
Plato, Gender Equality and Feminism: Connections and Contradictions

Abida Bano¹

¹ Faculty member, Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar. Email: abidabano@uop.edu.pk

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Abstract

Plato's classification as a feminist is a subject of intense debate, primarily due to his contradictory portrayal of women in his works. In the "Republic", he proposes women's inclusion as part of the guardian class, unlike philosophers of his time, which has earned him some favor as someone who believes in gender equality and feminism. Despite acknowledging women's ability to perform roles like those of men in the ideal city, Plato portrayed women as inferior to men in his other dialogues, leaving him in a confusing position. Given the patriarchal, exclusive political structures of his time, the issue of his being someone with feminist leanings still begs a question. Although there is a wealth of literature on Plato's stance on women's equality, it is challenging to make a conclusive case for Plato's feminism. This paper systematically reviews the academic scholarship that directly contributes to the discussion and argues that Plato's position of gender equality is nuanced and unclear, so it is a challenge to assert that Plato championed women's rights definitively. Plato seems to create a space for women's nature in the political domain, provided they are adequately trained, like men, to perform the roles of governance, warfare, and guarding in his republic. In hindsight, his views were limited and did not challenge the prevailing patriarchal ideology.

Keywords: Plato, Gender Equality, Women's Rights, Feminism, Patriarchal, Philosophy

Background

Plato's stance on women's rights is nuanced, ambiguous, and complex to categorize as consistent with an advocate of gender equality. His unique scheme of women's inclusion in the guardian class in his ideal city has led to varying interpretations of his works. These interpretations have considerably changed with shifts in women's status and in discourses on gender equality. Over the past four decades, many feminist scholars have sought to interpret his treatment of women, considering the latest feminist standards for gender equality. Numerous feminist scholars have raised this question of Plato's feminism, but there is little consensus that Plato is the forerunner of gender equality and feminism.

A vast set of literature (the late 1980s and early 1990s) portrays Plato as the forerunner of feminism for his radical government scheme, where women also make part of the ruling class (see Cornelli 2022; Zoller, 2021; Vlastos, 1994; Smith, 1994; Pierce, 1994; Allen, 1985). On the contrary, many contemporary feminist scholars reject the notion of Plato being a forerunner of feminism; instead, they argue that Plato's reasons for creating space for women in the political arena were not an attempt at gendering politics or women's elevation or emancipation but achieving the Republic's stability through civic unity (see Wood, 2017; McKeen, 2016; Nilson, 2014; Annas, 1976). Given the contention in the scholarship, this paper cannot help but wonder, "Why is there still ambiguity about Plato's position on gender equality and feminism? How do the feminist scholarship's arguments help us understand Plato's position on gender equality? Hence, drawing on carefully selected scholarly works on Plato, this paper examines the potential (in)consistencies between Plato's writings

and feminist assertions of gender equality.

Is Plato a feminist? Why is this question still relevant?

There is a reasonable ground for asking this question because, in ancient political philosophy, women had been left out of the political domain, like slaves and aliens. When other ancient political philosophers like Aristotle were relatively straightforward on women's subservient status in the political domain, Plato presented an outlier to the Greek philosophers' community for women's unique characterizations in city politics. Furthermore, unlike Aristotle, Plato identifies human beings with the soul rather than the body (Olszewsky, 1976). He believes that women, as individuals, can perform the same tasks as men if given the same opportunities (*Book V and Timaeus*). Plato's arguments in *The Republic V* are interesting and outrageous for his day. Some view him as pre-modern and revolutionary, while others see him as the precursor of dictatorships. His unique stance on women's inclusion in the guardian class, the abolition of the nuclear family, women's ability to perform the same roles as men after training, and equal economic and educational opportunities has garnered him more attention than other philosophers of his time. Although Plato's emphasis on women being potential leaders in the *Republic* is limited to the Republic's guardian class, his argument was unique and ahead of its time, and has been under scrutiny for a long time.

