GENDER IN THE HISTORY OF EARLY MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT*

ANNA BECKER

University of Basel

ABSTRACT. *In the history of early modern political thought, gender is not well established as a subject. It seems that early modern politics and its philosophical underpinnings are characterized by an exclusion of women from the political sphere. This article shows that it is indeed possible to write a gendered history of early modern political thought that transcends questions of the structural exclusion of women from political participation. Through a nuanced reading of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century commentaries on Aristotle's practical philosophy, it deconstructs notions on the public/political and private/apolitical divide and reconstructs that early modern thinkers saw the relationship of husband and wife as deeply political. The article argues that it is both necessary and possible to write gender in and into the history of political thought in a historically sound and firmly contextual way that avoids anachronisms, and it shows – as Joan Scott has suggested – that gender is indeed a 'useful category' in the history of political thought.*

While gender is a category well established in some historical disciplines, most notably in early modern cultural history, the same cannot be said for the history of political thought. It has been either explicitly stated or implicitly assumed that in early modern 'republican' or 'civic humanist' thought, characterized by an emphasis on active male citizenship and public political participation, women have been conceptually confined to an apolitical, or private, realm. At the beginning of the modern state (contested as this term is), women were

systematically excluded from all kinds of participative politics.[1] Gender histor-
ians have therefore argued that in its foundations the very concept of politics
itself rested on, and manifested, the exclusion of women.[2] Maintaining that
early modern political thought was indeed intrinsically gendered, in this
article I propose that it is nevertheless possible to construct 'gender' in early
modern political thought in ways that transcend simple statements of the
absence of women from politics. The 'gender problem' depends on what we
take 'the political' to mean in early modern practical philosophy, and in the
following I shall develop my argument through a critical reading of the histori-
ography of republican thought and by then reconstructing the early modern
vocabulary of politics through a reading of a variety of fifteenth- and
sixteenth-century commentaries on Aristotle's practical philosophy (and one
on Cicero's *De officiis*), as a genre that was deeply concerned with translating,
defining, and shaping the European political language(s). Understanding
that early modern political thought was gendered at its core, I am convinced,
adds an essential dimension to our understanding of the history of European
political thought, its concepts, and its philosophical ramifications.

I

In her 1986 article 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', Joan Scott
defined gender as a 'primary way of signifying relationships of power'.[3]
Warning against the dangers of trusting essentialist notions of 'man' and
'woman', Scott called for a historical contextualization of assumingly 'natural'
biological categories, male and female, and their relationship with hierarchies,
power, and, ultimately, political institutions. Scott was partly reacting against
what amounted to something of a failure of women's studies. Motivated by
the desire to look at the 'patriarchal' foundation of the state, feminist historians
had tried to expose the exclusion of women from positions of power in politics
or in economic life. Scott argued that these studies had not led, as intended, to a
widespread incorporation of sex and gender, masculinity and femininity into

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[1] For the term 'state' and in what way it is applicable in the history of early modern political
thought, see Quentin Skinner, 'A genealogy of the modern state', *Proceedings of the British
Academy*, 162 (2009), pp. 325–70.

[2] A classic example is Jean B. Elshtain, *Public man, private woman: women in social and political
thought* (2nd edn, Princeton, NJ, 1993). For Renaissance history of political thought, see Joan
Kelly-Gadol, 'Did women have a renaissance?', in Renate Bridental and Claudia Koonz, eds.,
Becoming visible: women in European history (Boston, MA, 1977), pp. 175–202. I have reconsidered
Kelly-Gadol's analysis in the light of my reading of civic humanist sources. See Anna Becker,
'"Antike" und "Mittelalter" in der "Renaissance": Gender als Markierung im politischen
Denken zwischen Kontinuität und Wandel', *L'Homme*, 25 (2014), pp. 15–32.

[3] Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', *American Historical Review*,
91 (1986), pp. 1053–75, at p. 1067.

the historical narrative, but rather to historical scholarship that was merely a footnote to the prevailing political, economic, or social historical narratives.[4]

The issue, according to Scott, was to understand the term 'gender' not just as another word for women, but as a relational term, denominating the complex relationship of men and women, of the male to the female. This was related to her central claim, namely that gender needed to be made available as an 'analytical category'. Gender was, in Scott's now famous definition, a 'constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and…a primary way of signifying relationships of power'.[5] Crucially, it needed to be seen as one of the 'recurrent references by which political power has been conceived, legitimated, and criticized'.[6]

That political power and gender share an intrinsic connection and are in themselves inter-relational has been explored in a multitude of ways in historical scholarship since the 1980s.[7] Influenced by Foucault and his thought on the diffuse and non-uniform dynamics of power, and by Judith Butler's work on the normative and performative power of sex, gender, and identity constructions as intrinsically linked to political power, cultural historians have focused on understanding the processes that structured early modern manifestations of power.[8] Relatedly, they have asked after agency and aimed to trace in what way political institutions were made and shaped by gendered subjects who in turn were made and shaped by those gendered institutions. The picture that emerges shows complex, fluid, and highly ambiguous historical relationships of gender and political power that do not offer simple tales of female subjection and male dominance in the political sphere.[9]

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[4] Ibid., pp. 1054, 1075.

[5] Ibid., p. 1067.

[6] Ibid., p. 1073. For a criticism of the sex and gender divide, see Gisela Bock, 'Challenging dichotomies: perspectives on women's history', in Karen Offen, Ruth Pierson, and Jane Rendall, eds., *Writing women's history: international perspectives* (London, 1991), pp. 1–23.

[7] Andrea Griesebner, 'Geschlecht als mehrfach relationale Kategorie: Methodologische Anmerkungen aus der Perspektive der Frühen Neuzeit', in Veronika Aegerter, ed., *Geschlecht hat Methode: Ansätze und Perspektiven in der Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte* (Zurich, 1999), pp. 129–37. For an overview over recent developments of gender history, see Claudia Opitz, *Geschlechtergeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 2010); see Sonya O. Rose, *What is gender history?* (Cambridge, 2010).

[8] Michel Foucault, *The birth of the clinic*, trans. Allan Sheridan (New York, NY, 1973); Michel Foucault, *Security, territory, population: lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2007); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish*, trans. Allan Sheridan (New York, NY, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Allan Sheridan (New York, NY, 1972); Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (3 vols., New York, NY, 1988–90); Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity* (2nd edn, New York, NY, and London, 1999); Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of 'sex'* (New York, NY, 1993).

[9] Ulrike Strasser's study on state building and the control of sexuality in early modern Germany is one highly illuminating example. Ulrike Strasser, *State of virginity: gender, religion, and politics in an early modern Catholic state* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2004).

