

Ancient Thought on Gender Equality

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Abstract

In ancient Athens and Rome, a few male writers conceptualized gender equality within their society, and what that would mean. Plato in his “Republic” and Aristophanes in “Ecclesiazusae” both conceived of a communist society where the genders are equal, and all resources are shared. Aristophanes proposes a government led by women, in which all share families and living spaces. Plato proposes an integration of women into the military, and the common raising of children. In Imperial Rome, Musonius Rufus argued for the full education of women, due to their equal nature to men and potential for success. However, writers such as Aristotle and Hippocrates believed in the inferiority of women’s bodies, and therefore their inability to rule or have equal footing with men. Many of these misogynistic stereotypical and biological prejudices against women in the ancient world continue today and hamper the ability of women to be considered as equal citizens in their potential to govern our American society. While there are some female trailblazers in the American government, such as Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Hattie Caraway, there is still a lack of full gender equality in the system, shown by the pay gap between men and women, and the gender demographics of Congress and the Presidency.

1. Introduction

“I ask no favor for my sex. All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks.” -Ruth Bader Ginsberg, quoting Sarah Moore Grimké

In ancient Athens and Rome, women were considered inferior to men in many ways. They were considered not fit to be able to vote or rule in any capacity, and were considered unequal in the eyes of the law. They could be involved in religion and social life, but held no place in the political or governmental sphere. In order to explore the idea of gender equality in the ancient world, we must define that term. Gender equality, as defined by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, refers to “the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether or not they are born male or female.”¹ Of course the connotations of this have changed throughout history and cultures, but this is the general definition used throughout this paper. However, many male ancient writers and thinkers were aware of this as well, and whether they agreed or disagreed, were able to recognize the inequality present in their system. Using the writings of several figures from Athens and Rome, such as Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, and Musonius Rufus, I hope to examine how these ancient writers perceived gender and gender equality, and how that corresponds with the outlook in America today.

In this paper I will examine the writings of ancient authors, along with secondary sources previously written, in order to explore what the thought of gender equality was in Ancient Greece and Rome, and what that would look like in those societies. I first wish to introduce the primary sources I have found that give proposals on gender equality, or the emancipation of women, and analyze them in their historical context and the context in which they are presented,

such as in philosophical writings or in the case of Aristophanes, in comedy. I then wish to explore the secondary sources which also explore these themes, and previous arguments about the validity or sincerity of such proposals. I also mean to explore the ways in which there was a semblance of gender equality in Ancient Greek and Rome, or the certain women or types of women who were able to gain it. Finally, I want to compare these ancient writings and proposals on gender equality to the thoughts of gender equality in America in the 20th and 21st centuries, and what arguments have been given for or against it.

1.1 Context

I do not wish to make the claim that any of these authors were “proto-feminist” or in the case of Aristotle, “anti-feminist,” since those are modern phrases with modern connotations that do not quite fit the context of these primary sources. It is also important to note that all primary sources are by men. This is because very few writings of ancient women have survived through the years, and none that I have found relevant to my subject. This is crucial because we are examining the gender power dynamic through the writings of the people who held the power. This creates a lopsidedness that, if it cannot be overcome, must at least be acknowledged. Since there are few primary sources by women, their thoughts or feelings about their place in society are largely unknown to us.

As mentioned in the introduction, the main ancient sources I will be exploring are that of Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, and Musonius Rufus. The first three were present in the democracy of Athens in the late 5th to mid 4th centuries. In this time, of course, citizens who could participate in politics were only men with property. Women could be considered citizens, but with no responsibilities or opportunities within politics and government, and no access to education. Their public actions were limited to religious practices, particularly funerary rites. Their only other roles for citizen women were that of a wife and mother. Otherwise, there were slaves or sex workers, including *hetairai*, none of whom could be considered citizens at all.² Roughly 400 years or more later, Musonius Rufus and his fellow Stoics were philosophers in Rome in the 1st century AD, and Rufus lived in the empire of Nero and later Galba. Despite the passage of time and culture, there was still little equality for Roman women. Richard A. Bauman writes, “Although never allowed to hold office or to vote, women played an important, and often - in spite of determined resistance- decisive role in public affairs.”³ There were also some powerful women in politics in the time that Musonius Rufus was writing, like Emperor Nero’s mother, Agrippina, and his wife Octavia, who might have influenced Rufus’ views. This historical context can help us understand why these ancient writers believed what they did about gender equality.