Furthermore, for the first time, Plato creates a space for changing gender roles after men and women in the guardian class undergo the requisite training. He treats women somewhat equally within the guardian class (Book V), while simultaneously recognizing their weaker and supporting position. Earlier, women were entirely alienated from the city's politics and restricted to their gender roles of childbearing and caring. Thus, the distinction between men and women and the public/private divide was acute and profound in Athenian society. However, Plato brought women into city politics and assigned them various tasks after training. This unique treatment requires exploring the shared ground between Plato's political philosophy and feminism. However, some subsidiary questions remain unanswered in the scholarship or are at least unclear, such as how far we can establish a case for him as an early feminist based on the available literature. Why is Plato questioned as a forerunner of gender equality and feminism? What makes this study relevant and significant is a critical analysis of the arguments advanced by contemporary feminist scholars, along with an assessment of their evidence, to determine whether Plato can be considered a champion of women's rights. This author contends that feminism has evolved over space and time. The contestation in the scholarship persists due to the evolving feminist discourses on gender equality and the women's movement, further complicating the issue.

Methodological Choices

This paper employs a qualitative approach and uses a systematic literature review to address the question at hand. The systematic literature review method follows a replicable process of reviewing the relevant sources pertinent to the research question (Fink, 2014, p. 3). Other researchers can use this defined and open-ended technique to analyze, assess, and evaluate academic literature for a particular purpose (Dewey & Drahota, 2016; Transfield et al., 2003). Scholarly publications discussing *Plato's Republic (V)*, *Laws*, and *Timaeus* have been identified to answer the research question. The original texts (from the *Republic*, *Laws*, and *Timaeus* by Plato) have also been used to support scholars' assertions about Plato's position on women's roles and capabilities.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section critically synthesizes the purposively identified scholarship that makes a case for Plato as a forerunner of gender equality and feminism. The second part engages with the scholarship that rejects Plato as a proponent of women's rights and gender equality, presenting its reasons for doing so. In the third section, drawing on both sides, an analysis of the debate will be conducted to make broader inferences.

Operationalization of Feminism

Feminism, as defined by the OED in 1985, as "advocacy of the claims and rights of women," is a very loose definition and cannot explain this term. Maggie Humm defines 'Feminist' in the dictionary of Feminist theory as someone who believes in both a doctrine of equal rights for women and an ideology of social transformation aiming to create a world of social equality for women" (Humm, 1985, p. 74). More specifically, feminism is defined by Simon de Beauvoir (1973) as a movement against women's objectification and treatment as others. Feminism, however, is not a unified phenomenon; instead, it is contextual and defined as a response to women's social, political, and economic realities in that context. For example, American and French feminists differ, with the former typically associated with liberal feminism and the latter with radical feminism. Eminent French feminists associated with French feminism include Simone de Beauvoir, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, who hold that women and men have distinct differences and that women should have equal access to education, work, and citizenship to balance society through their contributions (Cott, 1986, p. 50). This paper does not consider all that is said about feminism; instead, it will only use the broad conceptualizations and criteria mentioned above.

Women's Status in the Athenian Society (*polis*)

Lacking women's writings on women's status, interpretations of women's position in society are biased by men who interpreted ancient philosophy and characterized women in Athenian society (Petzold, 2024). Still, what accounts we have explained that in the ancient Athenian polis (city-state), women were never recognized as citizens and denied civil and political rights (Pritchard, 2014). Socially, politically, and economically, women were ranked lower than men. In Aristotelian philosophy, women were defined as 'not rational', hence not fit to be included in statecraft. Instead, they were responsible for household chores and producing more citizens (Pomeroy 1975, pp. 58, 64, & 72-75). Due to their lower status, women were married off at very young ages, were limited in household activities, and attended religious ceremonies only (Pomeroy, p. 64). Women had no political rights in Athens and were not involved in political activity (Pomeroy, 2002). They were also legally subordinated to men in the Athenian society (Pritchard, 2014).

Women in ancient Greece differed in status based on their class. (Petzold, 2024). To some, limited economic and social opportunities were available, but in the marriage decision, she had no say. Their primary job was to give male heirs to the family. Furthermore, no vocational opportunities were available to women except prostitution of different degrees, ranging from elegance to squalor. With a robust male hold over schools, gymnasia denied women opportunities for self-development (Vlastos, 1994, p. 13). However, in the lower strata of Athenian society, women could become wet nurses, midwives, and vegetable sellers. Cohen (1989) also argues that women's subservient position in society is not an isolated phenomenon but is embedded in social norms. They were denied political and civil rights and were not allowed to mingle with men except as priestesses, prostitutes, tradeswomen, and hetaerae; henceforth, gender segregation and gender hierarchies were regular features of Athenian society (Vlastos, p. 13).

