

HOLT N. PARKER : **Aristotle's Unanswered Questions: Women and Slaves in *Politics* 1252a-1260b.**

Aristotle is more straightforward than his interpreters. A number of scholars have championed an Aristotle guided by pure inductive observation to reach a theory of the inferiority of women and slaves.

This view, however, is contrary both to Aristotle's expressed method and his stated purpose. He begins from the *phainomena* and his explicit goal is to defend them and the advantages of master and husband. The current power structure is founded on nature and is and must be logically and genetically superior to the arguments he makes in its favor.

In general, scholars have explicated either the argument about slaves or that about women. However, each is inescapably fettered to the other. The unquestioned inferiority of slaves is the analogical basis for the hierarchy of male over female (e.g. 1252a31). The unquestioned natural inferiority of women the basis of the proof of the existence of the natural slave (54b12-16).

Aristotle reveals the uncertain heart of his argument in a series of unanswered rhetorical questions (59b23-37). There are three parts to his defense. The philosophical move is to reject Plato's unity of virtue. Mere difference in quantity (Plato's solution) provides contingent not absolute rule. The teleological move argues from different virtues to different essences for women and slaves. Aristotle creates separate entities to be ruled. The rhetorical move is to blend analogies based on the "natural" difference between male and female with the hierarchical difference between master and slave. Thus we reach the master trope of Western philosophy: man is spirit/culture, woman is matter/nature. A series of misreadings of Aristotle's purposes and arguments reveal how successful he has been in anchoring ideology in a politicized nature.

Philosophy is not a purely intellectual exercise; it is also a call to moral action. We must ask and answer Aristotle's rhetorical questions.

**Mots-clés :**

Aristotle – women – slavery – nature – philosophy – teleology