1.2 Primary Sources

The primary source that originally drew me to this topic was Aristophanes’ play *Ecclesiazusae*. In this, the women of Athens disguise themselves as men in order to participate in the Assembly, and pass a motion giving governmental power to women. After this, the women, led by Praxagora, institute a communist-like state in Athens, in which there is a common pool of resources and citizens equal in the eyes of the law. While there is of course a lot of crude humor in the play, there is also a clear denouncement of the Athenian democracy by Praxagora, as she states that “scarcely one in ten of those who rule it is honest, and all the others are bad.”⁴ The next point is that the Assemblymen spurn those that love them, and love those who would betray them, and that money rules them all. She then argues that women would be the better leaders for several main reasons. First, women are good at keeping tradition, which was one complaint against the male Assembly. Second, they can keep secrets, as they keep the Thesmophoria. As mothers, they are invested in taking good care of the military, they are good at getting money for themselves, and they are hard to deceive.⁵ These arguments and the large number of disguised women present in the Assembly allow Praxagora to win her case, giving women the power over the city, and enabling them to enact their “communist” state.

There are a few different ways that the humor of *Ecclesiazusae* can be taken. Of course, there is the obvious “crude” comedy, such as Blegyrrus’ constipation, and a lustful ugly hag, but there is also comedy found in the plot and structure of the play. John Zumbrennen gives some ideas, such as pointing out the ridiculous nature of the “Athenian exclusion of women *qua* women,” as the Assemblywomen can so easily pass as men with disguises. It can also be continuing the stereotype of tricky, deceptive women, or it can be taking an ironic look at Athenian society, as the women must become men in order to get any rights for themselves.⁶ It seems that Aristophanes has real complaints about the current governing system of Athens, aired by Praxagora. William Casement argues that it is vital to understand the political theory of *Ecclesiazusae*, and in fact argues, “While Aristophanes’ medium is comedy, in the *Ecclesiazusae* he forces us to examine a very serious subject.”⁷ Through the lens of comedy, Aristophanes examines the role of women, and the feasibility of changing the current system.

In Book 5 of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates explains to Polemarchus, Glaucon, and Thrasymachus that both sexes possess the qualities required to be rulers. He then goes on to describe a shared society quite similar to Praxagora's, in which there are both male and female guardians, and they share the same education and duties in the city. Socrates proposes that the traditional family system will be no more, but that men and women will be matched by lot, and the "best" will have more opportunities to mate than the others. Children will be raised all together, and "inferior" children will be exposed. The whole city will be family, and all goods will be shared. When they go to war, everyone of age goes to fight.

Aristophanes thinks of a society where everyone gets an equal and fair chance to pair up and mate; Plato takes a more eugenic approach, where the best of the best (in terms of physical fitness and mental aptitude) are given more opportunities for relationships and jobs. Socrates in *Republic* gives an argument that comes up several times in ancient writing about gender equality: the gender divide of animals, using this as an explanation of why human men and women should not be kept separate. Plato writes, "Are dogs divided into hes and shes, or do they both share equally in hunting and in keeping watch and in the other duties of dogs? Or do we entrust to the males the entire and exclusive care of the flocks, while we leave the females at home, under the idea that the bearing and suckling their puppies is labour enough for them?" He also writes a detailed plan for such a society, giving plans for institutions from education to military service, and explaining the necessity for equal education and training in order to have a society that is equal, as he writes, "Then, if women are to have the duties as men, they must have the same nurture and education? Yes."⁸ This sentiment is very similar to one shared by the late Stoic writer Musonius Rufus.