Once we turn to the history of political thought, however, it does not seem as if Scott's analysis has had much influence, at least not in scholarship of the history of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century political thought.[10] Although excellent studies in intellectual history have approached the complex 'notion of woman' or have examined 'Renaissance feminism and misogyny', the focus in relation to the political was mainly to show the exclusion of women as agents from the sphere of politics and focused on how that exclusion was constructed by male agents.[11] That women were excluded from the realm of active early modern politics seems, on the face of it, to be indisputable. As one very prominent example we might quote Leonardo Bruni, widely described as the quintessential Renaissance humanist, who in his *De studiis et litteris* (1424) argued that women should not train in the art of rhetoric, the ultimate art of politics:

> For why should the subtleties of the *status*, and the care for the *epicherematum* and those that we call *crinomena* and the one thousand difficulties of this art exhaust a woman, who will never see the forum? This artful plea, which the Greeks call *hypochrisis,* and we call *pronuntiatio*, necessary as it is for the orator, must not trouble a woman. If she throws her arms as she speaks, or if she exalts herself by shouting violently, she would be seen as mad and is to be restrained. These are the domains of men: the difficulties and contests of the forum, just as wars and battles…To sum up: a woman will leave the roughness of the forum entirely to men.[12]

For Leonardo Bruni, the world of active politics was a world of men, in which women simply could not participate, however capable they might be deemed – and Bruni

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[10] The situation for eighteenth-century studies looks slightly better, partly because a debate on the political role of women, as well as on the relationship of public and private, are more readily identifiable in the sources as topics of enquiry. See Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: race, gender, and the limits of progress* (New York, NY, 2013); Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The most public sphere of all: the family', in Elizabeth Eger, ed., *Women, writing, and the public sphere, 1700–1830* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 239–56; Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The Enlightenment debate on women', *History Workshop Journal*, 20 (1985), pp. 101–24.

[11] See Pamela Benson, *The invention of the Renaissance woman* (University Park, PA, 1992); Virginia Cox, *Women's writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 2008); Constance Jordan, *Renaissance feminism: literary texts and political models* (Ithaca, NY, 1990); Iain Maclean, *The Renaissance notion of woman* (Cambridge, 1980); Carol Pal, *Republic of women: rethinking the republic of letters in the seventeenth century* (Cambridge, 2012); Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The birth of feminism: woman as intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2009); Lyndan Warner, *The ideas of man and woman in Renaissance France* (Farnham, Burlington, VT, 2011).

[12] 'Quid enim statuum subtilitates et *epicherematum* curae et illa, quae appellantur *crinomena*, et mille in ea arte difficultates mulierem conterant, quae forum numquam sit aspectura? Iam vero actio illa artificiosa, quam Graeci *hypocrisim*, nostri "pronuntiationem" dixere, cui Demosthenes primas et secundas et tertias tribuit, ut actori necessaria, ita mulieri nequaquam laboranda, quae, si brachium iactabit loquens aut si clamorem vehementius attollet, vesana coercendaque videatur. Ista quidem virorum sunt: ut bella, ut pugnae, sic etiam fori contentiones atque certamina … totam denique fori asperitatem viris relinquet'. Leonardo Bruni, 'De studiis et litteris', in *Leonardo Bruni Aretino: Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, ed. Hans Baron (Leipzig, 1928), pp. 5–19, at pp. 11–12. See also Virginia Cox, 'Leonardo Bruni on women and rhetoric: *De studiis et litteris* revisited', *Rhetorica*, 27 (2009), pp. 47–75.

deemed Battista Malatesta, the addressee of *De studiis et litteris,* to be a very capable individual. In consequence, civic humanist and Renaissance republican thinkers – especially through their exploration of Aristotelian political thought – are held to have constructed the political and active life as taking place in a 'public' sphere that offered no space for women.[13] Women, it seems, were restricted to the sphere of the household and the family, the 'private', a sphere that was by definition, and perhaps by necessity, apolitical. These two spheres, the political and the household, are generally seen as deeply opposed to each other and even as antagonistic. Easily mapped onto this dichotomy of the political/public, and the household/private in our narratives of Renaissance political thought are the categories of female and male that also seem to be equally and solidly opposed to each other.

II

The understanding of the dynamics of the opposition between the political and the domestic as a feature of ancient thought was powerfully laid down by Hannah Arendt in the *Human condition*.[14] There, Arendt argued that, brought down to us from the worlds of the Greek city-states, and most notably expressed in the works of Aristotle, especially by his notion of man as a *zoon politikon*, was the idea that humans can fulfil their potential only in a sphere of politics that was not weighed down by what she thought were the necessities of 'natural life'. The household, she argued, was so sharply distinguished from the political and truly human that it did not even appear to be a genuinely human sphere in Greek philosophy. It existed solely to provide 'social companionship', but this was a trait human beings shared with animals.[15] 'The private realm of the household', Arendt wrote,

was the sphere where necessities of life, of individual survival as well as of continuity of the species, were taken care of and guaranteed. One of the characteristics of privacy, prior of the discovery of intimacy, was that man existed in this sphere not as a truly human being but only as a specimen of the animal species mankind. And this is the ultimate reason for the tremendous contempt held for it by antiquity.[16]

The household, the sphere of women, in Arendt's reading of Aristotle, appeared to be an almost inhuman sphere, hardly distinguished from the life of

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[13] I am using the contested terms 'civic humanism' and 'Renaissance republicanism' as a shorthand for those kinds of writings that emphasized the values of civic activity for the glory and the liberty of the city. For in-depth discussions of the languages and concepts of civic humanism, see James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance civic humanism* (Cambridge, 2004).

[14] Hannah Arendt, *The human condition*, ed. Margaret Canovan (2nd edn, Chicago, IL, 1998).

[15] Ibid., p. 25.

[16] Ibid., pp. 45–6.

animals. It certainly had nothing whatsoever in common with the political, with the life of speech and action, the realm of men.

I am here not at all interested in a critique of Arendt's handling of Aristotle, since she neither wrote as a classicist nor as a historian. Rather, she was deeply motivated by contemporary anxieties, particularly by the specifically modern danger that, as soon as we let economic concerns over-ride concerns for the political proper, we stop being political beings, and we give up our potentiality for acting and creating.[17] However, Arendt's analysis, and especially her reading of Aristotle and the public and private divide, came to be highly influential for the historical narrative of Renaissance political thought, at least insofar as it was seen as a rebirth of Aristotelian moral philosophy.[18] Jürgen Habermas relied entirely on Arendt when he sketched out the historical origins of the eighteenth-century 'bourgeois public sphere'.[19] Most famously, J. G. A. Pocock in the *Machiavellian moment* – one of the most influential accounts of Renaissance political thought – acknowledged Arendt as an inspiration. In his 2003 'Afterword' to the *Machiavellian moment*, Pocock wrote that he was telling the story of the revival of ancient political thought 'in terms borrowed from or suggested by the language of Hannah Arendt'.[20] In a more recent article, he expressed that he

had found in the *Politics* the most satisfying theory of the active citizen I had, or have, encountered; that in which he…was an equal, ruling over equals and so ruled by them, taking decisions which extend to the shape and character of the *polis* or *res*

[17] For a critique on Arendt's interpretation of Aristotle and for a reading of Aristotle as a philosopher who explored all correlations of the political with the social broadly understood, see William James Booth, *Households: on the moral architecture of the economy* (Ithaca, NY, 1993); D. Brendan Nagle, *The household as the foundation of Aristotle's* polis (New York, NY, 2006); Stephen G. Salkever, *Finding the mean: theory and practice in Aristotelian political philosophy* (Princeton, NJ, 2014); Bernard Yack, *The problems of a political animal* (Berkeley, CA, 1993). For highly illuminating analyses of the public and the private in Arendt's work, see Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, 'Justice: on relating private and public', *Political Theory*, 9 (1981), pp. 327–52; and Seyla Benhabib, 'Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of public space', *History of the Human Sciences*, 6 (1993), pp. 97–114.

