

The Metaphysics of Gender: Essence or Existence?

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The concept of gender has undergone drastic change in the post-modern era. Once accepted as a binary between male and female, gender is now widely considered a spectrum by current scholars.¹ Modern gender scholars, such as these, reject Aristotle on the basis that his anti-feminist rhetoric lends no use to current gender studies. The goal of this paper is to look back at Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, to see if anything in it could clarify the status of gender. The purpose is not to advocate a particular evaluation or endorsement of Aristotle's views regarding gender. Rather, the goal is merely to see if there is a way to interpret his works that lend some use to modern gender studies. I will not be using Aristotle to stipulate what gender is or to nail down what he thought the being of gender was. As such, I will be taking several Aristotelian positions at face value, without arguing whether or not they are true, merely to see whether or not they contradict modern gender scholars. The conclusion reached is that there is, in fact, a way to interpret Aristotle that does not contradict modern gender studies, even if he might not have intended that interpretation. In fact, even taking the full essentialist interpretation of Aristotle, it can be compatible with a gender spectrum. Ultimately, I conclude that while having a gender itself is an essential attribute that cannot change, particular manifestations of gender are accidental and fluid. Part of the human form is the fact that one has a gender while the particular manifestations of gender in each person arise in matter in the form-matter composite.²

In order to reach this conclusion, I first examine Aristotelian essentialism as Aristotle laid it out and as scholars have interpreted it since, what it entails and does not entail. Specifically, the discussion of accidental and essential attributes will be the main focus of this section. Next, I

¹ Surya Monro and Helen Daly are two such scholars who I will be focusing on in this paper.

² Aristotle is in fact ambiguous on the location of gender. In his biological writings, gender belongs to the form-matter composite. But in his metaphysical account of form, gender is an essential attribute of form. For the biological account, see *de Anima* II.1-4. In this paper, I will utilize the metaphysical account.

consider in what sense Aristotelian essentialism is compatible with evolution, and what that means for the teleological nature of Aristotle's philosophy. I will then turn to a discussion of Aristotelian essentialism in terms of reproduction, including his positions on form and matter. Throughout this section I will not be defending or arguing against any of Aristotle's positions, merely laying them out and attempting to explain their implications for how one can consider gender without contradicting him. In the next section I will lay out and defend the account of gender belonging to form and matter I summarized briefly above, as an interpretation of Aristotle's account that does not contradict himself. Finally, I will argue that this interpretation does not contradict modern gender scholars either, and is actually helpful to current studies of gender.

Before any analysis can occur, it will be necessary to define exactly what will be meant by gender. Since the goal of this paper is to take current conceptions of gender and then look back at Aristotle to conclude whether or not anything in his *Metaphysics* is clarifying, our definition of gender will be derived from current conceptions. The operational definition of gender will be "sex and the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex."³ This definition is derived from the Oxford English Dictionary and Merriam-Webster, which reflect the current usage of the word. However, perhaps more importantly, it is also the sense of gender used by current gender scholars. Helen Daly defines sex and gender interchangeably, referring to her model as the sex/gender model. For her, sex/gender means "physical and social characteristics having to do with maleness and femaleness."⁴ Surya Monro bases her definition of gender off her definition of transgender, since she is largely concerned with transgenderism. She defines transgender as people who are "cross-dressers, transsexuals,

³ This definition was drawn from the Oxford English Dictionary and Merriam-Webster.

⁴ Daly, Helen. "Modelling Sex/Gender." *Think: Philosophy For Everyone* 16, no. 46 (2017): 79-92

androgynes, intersexes (people born with a mixture of male and female physiological characteristics).”⁵ Gender here includes behavioral characteristics like dress and biological characteristics that individuals are born with. Charlotte Witt defines gender in a similar way, explaining gender in terms of the “socially mediated reproductive (or engendering) functions that an individual is recognized (by others) to perform.”⁶ Therefore, gender will be defined as including both biological and behavioral differences.

To begin, let’s reflect on Aristotelian essentialism. Most people, in claiming that Aristotle is an essentialist, are referring to his claim that beings have an unchanging substance comprised of essential attributes that persist through accidental change. In setting up this discussion, Aristotle names two distinct types of attributes: essential and accidental. This distinction occurs first in his discussion of being in *Metaphysics* Book IV. Aristotle adds nuance to the idea of being by identifying five distinct ways in which the word can be used. He claims that being is “meant in more than one way, but all of them pointing toward one source.”⁷ There although every type of being points towards the same definition, there are yet five separate ways in which being can be explained: as independent things, attributes of independent things, on the way to becoming a being/independent thinghood, productive or generative of thinghood, and negation.⁸ All of these separate notions of being help elaborate where exactly Aristotle finds what defines a being, and for present purposes, a human being.