There is more intersection of Plato and Aristophanes concerning gender equality, as Plato makes the playwright part of his *Symposium*. In Aristophanes' speech, he describes the original form of human as having two pairs of arms and legs, and two faces. There was an all-male form, an all-female form, and a male and female together. When these humans thought about reaching and attacking the gods, they were split in two, and left wandering the earth, looking for their other half. Aristophanes is describing love here, and says, "But my words have a wider application-they include men and women everywhere; and I believe that if our loves were perfectly accomplished, and each one returning to his primeval nature had his original true love, then our race would be happy."⁹ There is no difference of the genders here, only the difference of sexuality, and as Aristophanes describes it, women are just as free to love women as men are to love men. However, Aristophanes does state that the men who are paired with other men are the best and most manly, leading to other discussions of sexism and patriarchy, but in general this speech shows a general sense of equality for women, or at least no inequality based on gender.

As I already mentioned, the Roman Stoic Musonius Rufus had similar ideas of education of women to Plato, many centuries later. There are two lectures by Rufus that follow the idea of gender equality: "That Women Too Should Study Philosophy," and "Should Daughters Receive the Same Education as Sons?" These both obviously focus on the idea of equality in education, a topic which Plato described as vital to equality in society. In the latter, he quotes one of the arguments of Plato, in which the Greek states that male and female animals are not trained differently. Rufus argues that a foolish woman is just as bad as a foolish man, and that women have essentially the same abilities, but lack the training, saying, "that women have some prowess in arms the race of the Amazons demonstrated when they defeated many tribes in war. If, therefore, something of this courage is lacking in other women, it is due to lack of use and practice rather than because they were not endowed with it."¹⁰ This lecture specifically is targeted to fathers of daughters, while "That Women Too Should Study Philosophy" is aimed towards husbands. In this, he summarizes the ways that a woman would benefit from being educated in philosophy.

However, Musonius Rufus was not proposing the same kind of completely equal society seen in *Ecclesiastes* or *Republic*. In fact, he states that educating women would help them be better in their set roles, saying, "As for justice, would not the woman who studies philosophy be just, would she not be a blameless life-partner, would she not be a sympathetic help-mate, would she not be an untiring defender of husband and children, and would she not be entirely free of greed and arrogance?"¹¹ Martha Nussbaum captures this wavering equality of Rufus in "The Incomplete Feminism of Musonius Rufus," writing, "Musonius elaborately shows that the world will be better with equal treatment of women; he never quite says, look, they just are equals in fundamental respects and have the right, therefore, to be treated as equals."¹² This was typical for Late Stoics like himself, who were sympathetic to women, but in "Woman's Role in the Home and the State: Stoic Theory Reconsidered" David M. Engel writes, "it will become clear that they never advocated the political empowerment of women. Indeed, when given the opportunity to do so, they explicitly rejected the suggestion."¹³ In the case of Musonius Rufus, this difference from Aristophanes and Plato may stem from the fact that the Roman was giving actual suggestions to actual society, while Aristophanes was creating a comedy, and Plato was recounting a philosophical debate. Of course, it is still important to recognize the fairly radical belief that Rufus gives, that women should be educated in the same manner as men. This is a step towards equality.

Aristotle has very clear and well-known views about the differences between men and women, both biologically and politically. In fact, he views females as biologically defective, an incomplete version of the male. He states in *Generation of Animals*, “For females are weaker and colder in nature, and we must look upon the female character as being a sort of natural deficiency.”¹⁴ In regards to politics, Aristotle believed that women are naturally subject to men, and incapable of ruling. Marguerite Deslauriers argues that the biological weakness of women was not related to their natural subjugation, saying “The naturalness of the political subjection of women is, for Aristotle, a fact independent of the bodies of men and women.”¹⁵ In any case, Aristotle certainly did not believe in any form of gender equality, and gave several arguments against it. Unlike his predecessor Plato, it did not seem that Aristotle could or would conceive of a society with women equal to men.

