94. His discussion of this and related passages is helpful.

4. Deceptiveness: mischievous, less simple, void of shame, false of speech, deceptive, retentive of memory.

Of course, this is not a perfect classification. Some characteristics may fit into more than one category, and the boundaries between the categories are not entirely sharp. Furthermore, the last feature mentioned in the passage, viz. requiring a smaller quantity of nutriment, does not neatly fit into it. Nevertheless, this four-fold classification paints an informative general picture of the sort of character profile Aristotle is attributing to female animals and women in particular in this passage. Interestingly, insofar as it portrays women as naturally impulsive, reactive, scheming, and in general very emotional it supports something like the sort of character profile Fortenbaugh found in Aristotle.

Especially telling are the attributes of softness (*malakia*) and impetuosity (*propeteia*)<sup>22</sup>. Each of these is discussed in Aristotle's treatment of *akrasia* in *NE VII*. The former signifies the inability to endure pain or discomfort that most others could withstand (*NE VII.7 1150a9-15, 31-b5*), and the second denotes a form of *akrasia* which is not preceded by deliberation or choice but takes immediate action at the sight of the desired object (*NE VII.7 1150b21-2*). Notice, however, that neither of these conditions, nor any of the remaining ones mentioned in *HA IX*, coincides with the weak form of *akrasia* described in *NE VII*, i.e. the one in which the agent makes the right decision but it is overpowered by her stronger emotions (*NE VII.7 1150b19-21*). This is an important observation, because Fortenbaugh and his followers construe the natural character of women along the lines of the weak akratic agent whose emotions get the better of her (correct) deliberations<sup>23</sup>. By contrast, the *HA IX* passage, and in particular its attribution of impetuosity (*propeteia*) to women, paints a subtly different picture of the natural character of women, one according to which they are prone to act impulsively on their emotions *without* prior deliberation (and, moreover, when they do deliberate it is in the service of emotion, not reason's own ends/values). Now, of course, this is not to deny that women (subject to improper training and education) can exhibit

22 Another feature worth drawing attention to is their less spirited nature (*athumotera*). In Aristotle (and Plato too) spirit (*thumos*) is a complex, and multi-faceted phenomenon which is associated with the emotions of fear and anger, our competitive drive, and our own self-conception, see J.M. Cooper, "Reason, Moral Virtue, and Moral Value", in M. Frede and G. Striker, *Rationality in Greek Thought*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996, pp. 81-114; Heath, "Aristotle on Natural Slavery", pp. 255-8. In women the relative lack of spirit underwrites their cowardly nature (*HA IX.1 608a33-5*; cf. *Top. IV.5 126a8-10*) and also, presumably, their submissiveness (cf. *Pol. VII.7 1327b30-3*). This feature of their character is certainly relevant to their subordinate status in the household, cf. F. Miller, "The rule of reason", in M. Deslauriers and P. Destrée, *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, pp. 38-66, at. p. 50. However, it cannot be the whole story. For, by itself it does not explain why women deserve partial authority in the household but not the polis, any more than the inability to control their emotions can. So, it is doubtful that Aristotle is referring to it by the 'akuron' adjective at 1260a13.

23 See W.W. Fortenbaugh, "Aristotle on Slaves and Women", p. 139; cf. D. Modrak, "Aristotle: Women, Deliberation, and Nature", p. 213.

a weak form of *akrasia* or that (with proper training and education) they can acquire virtue. It is merely a description of the natural (as opposed to habituated) condition of women and, in particular, of the emotional condition described in Aristotle's most explicit and extensive discussion of the character traits of women in the corpus.

7. In spite of the subtle difference mentioned above, the foregoing confirms that there is a strand of thinking in Aristotle which generally coincides with the emotional picture of women invoked in Fortenbaugh's analysis. Moreover, he was probably correct to point to Greek literature as an important source influencing Aristotle's conception of women. For, the traits he ascribes to them in *HA IX* are by and large the very ones attributed to women in Greek tragedy and comedy<sup>24</sup>. Nonetheless, so that we do not take this concession as a license for the full endorsement of Fortenbaugh's interpretation, a few caveats are in order.

Firstly, the focal text upon which we have been drawing for Aristotle's conception of the natural character traits of women is taken from a biological treatise whose main purpose is to offer the results of a preliminary *historia* of the differentiae of animals (*HA I.6 491a7-14*)<sup>25</sup>. This does not imply that it is purely a random assemblage of information. Recent work on the treatise has convincingly shown that it is more than that<sup>26</sup>. But it does leave room for further development, refinement, and even rejection of the data provided. Therefore, quite apart from the fact that this information comes from a treatise different from the *Politics*, there is room for cautious skepticism about how much of the information Aristotle himself accepts at the end of the day<sup>27</sup>.