In the wake of these discriminatory attitudes, including political discrimination towards women in ancient Athens, it seems plausible that philosophers like Aristotle and Plato (to some extent) would find it harder to put women in politics against the aspirations of Athenian society. Plato was the first Philosopher in the classical period who treated men and women equally (education and economic opportunities) in his *Republic* (Vlastos, 1994, p. 12).

Feminist Interpretations of Plato as a Feminist of Some Kind

Women's status and role are discussed in Book V of *the Republic*, where Plato theorizes gender equality in education and economic opportunity, quite unlike the philosophers of his time. Plato states in Book V of the *Republic*, "If we use the women for the same things as the men [specifically the guardian class], they must also be taught the same things [as the men]" (Plato, *the Republic*, Book V (451e)). The broad principle of

gender equality in the Republic's text sparked debate over Plato's stance on gender equality. In the given statement, Plato refers to the fact that women of a specific class will/should be treated in the same manner as men if they work alongside men. Plato's stance on women's status and sex equality in the *Republic* is somewhat ambiguous to some. However, others see him as honest in his support of gender equality in education. They see him as a precursor of those who believe in gender equality. To better look at this controversy, both sides of the argument will be analyzed.

In the ideal society presented in Books IV and VIII of the Republic, women's position in the ruling and guardian class appears to be consistent with the feminist definition of sex equality (Vlastos, 1994, p. 12). Vlastos (1994) presents a compelling argument for Plato's Feminism. In contrast, he derives his definition of feminism from a proposed amendment to the American Constitution (never ratified) that includes social and legal rights. He defines feminism as "equality in the rights of persons shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex" (12). Keeping the definition in mind, Vlastos holds that Plato was the first Philosopher in the classical period to introduce the principle of sexual equality in the Republic's guardian class. He strengthens his argument by providing us facts from the *Republic*, such as rights granted to women in the guardian class that were equal to those of men: the right to education, vocational opportunity, suitable to unimpeded social intercourse, legal capacity; right to sexual choice; suitable to own and dispose of property; and political rights (Vlastos, 1994, pp. 13-14).

The rights mentioned above were not granted to women in ancient Athenian society, and the Philosopher's bold step of putting them in the *Republic* is worth appreciating. If we analyze political rights and the right to property granted to women in the Republic at this point, both dominant versions of Feminism (American/Liberal and French/radical) will agree that Plato can be called a feminist in dealing with women in the guardian class. To strengthen his argument, Vlastos poses another question: how rigorous a feminist agenda does Plato have in his *Republic*? He makes a persuasive argument by presenting the difference between women's presence in the *Republic* and Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazousae*. In the former, women are given equal status to men in terms of education and economic opportunity.

In contrast, Praxagora's conspiratorial women, who capture the state and turn their whims into law, are no more than a typical stereotype of women (Vlastos, 1994, p. 14). Vlastos counters the anti-feminist argument against Plato reasonably and differentiates between the two characterizations of women on logical grounds, arguing that one is progressive and empowering. At the same time, the other reinforces stereotypes of women. However, sex equality within the guardian class envisages its restricted feminist agenda. Vlastos (1994) argues that it was not discrimination against women in the Republic but against classes. Harry and Ron (2016), in line with Vlastos and others above, argue that Plato nowhere categorically states that women are socially or economically inferior to men. Instead, he appreciates their capabilities but is critical of their behavior at times. Harry and Ron believe this should be seen as a product of the society Plato shared, rather than as his belief.

Similarly, Smith (1994) claims the 'difference between sexes is not that of an extreme nature than Plato's (p. 25). However, it is noteworthy that Smith (1994) does not seem to have an agenda to prove Plato, a feminist by contemporary standards. Nevertheless, Smith does highlight Plato's stance on women's status and role in society. According to Smith, in Plato's opinion, women are weaker only in a muscular sense, not in intellectual capabilities. Plato acknowledges women's role in the household as child-bearers and their broader societal role (Smith, 1994, p. 27).