I have previously described the gender-equal societies proposed by both Plato and Aristophanes as “communist,” as in both, there is a shared pool of resources and good for the entire city, and no person has more than the other. Aristophanes addresses much of this in *Ecclesiazusae* in the form of a man called Chremes challenging the new system. When Chremes argues that many will hide their wealth, Praxagora replies that they will have no need to, as more than enough will be provided by the state. She then argues that as long as everyone is provided for equally, they will have no need or wish to hoard or steal. There will also be no court cases, as no one will have any need to sue one another, and no gambling, as no one will have any private property to set forth. Finally, walls will be torn down, and everyone will live communally, and draw lots to see which public dining hall they will eat in.¹⁶ Communism is defined as a “political and economic doctrine that aims to replace private property and a profit-based economy with public ownership and communal control of at least the major means of production and the natural resources of a society.”¹⁷ The new society in *Ecclesiazusae* falls well within this definition. Plato comes up with very similar system, writing, “Both the community of property and the community of families, as I am saying, tend to make them more truly guardians; they will not tear the city in pieces by differing about ‘mine’ and ‘not mine;’ each man dragging any acquisition which he has made into a separate house of his own, where he has a separate wife and children and private pleasures and pains; but all will be affected as far as may be by the same pleasures and pains because they are all of one opinion about what is near and dear to them, and therefore they all tend towards a common end.”¹⁸ Plato also writes that protection of every citizen is the duty of everyone, and all citizens are responsible for the defense of the city. *Republic* and *Ecclesiazusae* were roughly contemporaneous, with *Ecclesiazusae* being about 16 years older. The similarities of the communist societies between the two are striking and fascinating, especially since they both stem from conversations about gender equality. It seems that the concept of women being politically equal to men is so extreme that it requires an extreme change in society in the eyes of Aristophanes and Plato.

Now, it must be noted that the emancipation of slaves does not fit into either of these proposed societies. There is an agreement in *Republic* to no longer enslave fellow Hellenes, but it seems still acceptable to enslave “barbarians,” as Plato writes that Athens should deal with barbarians “as the Hellenes now deal with one another,”¹⁹ meaning burning cities and enslaving the people. In *Ecclesiazusae*, there is not even a question of ending slavery. When asked who will till the soil, Praxagora simply replies, “the slaves.”²⁰ Obviously these people do not count in the new “equal” society.

There is also a similarity between the two works in the sexuality of the societies. In both, there are rules regarding pairing and mating. As discussed above, Plato takes more of a eugenic approach, pairing the best of the best together and giving them first place. He writes, “Why, I said, the principle has been already laid down that the best of either sex should be united with the best as often, and the inferior with the inferior, as seldom as possible; and that they should rear the offspring of the one sort of union, but not of the other, if the flock is to be maintained in first-rate condition.”²¹ The goal here is not exactly equality, but to create the “best” society possible. Aristophanes takes somewhat the opposite approach for comedic effect, as Praxagora states that the old and ugly will have first pick, so that they are not left behind. She says, “The ugliest and the most flat-nosed will be side by side with the most charming, and to win the latter's favours, a man will first have to get into the former... The ugly will follow the handsomest into the public places after supper and see to it that the law, which forbids the women to sleep with the big, handsome men before having satisfied the ugly shrimps, is complied with.”²² Of course, the comedic effect of this idea is important to its context, but even in such similar proposals between Aristophanes and Plato, there are different methods that enable different motives and underlying thoughts of equality between the two. Plato speaks of gender equality and common resources in order to create a greater Athens, particularly in the military, which will have double the amount of soldiers with the addition of women. Aristophanes, on the other hand, is airing out grievances with the Athenian democracy, and coming up with an extreme solution for comedic purposes. In fact, William Casement writes, “Aristophanes is not an advocate of the utopian ideas he presents, while Plato means to support his.”²³

2. The Lives of Women

It is important to recognize that women in ancient Athens were not only unequal to men, but they were virtually powerless in terms of law, and controlled by the men in their family. For their entire life, women were supervised by their *kyrios* (having power or authority over). Until marriage, this *kyrios* would usually be a girl's father, or other family member, until she married and her husband took over the role.²⁴ These men had control over the girl's education, rights, privileges, and marriage, and the girl had little to no input. There is a common conception of the high-born Athenian woman never leaving her house, secluded from the outside world. Roger Just writes, "A woman's place was within the home, within the family; and though she may not have been physically constrained to remain there, that was her realm of competence."²⁵ As women were excluded from politics and law, they had their place in the *oikos* (home).