[18] Handbook articles and encyclopaedia entries in fields such as the history of ideas, political science, and philosophy show the unbroken influence of Arendt over these disciplines. See for some examples Iain Hampsher-Monk, 'Political philosophy, history of', in Edward Craig, ed., *Routledge encyclopedia of philosophy* (10 vols., London, 1998), VII, pp. 505–16, at pp. 505–6; Thomas F. Murphy III, 'Public sphere', in Maryanne Clyne Horowitz, ed., *New dictionary of the history of ideas* (New York, NY, 2005), pp. 1964–7; John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips, 'Introduction', in idem, idem, and idem, eds., *The Oxford handbook of political theory* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 3–41, at p. 8 and passim.

[19] Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA, 1989). For an influential criticism of Habermas's analysis of women and the public sphere, see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 1988).

[20] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian moment* (2nd edn, Princeton, NJ, 2003), p. 550.

publica, and finding in the exercise and enjoyment of this equality a freedom and authority necessary to the nature of the human being.[21]

Pocock inserted a highly significant bracket into this sentence that made clear that while 'he' (that is, 'man') ruled as an 'equal' over 'equals', 'she' (that is, 'woman') 'had yet to be included'.

Gender historians, and indeed feminist historians, must immediately ask how a political sphere can be seen as an expression of equality, when it is at the same time – and apparently necessarily so – completely masculine and diametrically opposed to a non-political female world. What then is the content of the Renaissance notion of 'equality'? Can a theory like that be qualified as 'most satisfying'? Can 'woman' who is 'not yet included' just hope that 'she' will be included one day and, following a rather linear trajectory of progress, will then squarely fit into a hitherto masculine sphere? In what follows, I shall argue that in order to offer a historically sensitive gendered reading of Renaissance political thought it is both necessary and possible to question and rethink the narrative of exclusion and inclusion of 'woman', that is so intimately tied to the idea that a republican political/masculine sphere was seen as opposed to an apolitical/feminine sphere and which appears fundamentally to structure early modern ideas of human life and politics. With this in place, we can then take another look at what political equality entailed.

At this point, it is useful to remember that Joan Scott has observed that, if political power indeed needed gender for its vindication, 'the reference must seem sure and fixed, outside human construction, part of the natural or divine order'.[22] In this case, the seeming 'universal nature' of the gender relationship becomes a part of political power itself. What is needed, then, is to look closely at how this universal nature is constructed, and make it an object of a historical contextualization. This is entirely to the point of the methodology that lies at the heart of the history of political thought connected with the so-called 'Cambridge School'. Historians of political thought are motivated to understand the historical constructions of political concepts, the language(s), and the discourses involved in this construction. We understand political ideas as contingent and we question both the notion of 'timeless' ideas or categories, as well as their 'universal truths', as Quentin Skinner has influentially laid down in his classic article 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas'.[23] Historians of political thought argue that political categories, including the notion of 'the political' itself, are never constructed without argument and

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[21] J. G. A. Pocock, 'Foundations and moments', in Annabel S. Brett, James Tully, and Holly Hamilton-Bleakley, eds., *Rethinking the foundations of modern political thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 37–49, at p. 42.

[22] Scott, 'Gender', p. 1073.

[23] Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas', *History and Theory*, 8 (1969), pp. 3–53, reprinted in J. Tully, ed., *Meaning and context: Quentin Skinner and his critics* (Cambridge, 1988); see also Annabel S. Brett, 'What is intellectual history now?', in David Cannadine, ed., *What is history now?* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 113–31.

contest.[24] If the category of the political in the way it relates to gender appears fixed, determined, and untouched by change, it is in urgent need of contextualization.

Thinking about gender in the history of early modern political thought requires first an examination of our assumption of the presumed dichotomy of the public–political and the private–household and their respective masculine and feminine natures. It requires rethinking the foundations of 'the political' as conceived by Renaissance thinkers. Rediscovering, reconstructing, and properly contextualizing the discourse about what 'the political' was seen to be, and, importantly, understanding where it was located, we might be able to examine its relation with gender in a new way. With this, we can approach gender in political thought in a way that transcends the question of the inclusion or exclusion of 'woman'.

For my examination, I focus on commentaries on Aristotelian practical philosophy in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe, since they offer the early modern Aristotelian perspective that is needed to deconstruct and historicize the categories that Hannah Arendt and her followers so successfully employed and employ. A glance at the handbook literature affirms that 'the political' is generally first approached through referring to Aristotle, and the assumption of a very close connection of 'the political' with 'the public' is invoked.[25] Furthermore, as has been convincingly shown, in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe Aristotelian practical philosophy was the dominant philosophical movement in relation to which every political thinker – 'Aristotelian' or not – had to position himself (and sometimes herself).[26] Finally, commentaries worked consciously with language. Medieval translations of Greek texts seemed to fifteenth-century scholars, as Leonardo Bruni expressed, to be 'produced rather by barbarians than by Latins'.[27] Part of the Renaissance project of the reappropriation of ancient texts was hence to render classical Greek into Ciceronian Latin, a process in which matters of finding the 'right' vocabulary and terms were paid much attention and kindled a lively debate. Translations and the accompanying commentaries hence offer a very apt starting point for

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[24] J. G. A. Pocock, 'Concepts and discourses: a difference in culture? Comment on a paper by Melvin Richter', in Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter, eds., *The meaning of historical terms and concepts: new studies on* Begriffsgeschichte (Washington, DC, 1996), pp. 47–58.

[25] See n. 18 for examples.

[26] Eckhard Keßler, 'The transformation of Aristotelianism during the Renaissance', in John Henry and Sarah Hutton, eds., *New perspectives on Renaissance thought: essays in the history of science, education and philosophy in memory of Charles B. Schmitt* (London, 1990), pp. 137–47. See Annabel Brett, '"The matter, forme, and power of a common-wealth": Thomas Hobbes and late Renaissance commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*', *Hobbes Studies*, 23 (2010), pp. 72–102; see Charles B. Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA, 1983).

[27] 'ut barbari magis quam Latini effecti'. Leonardo Bruni, 'Praemissio quaedam ad evidentiam novae translationis Ethicorum Aristotelis', in *Leonardo Bruni Aretino: Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, ed. Hans Baron (Leipzig, 1928), pp. 76–7.

an inquiry into the early modern constructions of a gendered idiom of the political.