The second way being is meant is where Aristotle makes the distinction between accidental and essential attributes. Accidental attributes include such things like hair color, skin

⁵ Monro, Surya. "Beyond male and female: poststructuralism and the spectrum of gender." *International Journal Of Transgenderism* 8, no. 1 (2005): 3-22.

⁶ Witt, Charlotte. *The metaphysics of gender*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 22.

⁷ Aristotle. *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Trans. Joe Sachs. (New Mexico: Green Lion, 2002), 1003b 3-4.

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003b 5-10.

tone, or height.⁹ These are attributes that can accrue over time and can be affected by factors such as one's history or environment. If we removed all the accidental attributes from an individual, the only thing that would remain would be those attributes that characteristically define them as human. Essential attributes are those that "mark them off and indicate a this, the removal of which does away with the whole."¹⁰ If essential attributes are removed, there is no longer a human being. Therefore, all essential attributes of humans are present at birth, at least as potencies, and are necessary for an organism to receive the qualification "human." However, we do not have to be using our essential attributes to be classified as having them. As Aristotle explains, "we say... of both one who is capable of using knowledge and one who is using it that he knows."¹¹ This is the root of Aristotle's essentialism, through this classification of essential attributes that would be necessary to any being. What is especially important to note here is that knowledge is not bodily, and yet knowledge or the capacity for knowledge is an attribute without which a substance cannot be human. If knowledge is not bodily and belongs to soul as an essential attribute, for human souls, not all essential attributes are bodily.

A large number of scholars interpret these passages in his *Metaphysics* to conclude that Aristotle is an essentialist.¹² One of the ramifications of this essentialism is that every human (every member of a species really) possesses a certain number of attributes that are necessary for it to be a member of that species, and if these attributes were to change, the individual would no longer belong to that species.¹³ In terms of these essential qualities, Gareth Matthews explains

⁹ I will be focusing on accidental attributes that belong to the material substratum, but that does not necessarily mean that all accidental attributes are material.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1017b 17-19.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1017b 3-4.

¹² These include Gareth Matthews, Stephen Boulter, Mariusz Tabaczek, and David Charles, all of whom will be explored in more detail here.

¹³ It is important to note here that not all essential attributes are formal, some belong to matter for the sake of form but do not belong to form.

how "it is impossible for a thing still to remain the same if it is entirely transformed out of its species, just as the same animal could not at one time be, and at another time not be, a man."¹⁴

The qualities that make a human a human instead of any other species are essential to its being. Stephen Boulter explains this by describing how, according to Aristotle, "F is an essential feature of kind K if and only if F is a feature used to define kind K."¹⁵ What this means is all essential attributes must be explanatory, the attribute is only essential if, without it, one cannot explain the being to whom the attribute belongs. Boulter then distinguishes "between essential and non-essential properties, the loss of the latter being consistent with the continued existence of the items through the change, while the loss of the former marks the passing out of existence of the item in question."¹⁶ So while the changing of an essential attribute marks the destruction of the being as such, non-essential properties are able to change.

These other, non-essential attributes can change or fade without affecting species participation. Thus accidental qualities are those that, unlike what make an organism a member of a species, fade in and out in time. Matthews describes how, for Aristotle, the human qua sitting "will perish when the [human] stands. We could say that sitting belongs necessarily and omnitemporally, even necessarily omnitemporally, to the sitting [human]. But saying that is not even a first step toward convincing Aristotle that sitting is, in any robust sense of 'essential', an essential property of the sitting [human]."¹⁷ This distinction allows one to see that even though sitting is a necessary quality of how the human is positioned in that moment, because it could easily change as the human stands up or begins to walk, it is not an essential quality. Essential

¹⁴ Gareth Matthews. "Aristotelian Essentialism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, (1990): 257.

¹⁵ Stephen Boulter. "Can Evolutionary Biology do Without Aristotelian Essentialism?" *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 70, (2012): 86.

¹⁶ Boulter, 86.

¹⁷ Matthews, 259.

qualities are only those that do not change or come in and out of existence, but are instead necessary to the being of the organism in question.