However, women had some small freedoms, and ways to gain power. Roger Just tells how women could have some influence in politics simply by being educated and influencing their husbands. However, this was only relegated to a certain status of women, as Just writes, "The feminine form of 'citizen', i.e. *politis*, does occur, but in general when it was necessary to distinguish the mother, or wife, or daughter of an Athenian citizen from other women (as it often was), then the somewhat odd term *aste* (city-woman) was used."²⁶ As was often the case, the freedom of these women depended heavily on the status of their husband. On the subject of existing equality, scholars are somewhat mixed on exactly how secluded freeborn Athenian women were in society. Many agree that these women were not locked away, but rather watched closely when out in public. Ancient sources such as Plato indicate that women were allowed to attend the theatre, and there are also indications that they could attend state events, shown by Pericles addressing women directly in his famous funeral oration.²⁷ Women and girls were also heavily involved in the religious life of the city, as they were able to act as priestesses, held the most responsibility for funeral rites, and even had their own exclusive festival, the *Thesmophoria*.

Of course, not every woman in ancient Athens was a free-born, upper class wife to a citizen. As Just noted, there was also the *aste*, which represented the other women living in the city, those who were not married to upper class citizens. In a certain way, not being an upper class wife could grant more freedom or more equality to a woman. This is most clear in the case of the *hetaira*. Although classed as a sex worker, *hetaira* really means 'companion,' and these women were generally long-term courtesans or mistresses for wealthy men in Athens. They were often free and independent, and there were several famous *hetairai* of the age, like ones named Phryne and Gnathaena.²⁸ Aspasia is another legendary *hetaira*, loved by Pericles and spoken highly of by Plato and Socrates. However, Roger Just says of them, "any woman who was likely to become the intellectual and, in a sense, the social equal of a man would have to be a *hetaira*; for it was in that capacity alone that a woman could have entry into male society."²⁹ Other than sex workers, there were other ways that women could have gone beyond traditional roles to get more recognition in ancient Greece. One example is female poets. Sappho is the most well-known female poet from this time, but there were others who were famous in their own right, and there is even a list of some by Antipater of Thessalonica, listing Sappho among names like Anyte, Erinna, Myrtis, Korinna, and more.³⁰ There is much debate on whether these poets performed for only female, or for mixed audiences, but it is clear that poetry was a form of freedom for some ancient Greek women. While acknowledging the lack of general equality for women in ancient Athens, it is interesting to note the small exceptions, and the ways that women could subvert their unequal status.

Many of the rights for women, or lack thereof, in Athens were still similar for women in ancient Rome. They were not considered full citizens, and had no voting or governmental rights. Most women were defined by the men around them, either their father, husband, or in the case of slaves, master. A daughter was given the feminine form of her father's name, and were under the control of the *paterfamilia* (head of the household) until they were married, and transferred under the control of their husband.³¹ However, Roman women did enter the public sphere more than Athenian women, and had more freedom of movement and independence. In fact, Michael Massey states, "By the beginning of the first century AD, laws were passed freeing women from this kind of guardianship and gradually extending their rights and responsibilities."³² Freeborn women were fairly respected, and had influence over their households, the *materfamilias* of Rome. This, of course, describes elite Roman women, of whom we have the most information on. There is general thought by some scholars that Roman women were slightly more equal to men than Athenian women, or that they had more rights and freedoms. Judith P. Hallett writes, "It also warrants reflection that the Roman elite did not distance and privatize the females of their milieu in the mode of the classical Greeks, who secluded women into a self-contained domestic sphere."³³ However, we must note that the genders were still not equal in government and law, and that the idea of 'freedom' can be changed according to opinion.