Secondly, even if it turned out that Aristotle imported the entire general picture from the *HA* into the ethico-political treatises or something very close to it<sup>28</sup>, it

24 A useful compilation of the traits ascribed to women in Greek literature can be found in K.J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1974, pp. 98-102.

25 On the pre-demonstrative nature of the *HA*, see D. Balme, "Aristotle's use of division and differentiae", in A. Gotthelf and J. Lennox, *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987, pp. 69-89; J. Lennox, "Between Data and Demonstration: The *Analytiks* and the *Historia Animalium*", in J. Lennox, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Biology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, pp. 39-71.

26 On Aristotle's strategy for organizing the material in the *HA* in a way that facilitates the posing of proper causal questions or 'problems', see J. Lennox, "Between Data and Demonstration: The *Analytiks* and the *Historia Animalium*".

27 An additional wrinkle is that there are some doubts about the authenticity of the later books of the *HA*. However, these doubts seem to be largely unfounded, see D. Balme, *History of Animals. Vol. 3, Books VII-X*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1991, pp. 1-13.

28 In the *NE* Aristotle alludes to a peculiar form of softness for women (*NE VII.7 1150b15-6*) and attests to a mother's natural affection for her children (*NE VIII.8 1159a28-33*, *VIII.12 1161b24-7*). He also points out that women, and womanly men, are prone to mourning (*NE IX.11 1171b6-12*). And in *Pol. III.4* he assumes that men are more naturally courageous than women (*Pol. III.4 1277b21-3*). This suggests that at least something close to the *HA IX.1* picture was read into the ethico-political works.

is unlikely that he is referring to the inability of a woman's reason to control her emotions with the 'akuron' adjective at 1260a13. For, again, that condition by itself is insufficient to justify the unique social role he attributes to women. In order to justifiably exclude women from politics altogether and confine them to partial ruling authority in the household he must assume that their strictly rational faculties themselves are by nature weaker than those of men, not merely unable to control their emotions. This suggests that Aristotle is somehow incorporating a reference to that intrinsic deliberative weakness with the 'akuron' adjective. This reference could be more or less direct, but, however we work it out, this spells bad news for Fortenbaugh's interpretation of the 'akuron' adjective.

8. In light of the previous discussion, we must conclude that Fortenbaugh's interpretation is neither wholly correct nor wholly incorrect. Some facets of his interpretation must be abandoned, while others should be accepted and developed. On the one hand, we should reject his specific proposal about the 'akuron' adjective, viz. that Aristotle is signaling with it the inability of a woman to control her emotions; but, on the other hand, we should admit that this is a feature of Aristotle's thinking of women more generally. This last conclusion was based upon an investigation of Aristotle's remarks about females in the biology, and it is worth highlighting a natural question that emerges from our investigation.

The *HA* IX.1 passage examined above contains Aristotle's most extensive discussion of the character traits of women and female animals more generally, but they do not exhaust his remarks about women in the biological works. For instance, he makes a number of well-known (and lamentable) comparisons of females to defective males in the *Generation of Animals* (*GA* II.3 737a22-34, IV.6 775a15-6). The interpretation of these remarks is notoriously subject to dispute, but, however we interpret them, it is natural to wonder whether, and if so how, they bear upon Aristotle's views about women in the *Politics*. Do Aristotle's views about women in the latter treatise depend upon those in the biology, or vice versa? Or, perhaps, are the two sets of views completely independent? I shall not attempt to answer this important question here<sup>29</sup>. Instead, I would like to make some observations that ought to be borne in mind by those who wish to consider this matter more fully.

The male (*to arren*)/female (*to th lu*) distinction at issue in the *GA* is essentially a distinction between individuals with different roles in *reproduction*<sup>30</sup>. In his initial account of the male and female generative factors in *GA* I.2, Aristotle characterizes the male as what is capable of generating in another and the female as what is capable of generating in itself (*GA* I.2 716a5-7, a20-3), but later he

29 For a recent and helpful discussion of this issue that argues compellingly for the independence of the treatments of gender in the biology and the *Politics*, see M. Deslauriers, "Sexual Difference in Aristotle's *Politics* and his Biology", «Classical World», 102, 3, 2009, pp. 215-30.