Subsequently, I shall follow early modern thinkers in their employment of a particular language that shaped political concepts, and show that 'the political' in early modern political thought was constructed along gendered lines. My intention is to show that gender and politics emerge as relational categories at the beginning of the modern state and that gender functioned, as Scott has suggested, as a 'signifier' of political power. I shall do so by way of two decon-structions and one reconstruction.[28] First, I shall examine the assumed fixed dichotomy of the two spheres, the domestic and the political, and show that these spheres relate to each other in very different ways than an 'Arendtian' reading of Renaissance sources suggests. In a second step, I shall examine the assumed dichotomy of 'the female' and 'the political' and show how that rela-tionship was seen in early modern commentaries. Third, I aim to reconstruct. I will not provide a narrative of exclusion of women from politics, but will follow early modern thinkers in showing how, as 'wives', some of them were, in fact, included in the sphere of the political.

III

One of the most enticing features of Aristotelian political thought is the idea that man is a political animal, *a zoon politikon*. As the commentator Pier Vettori wrote, man is an 'animal of the city, and made to live together in the society of human beings'.[29] 'City' is the closest English translation for *civitas*, the Latin rendering of *polis*. In early modern parlance, it denoted the collective whole of citizens, and as such was the term for what can be understood as the political sphere, although it is often anachronistically translated as 'the state'. In the Aristotelian tradition, this 'city' (or 'the political') took its strength, its particularity, and indeed the justification of its existence from its naturalness. A human being was a political animal by nature, so that his – and her – political characteristic was both a characteristic peculiar to human beings alone (that is, as opposed to animals) and it was natural.[30] Nature, then, was not at all con-structed in opposition to the political, as Arendt had suggested. Rather, politics was an expression of (human) nature.[31]

The political nature of human beings was discussed in the commentaries on Aristotle's practical philosophy, namely to the three Aristotelian texts, the

[28] For the importance of 'deconstruction' for gender history see Joan W. Scott, 'Deconstructing equality-versus-difference', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988), pp. 32–50.
[29] 'dicit…hominem esse animal civitati et coetui hominum colendo factum'. Pier Vettori (Petrus Victorius), *Commentarii in octo libros Aristotelis de optimo statu civitatis* (Florence, 1576), p. 12.
[30] Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T. A. Sinclair, rev. T. J. Saunders (London, 1992), 1253a7–18, p. 60.
[31] See Annabel S. Brett, *Changes of state* (Princeton, NJ, 2011).

Politics, the *Nicomachean ethics*, and the *Oeconomica*. The *Oeconomica* was, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, thought to be genuinely by Aristotle and thus provided the full Aristotelian picture of the art of the household, the *res familiaris*, and showed how to act rightly in the domestic sphere. The three books related directly to the moral examination of what the scholar and commentator Agostino Nifo (1473–1538) called the 'threefold life of man'. *Vita oeconomica*, the life in the household, held an important position in the way Nifo saw this threefold life arranged. He located it in the middle between the *vita monastica*, the individual life, and the *vita civilis*, the political life of human beings.[32] The sense that the three moral dimensions, individual, oeconomical, and political ethics, were like links of a chain was affirmed by Peter Vermigli (1499–1566):

Among these moral subjects, the first place is surely held by ethics, then economics, and finally politics. I see this order as circular. Through ethics, those who are its students will, one by one, become good men. If they prove upright, they will raise good families, if the families are properly established they will in turn create good republics. And in good republics, both law and administration will aim at nothing less than each man becoming a good citizen. For they have eyes not only for the body but also for the spirit, and they will take care that citizens live according to virtue.[33]

For human life to be morally complete all three and not only two dimensions, or spheres, were necessary. We see here that the political sphere and the sphere of the household were not at all oppositions but were seen as intricately linked to each other and to the ethical realm.[34] To be virtuous, a human being hence needed both household and politics. What is more – and the commentators affirmed this in their writings – the household was tightly connected to the good life and the common good of the city. Decidedly different from conventional (Arendtian) accounts that assume that Aristotelians saw the good life as a category pertaining to the political only, Renaissance Aristotelians lay responsibility for the care and the maintenance of the common good equally in the domestic sphere.[35]

Antonio Montecatini, Ferrara statesman and philologist, stated in his commentary on the *Politics* from 1587 that man viewed in isolation (*homo singulo*) was 'not wholly solitary (*solitarius*), but lives most of the time in society, certainly in the civil and the domestic society, without which neither the good life

[32] Agostino Nifo (Augustinus Niphus), *Opuscula moralia et politica* (Paris, 1645 [1531]), pp. 17–18.

[33] Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics*, ed. Emidio Campi and Jospeh C. McLelland (Kirksville, MO, 2006), p. 12.

[34] Importantly, reformed political and social thought drew on, and was part of, the very same tradition that I am discussing here. I have treated this in more detail in Anna Becker, 'Der Haushalt in der politischen Theorie der Frühen Neuzeit', in Joachim Eibach and Inken Schmidt-Voges, eds., *Haus im Kontext* (Munich, 2015), pp. 667–85.

[35] See for example Peter Hallberg and Björn Wittrock, 'From koinonia politike to civil society: birth, disappearance and first renaissance of the concept', in Peter Wagner, ed., *The languages of civil society* (New York, NY, 2006), pp. 28–51, at p. 44.

nor good deeds are possible'.[36] Human beings thus needed the full social life in its oeconomic and political dimension. Without the social, happiness, that is the morally good life, was impossible to attain. The relationship of the 'social' – a term that Arendt connected strictly to the household – with the political was very direct: as the Basel philologist and playwright Sixtus Birck wrote, 'men are political *because* they are social beings'.[37]

The household certainly did not seem to these Aristotelians to be an animal-like, sub-human space. What differentiated human beings from other gregarious animals, Aristotle's *Politics* stated, was our capacity for speech, for reason, and for justice.[38] Consequently, commentators regularly emphasized that these traits were natural and peculiar to human beings, they were the signposts of our humanity. Hence, they were not only marks of the political, but they equally characterized the social life in the household. As Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples wrote in 1506, basically paraphrasing Aristotle in his comment, 'It is peculiar to men, contrary to other animals, that they alone have the sense of the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, and other things of this sort, and through the sharing of this they bring about household and city.'[39] Lefèvre d'Étaples thus emphasized that the capacity to examine our actions morally and to act justly was a necessary requirement for the domestic life and not only a signifier of the political sphere. In short, the political was not antagonistic to the domestic sphere in the writings of these early modern Aristotelians. It makes much more sense to think of the ordering of the domestic and political spheres as mutually dependent, and conceptually interwoven.