Furthermore, she strengthens her case for Plato by bringing out the physical structure of women and men in ancient Athens, which is delicate in the former case, while more vital (muscularly) (p. 28). According to Smith, men would engage in gymnastics and physical training. At the same time, women would not be allowed to engage in such activities with men, resulting in men's more muscular bodies and weaker physiques. Smith touches upon functionality in Plato's argument regarding men and women. The Philosopher's argument on men's and women's functions is deeply ingrained in his conception of human nature. According to Plato, to

have justice in the individual and state, "every single person must do his own business according to nature" (Plato, *The Republic*, Book V (454a)).

Plato's justice is achievable through the specialization of functions, which means men and women should do what they are good at. Moreover, Plato suggests that human beings have individual (different) natures or exhibit specific characters that correspond to society's best function. This synchronization of human nature and functions would make a society just and stable. The question arises here: if women and men have different natures, should they perform different functions? Based on Smith's argument, I assume that Plato does not allude to any differences between men and women other than their procreative differences and physical strength (Plato, *The Republic* Book V (454e)). I think the evident difference between Plato and Aristotle on men and women's nature is that the former does not consider procreative differences huge enough to bar women from performing political functions (Smith, 1994, p. 31), while the latter believes in the inferiority of women's reason to men's, which disqualifies women from political roles (Aristotle, *Politics*)

Summarizing Smith's standpoint on Plato's Feminism, I can safely say that she neither makes a case for the Philosopher being a feminist nor against it. However, she does attempt to highlight Plato's concern with women's role in the guardian class in the *Republic*, where he presents women as potential leaders subject to equal education and economic opportunities. Smith seems neutral yet appreciative of Plato's treatment of the guardian women as equal to men. What appears more reliable in Plato's thought is the concept of human nature as subject to change through education, training, and opportunities. Therefore, I suspect that, according to Plato, women and men are equally capable of political roles in the *Republic*.

Annas (1976) defends Plato's claim about the difference in women's and men's natures (the former as weaker and the latter as more robust). She argues that Plato established the distinction in Book V, which proposes that different personalities are meant to do different things. In other words, particular characters are good at specific things, and therefore, one should do what he/she is good at. The objections are directed at Plato, who describes women's nature as inferior to men's in the political sphere. Plato only accepts such complaints on this particular point made if it is proved/shown that specific natures limit/affect men and women's capacity for that particular or same pursuit (p. 308). Plato does not mention that women are incapable of political roles due to their nature. According to Plato, men and women have different sexual positions, which have nothing to do with civic nature (454d-e).

Prudence Allen is also a writer who defends Plato's feminist approach. Prudence (1985), interpreting Plato, holds that Plato does believe in the physical weakness of women and the physical strength of men, but regards men's and women's souls as essentially the same (p. 63). Allen makes her point by drawing on the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*: Plato's goal is to separate the body from the soul, and women's souls are capable of the same things as men's. She quotes from the *Republic*, where Plato had Socrates raise a question, "Do you know of anything practiced by human beings in which the male sex is not superior to the female in all these (men can do everything better than women) ways? (Plato, *Republic*, Book V (455c)." Here, he implicitly suggests that men are superior and capable of doing things better than women; however, this superiority is limited to physical strength only (Allen, 1985, p. 63). At another place in the *Timaeus*, Plato made another point that can plausibly be interpreted as derogatory to women: evil men will be given female sex in the second life. I understand this statement as an assertion of the Philosopher who believes in the inferiority and lower rank of the female sex. It would be relegation and punishment for a man to grant him female sex in a second life. Allen takes this point in her particular defending style and contends that women and men have common goals and the same souls, but are different in physical strength; a woman's body is inferior to a man's, and therefore, a man reborn with an inferior body would be a punishment (p. 62). Allen points out that Plato does not engender souls, but does not establish complete equality between men and women due to women's weaker/inferior bodies.

Christine Pierce (1994) is another writer who believes Plato to be a feminist and holds that Plato gives women a limited but essential kind of equality (Pierce, 27). Pierce defends Plato's conception of human nature, which

differs from that of animals. The primary distinction between human nature and animal nature lies in rationality. Humans can understand philosophy and respond accordingly, whereas animal nature lacks the cognitive capabilities to do so. According to Plato, rationality is inherent in both sexes. When he presents women as potential guardians, he means that women possess this rationality and can excel in philosophy (p. 28). According to Pierce, Platonic love among men does not mean rejection of women. Instead, it only notes that women can also have platonic love (Eros) among themselves (p. 33). Pierce disagrees with the anti-feminist criticism of Plato and argues that Plato can be seen as an early feminist.

