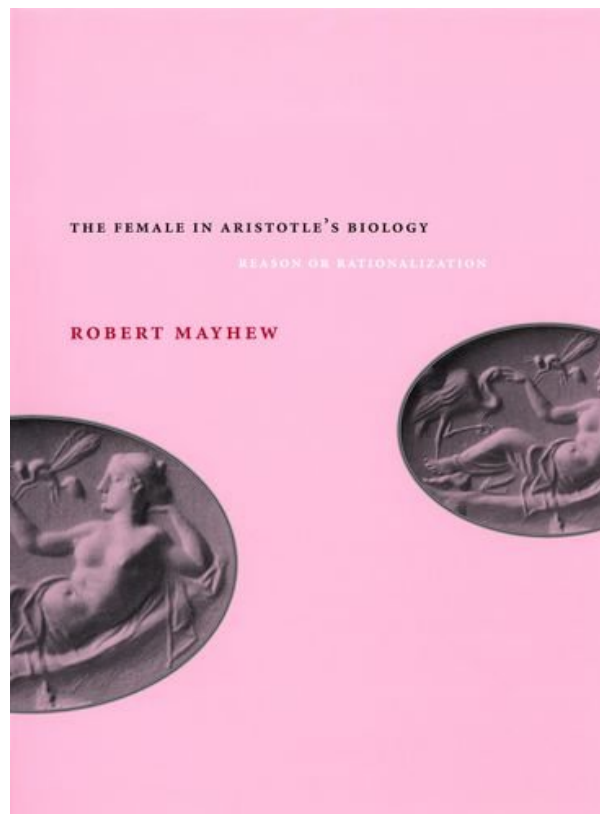


THE FEMALE IN ARISTOTLE'S BIOLOGY: REASON OR RATIONALIZATION BY ROBERT MAYHEW



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Review

“Mayhew’s main treatment is divided under five headings: entomology, embryology, eunuchs and women, anatomy, and ‘the softer and less spirited sex.’ . . . Mayhew’s account is in general careful and informed by close reading of the actual texts. . . . It vindicates Aristotle (to a large extent: Mayhew allows that occasionally Aristotle may have been guilty of a careless reliance on chauvinistic idées reçues) of the charges of misogynistic rationalization.”

(R. J. Hankinson Isis)

“A book on the female in Aristotle’s biology is welcome. Mayhew treats a range of issues in separate chapters: on sexual difference in bees and wasps; on the contributions of male and female parents to conception; on the analogy drawn between eunuchs and females; on scattered comments about anatomical differences (other than in generative organs) between male and female; and on differences in character that might be based on biological differences.”

(Marguerite Deslauriers Journal of the History of Biology)

From the Inside Flap

While Aristotle's writings on biology are considered to be among his best, the comments he makes about females in these works are widely regarded as the nadir of his philosophical oeuvre. Among many claims, Aristotle is said to have declared that females contribute nothing substantial to generation; that they have fewer teeth than males; that they are less spirited than males; and that woman are analogous to eunuchs. In *The Female in Aristotle's Biology*, Robert Mayhew aims not to defend Aristotle's ideas about females but to defend Aristotle against the common charge that his writings on female species were motivated by ideological bias.

Mayhew points out that the tools of modern science and scientific experimentation were not available to the Greeks during Aristotle's time and that, consequently, Aristotle had relied not only on empirical observations when writing about living organisms but also on a fair amount of speculation. Further, he argues that Aristotle's remarks about females in his biological writings did not tend to promote the inferior status of ancient Greek women.

Written with passion and precision, *The Female in Aristotle's Biology* will be of enormous value to students of philosophy, the history of science, and classical literature.

About the Author

Robert Mayhew is an associate professor of philosophy at Seton Hall University. He is the author of *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*.

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Necessary to know to understand Aristotle

By Israel Drazin

Many scholars consider the fourth century BCE Greek philosopher Aristotle as the wisest man who ever lived. Everyone agrees that his scientific way of examining the universe had an enormous impact upon people's thinking. His views even affected the philosophy of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. How, then, could such a wise man have such wrong notions about women. Among other foolish notions, he said that women are less spirited than men and are similar to eunuchs. Robert Mayhew explains that despite his intellect Aristotle was affected by the views of his age and although he conducted experiments before making pronouncements, his tools were inferior. Furthermore, despite his protestations, he relied on too much speculation. The book is valuable not only in showing us the history of concepts about women, but to warn people living today that they too are frequently making foolish and harmful mistakes based on improper evidence.

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