Like in Athens, sometimes specific women got a chance to have more equality, based on their occupation or situation. Valerius Maximus, a Roman historian, wrote of three radical female Roman orators. Mary Deminion writes, “If gender is defined in ancient Rome according to a framework of inclusion/exclusion, the forced inclusion of these few women in the exclusively male domain of public oratory places tension on the construction of gender as a natural binary and poses a direct test to the limits of Roman patriarchal power.”³⁴ Not only did these women “break the glass ceiling” in Roman oratory, but in some way proved that men were not inherently superior. Valerius Maximus writes of Maesia of Sentinum, who pleaded her own case in court and was acquitted, called *Androgyne* because she spoke like a man. Then he writes of Gaia Afrania, who was “addicted to lawsuits,” and became the name given to women who were unruly. Finally, there was Hortensia, who spoke against a heavy tax for women, whose late rhetorician father was apparently speaking through her. Note how all of these women were either called men, had men speaking through them, or were just considered obnoxious. This was a way to diminish the achievements of these women, and try to oppose the tension and test of which Mary Deminion writes.

However, there were some other notable women who seemed to subvert the expectations of their gender in Rome. Agrippina, Emperor Nero’s mother, and the granddaughter of Augustus, held a lot of power influencing the men of her family, and had many ambitions in politics. In fact, she sought to be co-emperors with her son Nero, and even attended a meeting of the senate.³⁵ Agrippina may be the Roman woman who came the closest to full equality with men, though of course she was of the highest status. Going back to the status of women in Rome, we can still see how even these powerful women were defined by relations to men. Hallett writes, “Agrippina, Tacitus implies, displayed the qualities of a military and political leader by reason and as proof of illustrious male ancestry.”³⁶ It seems that in the eyes of Roman men, a woman could only be powerful through the males in her family.

We have examined many of the effects and explanations of misogyny within the ancient world, but not yet discussed the root of that, and the reasoning that led to (and still leads to) gender inequality, exclusion of women from the government, and patriarchal power. Misogyny is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.”³⁷ Much of the misogyny found in the ancient world comes from generalizations about women, as well as a belief in their biological inferiority. These beliefs lead to ingrained prejudices. For instance, in *Theogony*, Hesiod speaks of the entire female population, saying, “Zeus who thunders on high made women to be an evil to mortal men, with a nature to do evil.”³⁸ There is even some evidence of this in *Ecclesiastusae* from Praxagora herself. When she is arguing the reasons women would be good leaders, she says, “Woman is adept at getting money for herself and will not easily let herself be deceived; she understands deceit too well herself.”³⁹ There is a common theme in much of ancient Greek literature of women being cunning and deceitful, ranging from mischievous to pure evil. The same is often true for Rome, as Judith Hallett writes, “Yet the perception of women’s Otherness is frequently voiced, especially in various statements from a broad array of Latin literary works which generalize about the female sex.”⁴⁰ The “otherness” of women was an excuse for them to be excluded and generalized.

We can also go back to Aristotle who believed that women were the defective version of men, or Hippocrates, who seems to suggest the same thing in his explanation of menstruation. Christia Mercer writes, “From the fact that female bodies are unable to use up their excess fluids, it follows that female nature is naturally imbalanced.”⁴¹ We know now that the biological beliefs of both Aristotle and Hippocrates are wrong, but the fact that many of their beliefs of the female body were based on the idea of female inferiority speaks to the misogyny inherent in ancient Greek culture.

3. Gender Equality Today

While there are many issues concerning gender and the oppression of women throughout the world today, I will be focusing on the United States of America as a point of comparison of the progress in gender equality. The women’s suffrage movement started gaining more momentum in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York. Many female supporters of the suffrage movement were originally abolitionists, who found their voice in the anti-slavery movement, and transitioned towards suffrage under the idea that every man and woman is created equal. This is a change from the women of *Ecclesiastusae*, who still considered slaves a vital part of their new “equal” society. White women in America received the right to vote on August 18, 1920, in the Nineteenth Amendment. However, due to poll taxes, literacy tests, and Grandfather clauses, many women of color were not able to enjoy these rights until the Civil Rights Movement over 40 years later. Gender equality for voting was a struggle throughout the 19th and 20th century, until the rights of *all* women were enacted.

Voting equality is not the only form, however, and there are some aspects of government and society in America that do not have true gender equality. There has been a consistent gap in pay since women entered the workforce in

America. The percentage of a white man's pay that women generally receive is dependent on age, location, and race, but is nearly always less. In 2020, the median annual earnings for white women were 80%, while it was 63% for black women and 54% for Hispanic women. Asian women generally tend to have higher pay, but even they receive just 87% of the pay of white men.⁴² These pay gaps are very prevalent and harmful in a society which claims to have gender equality. There will be no equality unless people with the same jobs are paid equally, no matter their gender or race.