While this discussion has revealed much about the properties of essential qualities, a discussion of Aristotelian essentialism's compatibility with evolution, will reveal still more. This consideration is therefore deeply relevant to gender concerns, because it reveals quite a bit about essential and nonessential attributes. The distinction between accidental and essential attributes form the basis for both Matthews' and Boulter's ultimate conclusion that Aristotelian essentialism is in fact presupposed by evolutionary biology, and that without it, the truth evolution is based on would falter. While their ultimate conclusions on the compatibility of essentialism and evolutionary biology are not particularly relevant to this paper, the reasoning they use on the way to those conclusions is. In other words, I will not be arguing that essentialism is presupposed by evolutionary biology, or even that the two are compatible. I will only be illustrating how the arguments these scholars make to prove their points reveal intricacies in Aristotle that are helpful to the task at hand: clarifying the status of gender. Boulter claims that essentialism is necessary for evolution to work because "an entity can persist through change only if it retains its essential properties while shedding or gaining an accidental property."¹⁸ This reading of Aristotle presupposes that some attributes are crucial to the species being identified as such, and if they go away, the species is now a different species. So, if gender were to be considered an essential attribute, the shedding of it would constitute a destruction of the human as belonging to the species human.

Other scholars agree with the conclusion that essentialism is compatible with evolution, but for different reasons. They focus instead on the fluidity of Aristotelian species versus

¹⁸ Boulter, 95.

Platonic forms. Tabaczek explains how essentialism “is oftentimes misunderstood and dismissed for presenting the idea of species defined as eternal, immutable, determined by God, and discrete.”¹⁹ But this idea of essentialism traces back to the static forms propagated by Plato, which is not what Aristotle argues for. Unlike this conception, the “dynamic Aristotelian understanding of species... forges a middle path between the absolute realism of Plato and pure nominalism.”²⁰ For Aristotle, species do in fact have essential attributes that are definitional, and make the species what it is rather than a different species. These essential attributes are admittedly fixed and permanent for that species, and will not change, since they are essential. So this interpretation adds nuance to the question of essentialism.

Some scholars get closer to applying this nuance on the topic of gender by being quick to point out that if Aristotle is essentialist, his essentialism is certainly at least teleological. This interpretation is rooted in Aristotle’s discussion of causality. Aristotle believes that it is necessary to ascertain the causes of things “since that is when we say we know each thing, when we think we know its first cause.”²¹ In ascertaining these causes, Aristotle identified four distinct ways in which causality can be understood. The first cause is called the formal cause, and refers to thinghood, substance, or essence. He calls it the “what it is for something to be,” the cause closest resembling Plato’s forms.²² Here he means the “beingness” of something or the “what it is to be” of something, which is the why the thing exists. The second cause is the material cause. This refers to the matter, or underlying mixture of elements that comprise something such as the parts and organs of a living body. The third cause is the agent cause, which is the source of

¹⁹ Mariusz Tabaczek. “An Aristotelian Account of Evolution and the Contemporary Philosophy of Biology.” *Dialogo: Proceedings of the Conferences on the Dialogue between Science and Theology* 1, no. 1 (2014): 63.

²⁰ Tabaczek, 64.

²¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 983a 26-27.

²² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 983a 28.

motion for something that came into existence. The fourth and last cause is called the final cause. It refers to the that for the sake of which, the good of something. And for natural living beings, the form (soul) is the moving (agent) cause, the final cause, and the formal cause all in one.

The fourth cause is where Aristotle's teleological position is most clear. This cause is the ruling cause and the first cause because without it, it would be impossible to determine what material or agent is necessary to bring something into being. It is "the completion of every coming-into-being and motion."²³ With the example of a human, the formal cause would be what makes us humans instead of just animals, the material cause our cells, the agent cause our parents, and the final cause the purpose of a human, to reason. According to this interpretation, the what it is to be of a fetus is a human because the final cause is to be a reasoning human and, since the final cause and the formal cause are the same, the completion precedes the beginning. The implications of this conclusion are that everything that is going to be in the cosmos is already perfected, only terrestrial beings change, and they change toward an end. This is undoubtedly a teleological explanation, and many scholars of his essentialism pick up on the ways in which this influences essentialist interpretations, like David Charles. Charles' explanation of Aristotelian essentialist integrates an "interdependency between definition and explanation" which is "based on the co-determination of essence and causation."²⁴ In this way he claims that definitions must be based on the ways in which essence is determinate of the explanation of beings.

David Balme is one author who uses Aristotle's teleology to claim that Aristotle is not an essentialist at all. He claims that typical interpretations of Aristotle hold that forms are just variations of a species and "animal's growth is directed primarily towards the form of the

²³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 983a 32.