Plato's portrayal of women in the guardian class as potential guardians or rulers seems reasonably progressive, given its vibrancy and forward-thinking nature. Also, Plato's views on women as potential leaders in the Republic are remarkably ahead of their time. Hence, keeping all the arguments in favor of Plato being a believer in gender equality (Allen, 1985; Vlastos, 1994; Pierce, 1994) and others who argue that Plato was thinking well ahead of his time, it can be contended that these feminist interpretations of Plato are a reasonable effort to find parallels with modern day feminism and discourses on gender equality. However, none of the arguments presented are conclusive, meaning that there is still some ambiguity around the controversial portrayal of women in Plato's writings. It is fair to say that Plato holds a different view of women's capabilities when given training. However, he does sound partial and biased in other dialogues where he relegates women to an inferior position to men. All the mentioned feminist scholars agree on the limitations and inconsistencies in the arguments presented in Book V about women's role in the guardian class. It is more of an acknowledgement of these scholars' honest analysis of the Philosopher's text, on the one hand, and of their presenting a weaker case for Plato's feminism, on the other. Conversely, there is another side to the picture, through anti-feminist interpretations of Plato.

Feminist Interpretations of Plato as an Anti-feminist

While some feminists (mentioned above) view Plato as a feminist for being the first to include women in the ruling class and for treating women equally in his philosophy, others (such as Annas and Wood) argue that it is a convenient strategy, not for women's uplift but for the smooth functioning of the political system. Contemporary feminist scholarship has vehemently criticized Plato on two points: Plato altered the nature of women (Saxonhouse), and Plato is inconsistent about women's capabilities and status, openly criticizing and placing them inferior to men in certain places in the *Timaeus and Phaedo*. The feminist scholars have argued that women have been altered and made to look like men to perform roles similar to men, which means Plato does not believe in the equality of both men and women; instead, he shows that women could become like men if given training to do specific tasks (masculine tasks otherwise). Hence, Plato does not seem to cherish high opinions about women, much less equal to men. An example of Plato diminishing the feminine character of a woman is Diotima, whom he regarded as very important, but who does not exhibit typical feminine characteristics; instead, she is more like a man, and her speech is delivered in a man's voice. Considering different standpoints within feminism, it is noteworthy that many feminists do not believe in an essential female nature, but rather in a social construction of women. Discussing the essential female nature is beyond the scope of this paper.

Julia Annas (1976) challenged Plato's position as a feminist and presented him as an anti-feminist philosopher. Anna's (1976) argument seems to contradict Vlastos's, defending her view that Plato holds a non-feminist position by interpreting passages in Book V. She argues that Plato cannot be categorized as a feminist or as believing in gender equality, since he offers controversial views on women's roles in his other writings. Also, his position is not consistent with the recent definitions and debates on feminism. Annas's (1976) criticism is based on the premise that Plato includes women in the guardian class by abolishing the nuclear family, a long-standing radical feminist claim. Annas sees it as political pragmatism rather than feminism. She thinks it is inappropriate to say that Plato abolished the nuclear family. Instead, he proposed abolishing the nuclear family in the guardian class to ensure women serve a political role of assisting men. It appears he discourages nuclear-

family formation among women in the guardian class, yet he still requires them to play supporting roles rather than leading ones. According to her, Plato does not believe in the equality of men and women and does not grant them a more extensive and equal role in society. Instead, he is concerned with the republic's stability and suggests limited inclusion to ensure it.

Furthermore, Plato's argument does not allude to women's liberation; instead, he is primarily concerned with the state's smooth functioning (Annas, 1976, p. 312). According to Annas, Plato's Feminism is more than a myth; the primary goal of whatever he suggests about women and children in *Republic* Book V is a unified and stable state. Abolishing the family and women's participation in state affairs was not part of the feminist agenda for women's liberation. Instead, there was no work for those women apart from supporting men in state affairs (Annas, p. 320). Anna's position on Plato's program for women in the guardian class is a means to an end in a stable, ideal republic, which is solid and strong.