Related to this, we do not find the domestic necessarily cast in the language of the 'private'. When Donato Acciaiuoli discussed the relationship of the three parts of practical philosophy in the late fifteenth century, he described ethics as *disciplina privata*, whereas oeconomics was *disciplina domestica*; politics was the *disciplina civilis* or *politica*.[40] The 'private' here only referred to what for

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[36] 'Et quom homines singuleos per se, ac simpliciter, & ut quidam homines sunt, dico; intelligo non omnino solitarios; sed in societate plurimum temporis viventes, & in civili quidem, ac domestica societate, sine quibus societatibus nec bene vivere, nec bene agere perfectè possent.' Antonio Montecatini, *In politica hoc est in civiles libros Aristotelis Antonii Montecatini ferrariensis progymnasmata* (Ferrara, 1587), p. 3.

[37] 'Politicae sunt hominis quia sociale animal', Sixt Birck (Xystus Betuleius), *In M. T. Ciceronis libros De officiis, De amicitia, De senectute commentaria* (Basel, 1544), p. 22.

[38] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a7–18, p. 60.

[39] 'Id enim preter cetera animalia hominibus peculiare est: ut boni et mali, iusti atque iniusti et aliorum huiusmodi sensum habeant soli. Et in horum communicatione domum efficiant atque civitatem.' Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (Jacobus Faber Stapulensis), *Politicorum (Aristotelis) libri octo; commentarii (Jacobi Fabri Stapulensis in eosdem); Economicorum duo; Commentarii (Fabri); Hecatonomia septem; Economiarum publicarum unus; Explanationes Leonardi (Aretini) in Oeconomica duo* (Paris, 1506), fo. 4r. In his comment to Bruni's translation, Lefèvre d'Étaples substituted *efficere* (to bring about) for Bruni's *facere* (to make) and introduced the term *communicatio* (sharing); these subtle changes strengthen the point that household and city share in their sense of moral judgement.

[40] Donato Acciauoli, *In Aristotelis libros octo Politicorum commentarii* (Venice, 1566), fos. 11r, 9v.

Montecatini was the state of the *homo singulo,* that is, when the attention was turned to an examination of individual virtues. These individual virtues, however, only made sense in the context of human society or community; through the medium of the domestic they benefited the common good, the welfare of the city. The sphere of the household, in early modern Aristotelian political thought, was hence not a 'private sphere' in the modern sense. Conceptually, the family and the household sphere was part of the political sphere; and not clearly divided from it. Commentators saw the political sphere as embracing the household. As Leonardo Bruni emphasized in his commentary on the *Oeconomica,* without households a city simply 'could not exist'.[41] In early modern commentaries, we do not encounter a stark opposition of the political and the domestic. Neither can we attest that the latter was held in contempt. Rather, the domestic sphere was seen as constitutive for the political and inter-related with it in a multitude of ways. Both the household and politics were important for the formation of the third sphere, that of individual ethics. The domestic was both the seed bed, or *seminarium,* from which the city originated but it was also needed for its running, for the forming of good citizens, and so for the common good.[42]

IV

Let us turn to my second point. Since in early modern Aristotelian thought the domestic and the political spheres appear to be highly inter-related and not easily separable, the question that presents itself is what happens with the narrative of the exclusion of women from the public sphere? Is the female really absolutely opposed to the political? Together with an exploration of the interdependence of household and politics, commentators also explored in detail what they saw as the household's most important relationship; namely that of husband and wife. Far from understanding the role of marriage as purely ancillary to the formation of cities, and indeed the political itself, commentators showed that it was exactly marriage, the natural conjunction of husband and wife, that did not only make cities emerge but that was already an expression of the civic, or political, nature of human beings. Here, Aristotle was read in an ingenious relation with the teachings of the church, which placed much emphasis on the marriage relationship.[43] If human beings were political by

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[41] 'id est, sine illis civitas stare non potest'. Leonardo Bruni, *Explanationis Leonardi in Oeconomica duo* (Paris 1506), fos. 174r–178v, at fo. 174r. See Aristotle, *The Oeconomica,* ed. T. E. Page, trans. G. Cyril Armstrong (London and Cambridge, MA, 1935), 1343a10–15, pp. 327–9.

[42] Anna Becker, 'Jean Bodin on oeconomics and politics', *History of European Ideas,* 40 (2014), pp. 135–54, at p. 139.

[43] David d'Avray, *Medieval marriage: symbolism and society* (Oxford, 2007); Christopher N. L. Brooke, *The medieval idea of marriage* (Oxford, 1989); James A. Brundage, *Law, sex, and Christian society in medieval Europe* (Chicago, IL, 1987); Gabriela Signori, *Von der Paradiesehe*

nature then what made them form cities needed to relate to their political nature. Commentators hence showed over and over again, and drawing on Thomas Aquinas for this, that human beings were *both* conjugal animal and civil animal.[44] The conjugal and the political were not oppositions but rather deeply ingrained, natural characteristics, that were seen as fundamentally related. The relationship of politics and household was negotiated through a gender relationship – that of husband and wife.

This is clearly brought out in Leonardo Bruni's vernacular writings. In his *Vite di Dante e di Petrarca*, Bruni stated that 'man is a civic animal, so say all philosophers. For the first conjunction is that of husband and wife, from which multiplied is born the city; and nothing can be perfect where this is not.'[45] Man was a civil (or political) animal only because he was a conjugal one first. Marriage was part of this *civic* nature of man, and thus had a function for civic life; it was the birthplace of the city, but through its offspring, it cared for the city and rendered it alive and flourishing.[46]

The problem that most of the commentators approached first, however, was that human couples shared the principle of procreation with animals, so that the conjugal relationship between husband and wife might be said to not represent a genuinely *human* trait. Aristotle had stated that marriage was not 'a matter of choice', it was 'essential for reproduction' and human beings shared this with animals and plants.[47] Commentators who emphasized that human beings were *by nature* political therefore wanted to show that human marriage was much more than animal-like coupling. Here, the *Oeconomica* was routinely used to underpin and flesh out content of the *Politics*, since it contained a rich account of the internal dynamics of the conjugal society, which proved crucial to an examination of the nature of political rule.

In the *Oeconomica*, slightly different from the *Politics*, the conjugal relationship emphasized the mutuality of the marriage relationship. While 'the union of male and female is very much according to nature',[48] in a human couple it was characterized as providing each other with 'more mutual help, affection

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zur Gütergemeinschaft: Die Ehe in der mittelalterlichen Lebens- und Vorstellungswelt (Frankfurt am Main, 2011).

[44] See e.g. Donato Acciaiuoli, *Expositio libri Ethicorum Aristotelis* (Florence, 1478), VIII, 12 (not paginated), and see Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Richard Regan (Indianapolis, IN, 2007), p. 17.

[45] 'L'uomo é animale civile, secondo piace a tutti i filosofi. La prima congiunzione, dalla quale multiplicata nasce la città, è marito e moglie; nè cosa può esser perfetta, dove questo non sia, e solo questo amore è naturale, legittimo e permesso.' Leonardo Bruni, 'Le vite di Dante e di Petrarca', in *Leonardo Bruni Aretino: Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, ed. Hans Baron (Leipzig, 1928), pp. 50–69, at p. 54.

[46] Becker, 'Der Haushalt in der politischen Theorie der Frühen Neuzeit'.