²⁴ David Charles. *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 245.

species.”²⁵ He counters this argument, claiming that animals grow in essential and non-essential ways to imitate their parents. In this case, he is using the term “essentialist” to mean someone who “holds in particular that each animal’s growth is directed primarily towards the form of the species; that its essence prescribes its form; and that animal form excludes material accidents.”²⁶ Balme disagrees with these typical essentialist interpretations of Aristotle because he does not think animals develop towards the form of the species, which excludes material, or accidental, attributes. He argues that “species membership is a consequential, not a primary cause, in animal reproduction and growth.”²⁷ Animal growth is therefore teleological, and is directed towards an end, but that end is not the form within their species.²⁸

The essence of an animal is what reveals its specifically teleological features. This is why Balme states that “the explanatory power of essence is that it reveals the teleological features.”²⁹ Therefore species differentials can be based on essence without revealing the end cause toward which animals develop, which is the fulfillment of their form and final cause. Rather, animals merely “develop into their most advantageous way in given circumstances, within the limits of the form inherited from their parents,” which is not only compatible with evolution, it removes the essentialist character of Aristotle’s biology.³⁰ Aristotle is not an essentialist because he does not believe animals develop characteristics directed for the sake of the form. James Lennox agrees, arguing that the fact that “at each level [of kinds] there will be an organization among the

²⁵ David Balme, “Aristotle’s Biology Was Not Essentialist,” in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle’s Biology*, ed. Allan Gotthelf (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 291.

²⁶ Balme, 291.

²⁷ Balme, 293.

²⁸ It is quite possible, according to *De anima* ii 4 that Balme and his opponents are right, since Aristotle argues here that the purpose of the nutritive function is for the being to maintain itself. However, whether or not Balme and his opponents are right does not impact this paper specifically, as we will only deal with the ramifications of Balme’s reasoning.

²⁹ Balme, 298.

³⁰ Balme, 291.

allowable ranges for each feature of each differentia which is essential to an animal's life... is not typological essentialism."³¹ Just because there are ranges in which certain accidental attributes can change and outside of that range their change would affect form does not mean that Aristotle is an essentialist.

One of the reasons why Balme in particular does not believe animals are growing merely towards the form they have within their species is that form has to exclude material or accidental attributes. While the essence "picks out only those features for which a teleological explanation holds... species on the other hand... must include non-essential features."³² This goes directly back to Aristotle's description of form and matter in the *Metaphysics*. He explains how in humans "independent things are put together by nature and in accordance with nature" and "it is this nature that is thinghood," or essence.³³ This essence "is not an element but a source," the elements, rather, "are that which something is divided into, being present in it *as material*."³⁴ Here is the difference between the form and the matter for Aristotle, the form is the source of how the materials are combined and in what way they are combined to create the human, and the materials used are the matter.

Balme distinguishes between attributes which contribute to form, and those that do not. He reminds us that "to account for animal features" we must "distinguish those that are for the sake of something from those that arise necessarily from the matter."³⁵ He uses the example of eyes, explaining how "[e]yes are for something but their color is owed only to their matter and the movements of matter."³⁶ Eyes are for the sake of something, since they are for the sake of

³¹ James Lennox, "Kinds, Forms of Kinds, and the More and the Less in Aristotle's Biology," in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, ed. Allan Gotthelf (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 395.

³² Balme, 297.

³³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1041b28-30.

³⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1041b31-33.

³⁵ Balme, 294.

³⁶ Balme, 294.

seeing, and therefore having eyes is an essential attribute. However, eye color is not for the sake of anything, because having brown or blue eyes does not affect one's ability to see, so eye color is not essential, it is only accidental and arises from matter.

We can look at gender on similar terms. Having a gender is for something, but the specific details of that gender are owed only to matter. Recall that the definition of gender we are using integrates both sex and the characteristics resulting from sex that are behavioral or social. Having a sex is necessary for reproduction, and for humans, having a sex necessarily means having a gender. We will refer to this understanding of gender as gender as such, however, which sex characteristics one has, or how one presents through behavioral or social factors is not for the sake of anything. These behavioral and social factors do not change one's ability to reproduce just as eye color does not change one's ability to see. Therefore, the fact that one has a gender encompassing sex is an essential attribute, for it exists for the sake of reproduction. But, in the same way as eye color is not essential, which gender one belongs to is not essential to the particular human one is.