It is plausible to see Plato in an entirely different scenario: passionate about a stable, unified ideal state. His scheme of education and communal family structure within the guardian class appears to be no more than a means to achieve his goal of a perfect state. Besides, he does not present a development or liberation program for working-class women. Although Plato does not mention women in different classes, he does so by classifying functions. For Plato, classes in the Republic are hierarchical; the guardian class is the superior of all, while others are assigned duties according to their characteristics. Based on the hierarchical order in the *Republic*, it is evident that women in the lower class are treated differently from those in the upper class, which is the opposite of gender equality and the women's rights agenda. Feminism is a struggle for the freedom of women across all denominations, but that is not the case in Plato's writings. Plato's scheme can help achieve a stable political system, but it does not ensure women equal rights and status in society.

Furthermore, in Book V, Plato presents a scheme for guardian women without allowing them to reject it. In a case where the freedom to choose is denied, it contradicts the feminist assertion of women's agency and autonomy. Gender equality and feminism advocate for the equal treatment of genders and the right to self-determination. Henceforth, it would be more than a stretch to say that Plato was a feminist when he did not allow women to use their agency. At the same time, he did not propose a comprehensive scheme for women's emancipation or liberation, allowing them to perform as they chose and according to their abilities; instead, he restricted women to mere supporting aids to men in the guardian class.

Similarly, Arlene W. Saxonhouse (1976, 2017) argues that Plato did not believe in gender equality or in women's capabilities being equal to men's. Because he altered women to make them more like men, serving the state's purpose (Saxonhouse, p. 68). Plato conceptualizes women in the guardian class as exceptional; they share nothing in common with ordinary women in Athenian society. They are given (trained) male characters, and the importance of motherhood is reduced as everybody in the guardian class shares the responsibility of raising children (Saxonhouse, p. 72). Saxonhouse levels another objection against Plato on account of presenting women doing exercise with men because women are no longer erotic sites for men due to their manly characteristics, which is quite unlike a typical Athenian woman. Women are no longer objects of sexual desire for guardian-class men, which means that Plato discourages women's characteristics and feminine appeal to make them fit and appropriate for guardians' roles (p. 73). Thus, the guardian role is inherently defined for men, and whoever (women) shares it should have uniform characteristics rather than a unique set of them. Plato transforms women into men-like beings through training to play the potential guardians in the ideal state. Wood (2011) also notes that Plato's primary goal is to establish an ideal state for aristocracy rather than anything else (p. 67), which I can extend to suggest that Plato did not seem to be concerned with women but with the unified and stable state.

Some affinity between Annas's and Wood's interpretations of Plato is evident, such as the idea that Plato is more concerned with the Republic's stability than with the equality of men and women. Saxonhouse's argument of altering women's characteristics to make them more like men's also seems to be Plato's effort to make the ideal state more stable through the homogeneity of characteristics within the guardian class.

Nonetheless, Plato could not have achieved more stability in the Republic if women and men in the guardian class had behaved ordinarily. By the ordinary manner, I mean that power struggles and family conflicts within the guardian class would never allow them to act wholeheartedly.

Another reference cited in this regard is Elizabeth Spelman (1994), who, resonating with Saxonhouse, argues that Plato alters the role of women in the guardian class. Spelman's argument is like Smith's, who holds that different natures are meant to play different roles, and that justice can be achieved only when everyone plays their role. According to Spelman's interpretation of Plato, souls are meant to control bodies to attain knowledge of forms. When a soul cannot control the body and thus impedes mastery of forms, it is likened to a woman (Spelman, p. 15). Here, Plato refers to women's weakness and argues that a man's soul will enter a woman's body when he lacks a manly (strong) character. Therefore, weaker souls should be in more fragile bodies, which shows that Plato gendered human souls. According to Plato, gendered souls imply that the soul is either masculine or feminine, and feminine souls are perceived as weak and cowardly, whereas men's souls are considered strong (Spelman, p. 16). Suppose we return to the definition of feminism presented at the beginning of the paper. In that case, women are discriminated against and ranked lower on account of their sex, which conflicts with Plato's position on gender equality. Spelman rejects Allen's assertion that Plato does not make gendered souls and contends that a man's soul being punished by being reborn in the female body shows that Plato's souls are gendered and ordered hierarchically. Furthermore, Plato alters the role of women in the guardian class, appreciating only women with manly souls, whereas guardian women do not possess the exact nature of typical Athenian women (p. 19). In other words, Plato's guardian woman is a typical woman with a manly character and soul.