In addition to the pay gap, there is not equal representation of women within our representational government. As of 2020, women made up only 23.7% of the United States Congress. Only 9% are women of color.⁴³ The first woman to ever hold a federal office in the United States was Jeannette Rankin, in 1916, before women even had voting rights. In 1931, Hattie Caraway of Arkansas became the first woman to serve a full term in the Senate, as well as the first woman to preside over the Senate. A woman has also never been elected President of the United States, and Hillary Rodham Clinton was the first to be nominated for a major party in 2016. In 2020, Kamala Harris became the first woman to be elected as the Vice President of the United States, as well as the first woman of color. However, these "firsts" were not indicative of a common election of women, as seen by the current representation. The lack of equality in representation is seen by the election of a woman into an executive position for the first time a full century after the Nineteenth Amendment. The second female Supreme Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, was notable for her work to enact gender equality in America. For instance, she spoke out against the *Ledbetter v. Goodyear* case in 2007, in which a female employee sued her employer for pay discrimination due to gender. This led to the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which Ginsberg was credited for inspiring.⁴⁴

Misogyny is also still prevalent in America, and against women in politics. Speaking on Hillary Clinton's first campaign for President in 2008, Melissa Ames writes, "More overt instances of sexism, occurred when Clinton was portrayed as an emotional woman after tearing up on the campaign trail, or when the media simply could not help referencing her 'menstrual cycle, pantsuits, laugh, and her husband's infidelity.'"⁴⁵ There have often been many jokes and claims made about why a woman should not be in the White House, often due to stereotypes of being overly emotional, vindictive, and ruled by her menstrual cycle. These stereotypes and prejudices are rooted in misogyny in America just as they were in Athens, and just as Aristotle believed women to be naturally incapable of ruling, so do some even now.

Like in Aristophanes' plays, modern entertainment is often used as political tools, or simply mirrors to political situations. Melissa Ames writes specifically about the 2016 Presidential election, saying, "Though entertainment genres often are affected by peak political moments, this particular election found the entertainment industry playing an active role in attempting to shape the outcome of the race. As in years past, the various infotainment and satire genres... played a role in the election, offering scathing critiques of Trump (e.g., *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, *This Week Tonight with Jon Oliver*, *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*)." ⁴⁶ We can see how just like in Athens, comedic entertainment can still be a lens through which to view political issues in America. It is also a way to examine gender equality and politics. Mary McHugh writes, "As we will see, long-term success for female candidates begins with, and depends on, candidate humanization that can occur during political satire in late-night comedy programs."⁴⁷ Finding comedy in women in politics, and not necessarily through stereotypes, allowed Americans to get used to the idea. Aristophanes also found humor in the idea, and did not always rely on negative stereotypes of women.

4. Conclusion

Misogyny has been a part of societies like Athens, Rome, and America throughout history. This misogyny leads to stereotypes, prejudice, and inequality, and makes it difficult for women to gain any more political or legal status than what they are already given. In Athens, the *hetairai* and some female poets were able to enjoy more inclusion as a result of their professions, as contemporary writers like Aristophanes and Plato imagined scenarios where women and men would live, rule, and fight together as an equal society. In Rome, women of the imperial family enjoyed political influence, and some women subverted tradition in order to speak for themselves, but they were all defined by their relationship to men. Even Musonius Rufus believed women should be educated in order to better fulfill their set roles in society. Now, in America, there is still not equal gender representation in our representational government, or equal pay for women. Entertainment and comedy are still used as a tool to examine our society, including the misogyny within. However, in nearly all of these cases, particularly the ancient sources, we are reading words of men only, and seeing the male perspective. It is difficult to know what ancient women would think of our definition of gender equality and how it pertained to them, but we can at least hear the words of modern women asking for equality in America,

through the media and through government and law. Unlike Athens and Rome, there is a chance to preserve the words and thoughts of women, in order to utilize them in the struggle for equality.

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