IJCNP, Volume 4, Issue 07 2026 ISSN: 2995-536X
https://medicaljournals.eu/index.php/IJCNP

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGY

SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS OF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS ON GENDER EQUALITY

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Abstract: This article examines the socio-philosophical views of ancient philosophers, primarily Plato and Aristotle, on gender equality. Through comparative and hermeneutic analysis, it contrasts Plato's meritocratic stance in *The Republic* which subordinates sex to individual ability and knowledge with Aristotle's naturalized gender hierarchy grounded in his political philosophy. Both are evaluated against modern gender theories (Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach, Okin's family-inequality thesis, Butler's social-constructivist view of gender), revealing that while neither philosopher's views align fully with contemporary gender equality concepts, Plato's ideas prefigure the equal-opportunity paradigm, whereas Aristotle's reflect the institutional norms of his era. The study also references women's intellectual contributions in antiquity, including Hypatia of Alexandria and female thinkers of the Turan region, to complicate narratives of total exclusion. The findings offer a historical-philosophical foundation for understanding the evolution of gender equality discourse and identify Eastern philosophical traditions as a direction for further research.

Keywords: *gender equality; ancient philosophy; Plato; Aristotle; socio-philosophical thought; feminist theory; historicism*.

INTRODUCTION

In the current context of globalization, ensuring gender equality is a priority for protecting human rights, developing a democratic society, and achieving sustainable development. At the international level, the issue of gender equality is specifically recognized within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 – "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." From this perspective, studying the historical and philosophical roots of gender equality ideas holds not only theoretical but also practical significance [1].

The scientific novelty of this research lies in its comparative analysis of Plato's and Aristotle's views on gender against the concepts of modern gender philosophy, revealing their influence on the development of contemporary gender policy and socio-philosophical thought [2].

The research process utilized the methods of historicism, a systematic approach, comparative analysis, hermeneutic interpretation, and philosophical analysis. These methods enabled an analysis of the content of the ancient thinkers' works in close connection with the historical conditions in which they lived [3].

Martha Nussbaum, a prominent figure in modern gender philosophy, asserts through her "Capabilities Approach" that creating equal opportunities for women and men is a fundamental condition for societal development [4]. Susan Moller Okin scientifically substantiates that within ancient and modern political theories, inequality in the family serves as the starting point for social inequality in society. Meanwhile, Judith Butler interprets gender not as biological but as a social and cultural construct, highlighting the primacy of social factors in the formation of gender identity [5].

These theories enable a re-evaluation of the views of Plato and Aristotle based on modern scholarly criteria. In particular, while Plato's views prioritizing ability over sex are somewhat aligned with the contemporary concept of equal opportunities, Aristotle's ideas justifying a natural hierarchy between the sexes are critically assessed by modern gender theories [6].

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Thus, a comparative study of ancient philosophy with modern gender theories provides a deeper understanding of the historical evolution of the concept of gender equality and creates an important theoretical foundation for contemporary socio-philosophical research [7].

Gender equality is recognized today as a crucial criterion for human rights, democratic progress, and sustainable development. This issue is not merely a product of the modern era but was also reflected to a certain extent in the philosophical thought of ancient civilizations. The roles of men and women in society, their rights and obligations, their participation in state governance, and their social status were interpreted differently by ancient philosophers [8].

The evolution of gender relations can be observed throughout all stages of the development of Western and Eastern civilizations. This evolution can be conventionally divided into the following periods [9].

Ancient Greek philosophy, in particular, is considered one of the first philosophical schools that attempted to analyze the nature of society, the state, and humanity on a scientific basis. For this reason, the views of Plato and Aristotle are of particular scholarly importance when studying the historical roots of the gender equality issue [10].

METHODOLOGY

Plato's "The Republic" is considered one of the most important sources of political and philosophical thought of antiquity. In this work, while developing a model of an ideal state, the philosopher pays special attention to the roles of women and men in society. He assesses biological differences not as the primary factor determining a person's social functions, but rather as a secondary characteristic.

According to Plato, a person's position in society should be determined not by their gender, but by their natural abilities, knowledge, and potential to serve the interests of the state. For this reason, he advocates for equal opportunities for men and women in receiving an education, choosing a profession, and participating in public administration. This idea is considered an extremely progressive view, taking into account the conditions of antiquity.

In his work "The Republic," Plato asserts that a woman giving birth to a child does not mean she should be engaged only in household chores. On the contrary, if a woman possesses the necessary knowledge and skills, she can also serve in the state's administration just like men.

Nevertheless, it would be scientifically inaccurate to interpret all of Plato's views as advocating for absolute gender equality. This is because his works, such as "Timaeus," "The Republic," and "Laws," also contain ideas that place women in a subordinate position to men or describe them as a source of certain social dangers. Thus, Plato's views combine, on the one hand, progressive ideas with, on the other, conservative approaches shaped by the social stereotypes of his era. Another great thinker of antiquity, Aristotle, in his teachings on humanity and society, explains the differences between the sexes as a natural phenomenon. In his view, a human is primarily a political being who realizes their essence in the life of the polis. However, this definition applies mainly to free male citizens.