30 Aristotle recognizes that not all animal kinds exhibit sexual differentiation (*GA* I.1 715a20). He thinks that in general or as a rule the sexed zoological kinds will be those (blooded and bloodless) with the power of locomotion (*GA* I.1 715a25-30).

refines these accounts distinguishing the former from the latter in terms of the ability to concoct one's residual nourishment into seminal fluid (*gonē*) (*GA* IV.1 766a30-b3). Thanks to the fact that many zoological kinds exhibit such a sexual differentiation, Aristotle maintains that female (*to thēlu*) and male (*to arren*) are contrary predicates that belong as such or *per se* to animal itself (*Met.* X.9 1058a32-4)<sup>31</sup>. This implies that the proper level of generality at which to study these features is the level of the common animal nature possessed by the zoological kinds that exhibit them<sup>32</sup>. That explains why Aristotle discusses them in the *GA*, his general investigation of zoological generation, not a treatise concerned exclusively with humans, e.g., the *NE* or *Pol.*

By contrast, a woman (*gunē*) is a particular sort of human being, who is identified by her role in the household. Aristotle does not say much about a woman's domestic role in the *Politics*, but he says enough to suggest that he subscribes to the customary view of his time according to which women are fit for the 'indoor' tasks that pertain to the preservation and distribution of domestic goods (*Pol.* II.5 1264a40-b6, III.4 1277b24-5). These indoor tasks traditionally included nursing the infants, cooking, weaving clothes out of wool, and deciding how to store and distribute the domestic goods brought in from outside (cf. *Xen. Oec.* VII.21.3-5, 25.1-2). Only *human* females (and a particular subset of human females, freeborn women) are capable of performing these activities. That is why Aristotle discusses them in the *Politics*, one of the works constituting his 'philosophy of human affairs' (*NE* X.9 1181b15).

It is of course true that freeborn women have a role in reproduction (*Pol.* I.2 1252a26-8), but, importantly, that is not unique to them. Female slaves, by virtue of being female, also have a similar reproductive role. These observations do not necessarily preclude the possibility that the treatment of gender in the biological works and particular the *GA* may somehow underwrite that in the *Politics*, but they suggest that, if it does, the account of how it does so must be quite complex. For instance, one cannot simply say that the degree of vital heat that makes a particular human incapable of producing seminal fluid (or, alternatively, makes her capable of producing menstrual fluid) also explains why her deliberative faculty is 'without authority', since certain human females, viz. female slaves, lack the deliberative faculty altogether (*Pol.* I.13 1260a12). Further qualifications and distinctions are necessary to bridge this explanatory gap<sup>33</sup>. Whether Aristotle's writings contain the tools construct such a bridge, and whether the bridge is sturdy, are questions that

31 More precisely, they are related to animal via the second *per se* relation described in *An. Post.* I.4 73a37-b5: their subject, i.e., animal, is mentioned in their definitions, as number is mentioned in the definitions of odd and even or line in the definitions of straight and crooked, cf. *Met.* VII.5 1030b25 with 73b16-24.

32 On the methodological importance for Aristotle of studying attributes at the appropriate level of generality, see J. Lennox, "Divide and explain: The *Posterior Analytics* in practice", in A. Gotthelf and J. Lennox, *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987, pp. 90-119.

33 There are additional passages in the biological works that discuss the quality of the blood of women (cf. *HA* III.19 521a21-7) and the relation between the quality of something's blood and its intelligence (*Part. An.* II.2 648a2-11; cf. *Pol.* VII.7 1327b18-38). Mariska Leunissen

deserve more attention. However, regrettably, a more extensive treatment of these issues will have to wait for another time<sup>34</sup>.

9. We can – and should – reject many of the details of Aristotle’s ethico-political doctrines, e.g. his defense of slavery and disenfranchisement of craftsmen. More to the point, we must also reject his presumption that women are naturally less intelligent than men. That view is based upon an insufficiently small sample size (a survey of the existing poleis in his time) and mistakenly construes the customary treatment of women at the time (their exclusion from politics and philosophy) as an indication of their natural capabilities and proper role in society. History has shown that women are the intellectual equivalents of men (and often their superiors). Therefore, Aristotle’s treatment of women in the *Politics* is not something that we can accept nowadays.

However, simply because the details of Aristotle’s ethico-political theory and its associated psychological theory are false, that does not mean that we cannot learn something from them. Aristotle’s fundamental assumption that the ethical/political dimension of human nature shapes our psychology is especially important. Whatever we think about the specifics of his account, Aristotle was surely right to insist that humans are social creatures who cannot achieve fulfillment outside of an ethically informed communal setting. This implies that responding to ethical norms and forming friendships are part of the fabric of our being; they are things that we are hard-wired to do, and how we do them impacts the quality of our lives. This insight may seem a truism—it is certainly not meant to be a grand philosophical conclusion. It is instead a starting point that should be kept in mind in our ethical theorizing, but that does not make it any less important. As Aristotle himself remarked, “the beginning is...more than half of the whole, and many of the questions we asked are cleared up by it”.

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