Another plausible case for Plato's anti-feminist approach is his inconsistent and derogatory attitude towards women in his writings, *Timaeus and Phaedo*. A couple of quotes that can be cited as evidence in this regard are Plato's statement in *The Republic*, "Isn't it small-minded and *womanish* to regard the body as your enemy?" (Book V, 469d (italics added)) He also states elsewhere in the *Republic*, "One finds all kinds of diverse desires, pleasures, and pains, mostly in children, women, household slaves, and in those of the inferior majority who are called free" (Book IV, 431c). These statements show that Plato did not appreciate women's characteristics as such. Besides, being like a woman is terrible for Plato, at least in the abovementioned quotes. Plato does not regard women as equal to men. However, women in the guardian class are not women in the typical sense; instead, they work to embody manly qualities to stabilize the ideal state. Women in the *Republic* are sexual prizes for brave men, not at all equals to men. John Darling makes a similar argument: gifted women should be among the guardians solely for the purpose of bearing children. At the same time, men have been given more sexual rights (subject to their bravery in war) than women (Darling, 1986, p. 126). Darling's argument is closely influenced by Allen's assertion that Plato is inconsistent with women and considers them inferior to men, which I find contradictory to contemporary feminist debates on women's emancipation and liberation. The arguments of Saxonhouse, Spelman, and Darling present a compelling counter-position to Plato's views on feminism and gender equality. Based on the points made, it can be contended that Plato did not appreciate a woman as a woman but as a transformed, de-sexed being, which contradicts the standards of feminism. Plato did not contest the gender discrimination and gender bias of his time openly; instead, he held traditional views of women's position and put them inferior to men (Hulme, 2024; Proios & Kamtekar, 2024). Plato's views on gender equality are mixed; in some places, he sounds progressive, but in others, restrictive. In his other dialogues (*Timaeus* and *Phaedo*), he aligns more closely with traditional beliefs that women are intellectually and physically inferior to men. Plato cannot be categorized as fully feminist since there are inconsistencies across his works (Proios & Kamtekar, 2024). He did not hold a single position on women's capabilities or their ability to perform roles like men (gender equality). Plato expresses progressive views in the Republic (Book V) but then contradicts those in his other writings.

Conclusion

It is challenging to establish a strong case for Plato's gender sensitivity and feminist leanings based on the sources discussed in this paper. Contemporary feminist scholarship, as well as the latest, seems to suggest that Plato's treatment of women in the guardian class as a potential case for equality between men and women would be a bit of a stretch. He cannot be considered a feminist by the broad standards of feminism (gender equality). Considering the gaps and slurs mentioned by Spelman, Annas, Darling, and Saxonhouse, Plato's views are mixed. Though feminist scholarship helps us understand Plato's position on women, it cannot make a clear case for either position. Posing such a question to an ancient philosopher seems unfair, especially when we are assessing him as per contemporary standards of feminism and gender equality. It would be fair to say that his partial views are shaped by the patriarchal social norms of his time.

Scholars' effort to prove that Plato is not discriminating against women, but rather against classes; if Plato does not appreciate women's roles, why would he include them in the guardian class? Plato, in some ways, appreciates the specific roles of women, particularly in the household, childbearing, and childrearing. However, he transforms these roles to create homogeneity and unity within the guardian class, thereby fostering stability. If at all, Plato wanted the republic to achieve political stability, and that is why he included them in the state's scheme; it is still a progressive scheme for his times. Also, he did not seem to believe in the essential inferiority of women; instead, he suggested that women be educated and trained to perform guarding and warfare roles.

Furthermore, Plato's family and education scheme is meant to produce a homogenous class of guardians to achieve the overarching goal of the state's stability. Besides, Plato does not seem concerned with men and women in the guardian class as individuals, but rather with the class of guardians having the same characteristics, performing similar roles – ultimate homogeneity. Conflict among the guardians (women and men) can jeopardize the state and Plato's smooth functioning, necessitating every effort to eliminate the possibility of instability. Although feminism is not a single, cohesive phenomenon, every definition of feminism treats all women equally, but Plato treats guardian women differently.

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