[47] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a 24–34, pp. 56–7.

[48] 'Societas enim est maxime secundum naturam maris et foeminae.' I am quoting here Bruni's translation in Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Politicorum*, fo. 128r.

and cooperation'.[49] The human couple had 'a more perfect bond' with each other than other tame animals since the human partnership did not merely ensure existence through procreation and thus kept the species alive, but it existed for 'the good life'.[50] These important qualifications were consequently emphasized. When Lefèvre d'Étaples commented on the passage in the *Oeconomica*, he did not only draw parallels to Aristotle's *Politics*, in which the city was defined as 'coming to be for the sake of life, and existing for the sake of the good life',[51] but he basically paraphrased Bruni's translation and thereby stressed that the human couple did 'not exist for living only but for the good life' and that they existed for their mutual service and devotion.[52] The good life, we see here once again, was not at all understood as part of the political sphere only, but had vital connections to the household, flowing directly and crucially from the relationship of husband and wife. For the human couple, procreation was not at all the only reason for their being together and sharing a life. Rather, husband and wife were described as leading a life of co-operation and of concord, not of hostile opposition, and this ultimately benefited the city as a whole. The care for the good life was situated also in marriage, which was in this way deeply connected to the political life.

Early modern Aristotelians also did not care very much that the *Politics* had said that the conjunction of male and female was not one 'by choice'. Rather, they emphasized that it was exactly the element of choice that signalled the specific human characteristic of marriage. While the simple act of conjunction for the sake of procreation was universally shared with animals, Donato Acciaiuoli wrote that 'nevertheless this conjunction can be perfected by choice, when one spouse consents to the other'.[53] Again making use of teachings of the church, Aristotelians saw the specific human formation of marriage as a voluntary agreement between the spouses that required active consent – *cum coniux in coniugem consentit* – and hence demanded a couple that shared in reason fairly equally.

What is more, the marriage relationship was envisioned as a relationship of the law. Bruni, drawing on Roman Law and on Thomas Aquinas, wrote that 'The principle of the conjunction in human beings is in nature. The form is from law and reason, this we call matrimony.'[54] Bruni thus emphasized at once the utter naturalness of the conjugal state, and he showed that the

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[49] 'magis mutua auxilia et dilectiones et cooperationes'. Ibid.
[50] Aristotle, *Oeconomica*, 1343b15ff, pp. 330–1. See Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Politicorum*, fo. 128r.
[51] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b27ff, p. 59.
[52] 'non ut sint solum causa sed ut bene sint vir feminaque, mutuo operantes existunt'. Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Politicorum*, fo. 128v.
[53] 'Notandum quod licet homo inclinetur ad copulam per principium commune et naturalem appetitum, tamen potest talis coniunctio perfici per electionem, cum coniux in coniugem consentit.' Acciaiuoli, *Politicorum*, fo. 13r.
[54] 'Principium ergo coniunctionis in hominibus est a natura: forma vero est a lege et ratione, quod matrimonium appellamus.' Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Politicorum*, fo. 175v. See *Digest*, I,1.1.4; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentum in quattuor libros sententiarum*, lib. 4, d. 26, q. 1:4.

conjugal society in the political sphere was defined by laws and *ratio*. Marriage was clearly differentiated from a realm of unreasonable animals; as a key institution, it was part of the political sphere. It functioned according to the same principles as politics – as terms like choice, consent, reason, and law make clear – and had a role in the political perfection of mankind.

The language that the commentators used to describe the human couple is highly illuminating. They did not operate indiscriminately with broad categories of 'the male' and 'the female'. When talking about the natural principle of conjunction for the end of procreation, the vocabulary was about the broad *masculus* and *foemina*. But when the commentators talked about the 'civilized', or political, gender relationship, connected to the good life and possessing elements of law, the vocabulary employed was that of 'husband' and 'wife', that of *maritus* and *marita, vir* and *uxor,* and of *coniux* – the last word bearing both genders, masculine and feminine, in the Latin. It thus seems that the commentators did not operate with a universal category 'woman', at least not when they were talking about the civilized civic and domestic spheres. 'Woman' was not a category of the civil, and it was not one of philosophical enquiry.[55] Although the political discourse was shaped by reflections on nature, it is hard to detect a simple biological essentialism in these Aristotelian writings. The linguistic differentiations were both nuanced and pronounced, and so was early modern thinking about gender – not about 'women' only – even in the context of reflections on Aristotle's *Politics*.

V

Having thus deconstructed the spheres of public and private and the language of 'woman', I shall now reconstruct a part of the narrative, exploring in what way the political can be said to be gendered. The above shows that the categories of 'male' and 'female', and wife and husband, do not map so easily onto the categories of the political on the one hand and the household on the other. Since the political and the household were not dichotomous spheres but permeable and inter-related, I shall show in a next step that early modern thinkers emphasized equally the interdependence of the most important gender relationship inside the household, namely the marriage relationship between husband and wife, with the political sphere. Husband and wife did not only share the same domestic sphere, but the wife, as we shall see, was also able to cross

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[55] The discourse is also decisively influenced by Roman Law, which cannot be dealt here but will be at another occasion. Roman private law is not divided by a biological distinction of woman to man, but persons have rights according to their *status*. See Max Kaser, *Das römische Privatrecht: Das altrömische, das vorklassische und klassische Recht* (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft, x.3.3.1, 2nd edn, Munich, 1971), passim; and Max Kaser, *Das römische Privatrecht: Die nachklassischen Entwicklungen* (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft, x.3.3.2, 2nd edn, Munich, 1975), passim.

conceptually the (already very porous) boundary of the household and step into the political.

Let us, then, turn to the question of the 'political nature' of the relationship of male and female, or more correctly, that of husband and wife. The relationship of husband and wife was not only the foundation of the city, but synonymous with, and foundational for, political power itself. Renaissance thinkers were prompted by Aristotle to use the relationship in the family to explore the very nature of rule, of all rule, and especially political rule. Aristotle had used the family to explain the different kinds of rule in the city having stated in the *Ethics* that 'one can also find in households resemblances to these political systems and, as it were, models of them'.[56] In the *Politics*, Aristotle described rule in the household as being twofold; it was divided between rule over unfree people (i.e. slaves) and over free subjects (i.e. wife and children). The government over free people was equally sharply divided. In Leonardo Bruni's translation, the passage in question read, 'The *paterfamilias* rules over both wife and children as free persons, but not in the same sort of rule (*imperium*): for the wife is ruled constitutionally, while the children are ruled monarchically.'[57] In his *Oeconomica* commentary, Bruni fleshed out the *Politics* passage. While the head of the household was a 'monarch in his household (*domus suae rex*)', Bruni emphasized that Aristotle had specifically excluded the wife from the monarchical power of her husband. A husband 'does not have *imperium* over his wife in the same way in which he has *imperium* over his children'.[58] Rather, a husband had to follow strict laws vis-à-vis his wife, and when he transgressed them, he committed injustice (*inuria facit*).[59] 'For justice has the form of the law, injustice is against the law.'[60] For Bruni, a *pater familias* had three types of roles in the family which connected to three types of rule; the simple view that an early modern head of the family had complete power over all his dependants is very different from the more complex position we find in our sources. In his role as husband, the head of the household's power was restricted by very specific laws; in fact, it was a 'constitutional relationship'. In the *Politics*, Aristotle had described the relationship of husband to wife as *politikos*, statesman-like. Medieval translations of the *Politics* used the neologism *politicus*; Bruni and his followers preferred the Ciceronian *civilis*. Whether *civilis* or *politicus*, both terms signified the 'constitutional' government,