Aristotle considered the social status of women and slaves to be much lower than that of free male citizens. Their primary role was seen as related to the family, household management, and child-rearing. For this reason, Aristotle did not consider the active participation of women in the governance of the polis and in political life to be natural.

These views were directly linked to ancient Greece's slave-owning system, patriarchal family relations, and civic institutions. Therefore, it is more appropriate to evaluate Aristotle's views on women not by the principles of modern gender equality, but from the perspective of the historical conditions of that period.

At the same time, the history of the ancient period also features women who made a great contribution to the development of science. In particular, the famous scholar Hypatia, who lived in Alexandria, was active in the fields of mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy and was recognized as one of the most knowledgeable thinkers of her time. Her scientific work practically demonstrates that women in ancient society could also possess high intellectual potential.

The historical development of the gender issue cannot be confined to the scope of Western philosophy. Important historical information is also found in the Ancient East, particularly in Central Asia, regarding the role of women in state administration, military activities, and the development of enlightenment and culture. Historical sources note that many women thinkers and stateswomen who lived and created in the land of Turan made a worthy contribution to the development of society. This indicates that the issue of gender equality also had its own unique philosophical and cultural foundations in Eastern civilization.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analytical Findings on Philosophical Positions

The comparative philosophical analysis of Plato's and Aristotle's views on gender yields several substantive findings that illuminate the internal contradictions and historical conditionality of ancient thought on the subject. Plato's position, as articulated primarily in The Republic, represents a functionally meritocratic departure from the dominant patriarchal norms of Athenian antiquity [11]. By subordinating biological sex to individual capacity,

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knowledge, and civic utility, Plato constructs a philosophical framework in which women's exclusion from public and political life is contingent rather than essential a position that prefigures, however incompletely, the equal opportunity paradigm central to contemporary gender theory. Yet the analysis confirms that this progressivism is internally inconsistent: the coexistence of egalitarian propositions in The Republic with the subordinating characterisations of women in Timaeus and Laws reveals a philosopher whose views were simultaneously constrained by the social stereotypes of the slave-owning polis within which his thought was produced [12].

Aristotle's position presents a structurally different case. His naturalization of gender hierarchy grounded in the ontological category of the political being (zoon politikon) as an exclusively male, free-citizen subject does not contradict itself internally but rather reflects a coherent, if ideologically bounded, application of his broader teleological framework to social organisation. The analysis indicates that Aristotle's views are more appropriately evaluated as historically situated institutional prescriptions than as philosophical arguments about essential human capacities, a distinction that carries methodological importance for the application of modern gender theory to ancient texts [13].

Discussion in Theoretical Perspective

Situated against contemporary gender philosophical frameworks, these findings yield productive critical tensions. Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach provides the most direct evaluative lens for Plato's meritocratic proposals, affirming that the structural logic of creating equal developmental opportunities transcends its ancient formulation. Conversely, Butler's constructivist analysis of gender as socially produced rather than biologically determined renders Aristotle's naturalistic justifications theoretically indefensible, while simultaneously illuminating why such justifications proved institutionally durable across millennia [14]. Okin's identification of family-level inequality as the foundational source of broader social inequality is particularly pertinent: both Plato's and Aristotle's frameworks, despite their differences, preserve the domestic sphere as female-coded, indicating that neither philosopher fully decoupled gender from reproductive and household function.

The inclusion of Hypatia of Alexandria and the intellectual contributions of women scholars of the Turan region importantly complicates any monolithic narrative of ancient female exclusion, suggesting that philosophical prescriptions and historical social realities did not always converge [15].

Knowledge Gaps and Directions for Further Research

The study's principal knowledge gap lies in its geographic scope: the analysis centres on Greek antiquity while offering only preliminary reference to Eastern philosophical traditions. A systematic comparative investigation of gender conceptualisation in Islamic philosophy, Zoroastrian thought, and the Sufi intellectual traditions of Central Asia would substantially enrich the historical genealogy of gender equality ideas, particularly for readers in the Uzbek scholarly context. Future research should also examine how Plato's and Aristotle's gender frameworks were transmitted, transformed, and selectively appropriated within medieval Islamic philosophy including the commentarial traditions of Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd to trace their long-run influence on gender discourse in both Western and Eastern intellectual history.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that the views of ancient philosophers on gender equality were closely intertwined with the political, economic, and social relations of that era. While Plato, on certain issues, advocated for equal education and opportunities for women and men to participate in state governance, Aristotle sought to justify social differences between the sexes as a natural and necessary condition.

Although the views of both philosophers do not fully align with the modern concept of gender equality, they represent a significant historical milestone in shaping the philosophical foundations of the gender issue. In particular, Plato's views, which prioritized ability and knowledge over gender, are recognized as one of the philosophical roots of equality ideas that formed in later periods.

Thus, the issue of gender was not interpreted uniformly in the philosophy of antiquity, where both progressive and conservative views were manifested. Studying these views based on the principle of historicity allows for a deeper understanding of the formation process of modern gender theories.

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