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[56] Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, ed. and trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge, 2000), p. 156.
[57] 'Nam et uxori praeest et filiis, tamquam liberis quidem ambobus: sed non eodem imperii modo: sed uxori quidem civiliter, filiis autem regie.' To quote and translate Leonardo Bruni's translation I have used the edited version in Albertus Magnus, *Opera omnia*, ed. Augustus Borgnet (38 vols., Paris, 1891), XIII, p. 70. See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1259b5–6, p. 92.
[58] 'non putet ergo vir…eodem modem imperium habet in uxore'. Bruni, *Explanationis…in Oeconomica*, fo. 175v.
[59] 'quas si transgreditur, iniuria facit, nec in arbitrio suo positum existimet, ut totum sibi liceat, sed cognoscat se lege teneri et iniuria esset'. Ibid.
[60] 'Nam ius est forma legis: iniuria contra leges'. Ibid.

the political relationship, that was characterized as the relationship between citizens as equals which 'rule and are ruled' in turn.[61] This constitutional, civil, or political rule was for republican thinkers the best and the most important form of government in the city, in which the citizens participated and thus shaped the city's fortune. At the beginning of this article, I emphasized the 'civic humanist's' stress on the values of active citizenship, in which citizens share the demands, the duties, and the joys of ruling, actively participating in the sphere, the affairs, and the decision-making of the city – 'satisfying' even to historians today. Through the use of the terms *politikos/politicus/civilis* for both the citizen and the marriage relationship, these values now connected the best form of rule in the city (i.e. 'political' rule) with the power relationship that characterized legitimate marriage. Arguing with Aristotle, for the early modern writers we are examining, the way that citizens related to each other in the city was like the husband–wife relationship in marriage. The wife became *political* and in consequence the citizen became a wife.

There was nevertheless a difference between the political husband–wife relationship and the relationship between male citizens. While the citizens' relationship amongst each other was characterized by an alternation of ruling and being ruled, according to the *Politics* a wife was never in the position to rule her husband so that the 'political' relationship remained a static one. Donato Acciaiuoli addressed the problem as to how marriage could be said to be a political, civil, or constitutional relationship when there was no alternation of ruling and being ruled between the marriage partners.

It is said that conjugal *imperium (imperium conjugale)* is like the political rule, but this is not completely consistent: because the husband naturally presides over his wife (*praeessere*), and there is no change of rule (between them), except by some accident. Citizens, however, sometimes rule (*praeessere*) over their fellow citizens, sometimes they obey the others, according to the change of civil offices, wishing to be equals according to nature. But according to nature the masculine is superior to the feminine, unless something happens, as we have said above. It is nevertheless similar in this, because a husband rules in a certain civil presidency (*praesidentia civilis*), and not in a despotic or in a monarchical one.[62]

We can see here that Acciaiuoli balanced the idea of civic equality and natural hierarchical subordination, being very careful of never conflating the category of 'woman' with the category of 'wife'. By nature, the woman was subordinated to man (here the language is *masculus et foemina*) but in the civilized sphere their relationship becomes a *praesidentia civilis*, a civil or political governmental

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[61] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1259b5–7, p. 92.
[62] 'Dictum est autem coniugale imperium esse simile civili, verum non omnino convenit, quia mas naturaliter praeest uxori, et non fit vicissitudo dominandi, nisi accidat. At cives modo aliis civibus praesunt, modo alijs obtemperant, ob vicissitudinem magistratuum. Aequales enim esse volunt secundum naturam. At masculus, quam [sic] foemina principalior est secundum naturam, nisi aliter eveniat ut supra diximus. Simile est tamen in eo, quia vir praesidet civili quadam praesidentia, non dominica, nec regia.' Acciaiuoli, *Politicorum*, fo. 40v.

relationship, in which the *vir*, the husband, presided. Acciaiuoli did not present nature and civilization as absolute dichotomies; the 'natures' of 'man' and 'woman' and 'husband' and 'wife' were inter-related, not essentially determined but very transient. The term *praesidentia civilis*, then, brought to the fore that the civilized husband–wife relationship was very much understood in terms of public office. Husband and wife appear as magistrates, jointly ruling the household. The language of marriage was equally the language of active citizenship in a city-state. Accordingly, Acciaiuoli also explained, 'the husband rules over the wife constitutionally (*civiliter*), like any magistrate in a *res publica* rules according to laws'.[63] And Antonio Montecatini thought that the conjugal relationship was 'like that of two magistrates': *ille maior, haec minor*, one higher, the other lower, who together rule the household.[64] This served to emphasize the civil or political nature of the conjugal relationship, in which the wife actively chooses a husband and shares with him in the government of the household.

The language that was used to describe the household relationships did not differentiate between the domestic or political. Both were relationships of *imperium*, of *potestas*. When Acciaiuoli and others expressed the husband–wife relationship as *civilis*, this obviously had a host of layers of meanings.[65] But they were all 'political': that is, they referred to a linguistic sphere that we are used to connecting with the government of the city, the political community. And all these meanings were also, as our discussion has shown, intrinsically connected to the relationship of husband and wife. In the conceptual imagination, they were occupying the same terrain. In early modern political thought, the relationship of husband and wife was therefore inseparably connected to a discourse of citizenship and the discourse on citizenship was directly related to a gender relationship. One referred to the other.

We can now turn to the question of equality, which crucially characterized a 'political' relationship according to Aristotelian thought. We have seen above that Acciaiuoli had attested the wife and husband to be 'alike' to a certain degree, so that marriage could indeed be called alike (*similis*) to a civil regime. Lefèvre d'Étaples, commenting on the same passage, explained that 'While it is well deserved that a husband presides over his wife, yet among the parts of the household, no other relationship is closer to equality (*aequalitas*) than husband and wife, in such a way that it is understood to be similar to a civil regime.'[66] For the French humanist, the wife was her husband's equal,

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[63] 'Deinde intelligendum, quod etiam differunt istae duae inter se secundum praesidentiam, quia vir praeest uxori civiliter, ut quidam magistratus in republica praesunt secundum leges.' Ibid., fo. 40r–v.

[64] Montecatini, *In politica*, p. 441.

[65] Nicolai Rubinstein, 'The history of the word *politicus*', in Anthony Pagden, ed., *The languages of political theory in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 41–56.

[66] 'merito igitur vir uxori praeest at quia inter partes domus nulle magis quod vir et uxor aequalitati propinquant, huiusmodi principatus civili similior esse videtur'. Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Politicorum*, fo. 13v.

or at least had a status that was rather 'close to equality'. Nevertheless, she was always hierarchically subordinated. Analysing the gender relationships of the household here serves to highlight the nature of the concept of early modern equality. Subordination was not necessarily a signifier for inequality. A citizen in the Aristotelian sense 'rules and is being ruled in turn', so that male citizens also stood in a hierarchical relationship with each other due to their particular functions in the political administration. Citizens in early modern Aristotelianism were hence equal only in the broadest sense. They were equal vis-à-vis the liberty of the city, they had equal opportunities to attain office, but at the same time they were constantly bound in some sort of hierarchical order. Early modern civic equality, we should be very clear, was a concept that was not hostile to strict hierarchies. In a family, husband and wife were of equal status when viewed from the standpoint of their children or their servants, and they shared in the ruling of the household and in the education of children. Nevertheless, this was a continuing hierarchical relationship in which the wife was always situated in a subordinated position.[67]

VI

The above shows that thinking about gender can enlighten the way we reflect on key political concepts like 'citizenship' and 'equality' and thus deepen our understanding of early modern political thought – especially as it shows its alterity from our modern thinking. Gender then emerges as a central signifier for political concepts and for political power. If we assume that early modern Aristotelians had a 'satisfying' concept of citizenship, we necessarily – according to the logic of the gendered concept of Aristotelian citizenship just discussed – also say that they had a satisfying concept of husband and wife relations. On the other hand, if we maintain that the relationship of husband and wife in early modern political thought was characterized by an unsatisfyingly hierarchical order, then we also have to admit that the relationship between citizens in this sort of republican thought might not have been so satisfying after all.

Feminist scholars have long expressed their uneasiness with the equation of republican government with notions of equality. Ursula Vogel, for example, has remarked that the 'republican constitution depends, more than any other form of government upon the firm foundations of patriarchal domestic rule'.[68] She and others have identified a politics of familial identity inscribed into republican thinking, in which the husband is imagined as acting in the interest of, and indeed *as*, the entire family, crucially dependent on a subordinate but virtuous wife. And not least, Joan Scott has highlighted a further

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[67] We can also use this early modern conception of equality and hierarchy to understand that it was possible to see the relationship of household and politics as a relationship that was both equal and hierarchical.

[68] Ursula Vogel, 'Is citizenship gender specific?', in Ursula Vogel and Michael Moran, eds., *The frontiers of citizenship* (London, 1991), pp. 58–85.

'paradox' that republican feminism had (and has) to face. Equal civic rights for women to men were demanded on the grounds that differences between the sexes were irrelevant and that 'nature' should not factor into the question of citizenship (understood as an abstract universal idea). But in the very moment in which feminists argued and acted on behalf of women, they affirmed differences between the sexes.[69] My thoughts laid down here support the notion that simply extending a notion of equal citizenship to include women and thus writing their equality with men *into* republican theory does not make this theory 'gender-blind or 'gender-neutral'. Understanding that the concept of republican citizenship already presumes that there is 'a wife' in a quasi-citizen position rather demonstrates that in terms of a gendered history of political thought, the inclusion of 'woman' into citizenship is a complex philosophical problem.

However, with the above I have also aimed to draw attention to the fact that in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe it was possible to write of an equality of the sexes, and to relate this idea explicitly to the political sphere. It is important to emphasize that in this, Renaissance Aristotelians were not completely innovative, but rather drew on a long tradition that saw marriage as a consensual union. Medieval lawyers, philosophers, and theologians, reflecting on the natural state of Adam and Eve in paradise, coupled this with Aristotelian ethics which saw the married pair as living as a sort of friends. These writers had indeed used a language that saw husband and wife as *aequales*.[70] What is more, in the Roman Law tradition, marriage was understood as a union in which the partners shared in 'divine and human right' (*divini et humani iuris communicatio*).[71] In the Renaissance, this tradition of relative equality, as we have seen, was then emphasized in its political dimension. Medieval and early modern thinkers hence did not simply advocate the subordination of all women to all men. Thinking about the political nature of marriage was far more complex than this.

Not only can the category 'gender' enable us to make sense of earlier political concepts, but simultaneously paying attention to political language enables us to reflect on historical gender relations. Marriage and citizenship in political thought are categories that deeply relate to each other; the married couple's gender relationship was political and the citizens' political relationship was gendered. Gendering concepts in the history of political thought brings to the fore that presumably stable categories are not fixed but complex, multi-dimensional, and inter-relational. Early modern thinkers did not operate with a simple dichotomy of the political and the domestic sphere, of masculine and feminine,

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[69] Joan W. Scott, *Only paradoxes to offer: French feminists and the rights of men* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

[70] Signori, *Von der Paradiesehe zur Gütergemeinschaft*, pp. 13–56.

[71] *Digest* 23.2.1 (De sponsalibus) Nuptiae sunt coniunctio maris et feminae et consortium omnis vitae, divini et humani iuris communication.

of husband and wife, or of 'nature' and 'culture'. In the social worlds in which the writers lived, the category 'woman' was far from universal, and it was not presented as such in their political thinking.[72] The female was naturally subordinated, but the citizen-wife was much closer to equality to her husband. Human beings shared with animals the necessity of procreation; marriage, however, was civil and thus political. Nature might have made the woman defective but it had also made the citizen-wife far superior to any non-civic male. Thinkers differentiated sharply between the categories of feminine and masculine, between women and wives, between men and husbands, even though nature and politics were inter-related. Although nature was a highly important concept, looking at the language they used, these thinkers expressed an understanding, sometimes more than it is expressed today, that biology was not necessarily the justification for every perceived difference between human beings. In a gendered analysis, the domestic emerges as a deeply human sphere, related to the political in a multitude of ways. The political sphere embraced the household; for early modern Aristotelians, the household was part of the political sphere. A gendered relationship was the pivot that related the domestic to the political, insofar as marriage, and an analysis of the husband and wife relationship, was the most important relationship to explore both the origins and the best rule in the state. In that sense, 'women' did not have to wait for their inclusion into the political; since the political sphere embraced the household, as 'wives', some of them were already in it.

Asking questions about gender thus helps us structure and rethink the way we conceive political concepts, including the very idea of 'the political' in early modern Europe. Gender history asks for a contextualization of seemingly universal assumptions of political theory. Therefore, asking questions about gender helps us to question our historical narrative. The history of political thought with its focus on language and discourses makes this contextualization possible, makes it historically sound, and thus enables us to grasp gendered notions of the political. What emerges is that gender was indeed deeply embedded in political thinking in early modern Europe: in its foundations, in its categories, and in its language. It structured the political and was tied to it in a myriad of ways. Gender hence is indeed a useful category – also, and specifically, for the history of political thought.

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[72] See Julius Kirshner, *Marriage, dowry, and citizenship in late medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Toronto, ON, 2015).