Whether or not gender as such can belong to form, however, is a question that will take more consideration. The defense of this position starts with a consideration of the final cause of different types of beings, which Aristotle gives in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle explains that the kind or form of an inanimate object is to exist, of plants is to live (which is "the life of nutrition and growth") of animals is to sense, and of humans to reason.³⁷ The final cause of a human being is thus to exist, live, sense, and reason, and to live requires reproduction. Aristotle also argues in the *Politics* that "in the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may continue."³⁸ Therefore gender

³⁷ Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. W. D. Ross. (Massachusetts: MIT, 2005), I.7.

³⁸ Aristotle. *Politics*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. (Massachusetts: MIT, 2005), I.2.

as such is a part of human nature because to be human, one must reproduce with the other and one cannot be human without reproducing.³⁹ Specific manifestations of gender cannot be a part of the form because to have them is not universal unchanging and necessary, but having a gender in and of itself is, because without it one cannot reproduce. The final cause of a human necessarily includes reproduction, and there can be no reproduction without engendering, therefore engendering is part of the human form. Gender is by no means the entirety of the human form, but is merely one aspect of it, an essential attribute of it.

The relationship between attributes and form, which was discovered through an exploration of essentialism in relation to evolution, can be further revealed through a consideration of reproduction. Aristotle argues that “we may safely set down as the chief principles of generation the male factor and the female factor; the male as possessing the principle of movement and of generation, the female as possessing that of matter.”⁴⁰ Therefore, for Aristotle, the male contributes the form and the female contributes the matter (the ovum is the matter and the semen conveys the form). In this way of interpreting Aristotle, the male contributes all aspects of the fetus that affect form and are for the sake of something, and the female contributes that which is not essential.

Some feminists interpret this as subordination, since the attributes for the sake of something are seen as superior. But another way to read this argument is to redeem the value of matter. Knowing the form or essence of a thing does not account for what that thing is. Not just species differences but also individual differences come to be through matter. This, arguably, is the reason why in Balme’s view, Aristotle is not an essentialist. While the matter contributes the

³⁹ Again, it is not that I am advocating this understanding of Aristotle, merely using it to explain how he can be relevant to modern conceptions of gender.

⁴⁰ Aristotle. *Generation of Animals*. Trans. A.L. Peck. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943), 716a5-6.

form of the fetus, it is only with the addition of matter that a human exists, because “the material is not known in its own right”.⁴¹ And yet matter alone is unstable, since matter is a potentiality to be something, which explains decay and death. It is only with the union of the two that a stable human which exists is created. So, while an essentialist would only consider formal differences, and not matter, Balme recovers the importance of matter. Therefore, in defining a human, one must consider both the form and the matter of that human. Perhaps while the male contributes the form, which is essential in terms of the fact that it requires a fetus to have a gender, the female contributes the complexity and spectrum. At this point, it appears that gender as a spectrum aligns with Aristotelian thought if it does not exist in form, but only in the manifestation of gender through matter.

Here it is important to discuss in what way gender can belong to form or matter. For Aristotle, “the primary sources of all things are the this that is first as work and something else which is in potency,” or, the form and the matter.⁴² For Aristotle, then, the form is the cause, but matter is just potency. Nothing can belong to matter in this sense. However, certain attributes can arise from the matter and depend necessarily on the matter within the form-matter composite.⁴³ So, for the remainder of the paper, the aspect of gender which belongs to form is only the fact that humans have a gender. The aspect of gender that belongs to form is not our sex and behaviors, it is the fact that we have sex and behaviors in the first place. Every other aspect of gender, our sex and behaviors, arise from matter.

The work of many scholars on the issues of Aristotelian form and matter back up this point. D.W. Hamlyn explains how “it might be said indeed that while form is always in a kind of

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1036a9-10.

⁴² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1071a15.

⁴³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1069b15.

matter (except, e.g. in the case of God), and while each determined the possibilities that are available for the other, it cannot be said in general that a given form is to be found only in a given kind of matter.”⁴⁴ Aristotle explains that “for all those things that are brought into being in materials different in from, such as a circle in bronze or stone or wood, that the bronze does not in any way belong to the thinghood of the circle.”⁴⁵ Indeed, even if one had only ever seen bronze circles, and never stone or wood circles, “the bronze would in no way belong to the form, though it would be difficult to subtract it in one’s thinking.”⁴⁶ It would be even harder to conceive of a human that does not have the matter of flesh and bones and blood, since we have never seen a human in any other matter. However, that does not make flesh and bones and blood “parts of the form and of its articulation... but just material” though it is hard for us to imagine that since we have never seen the human form in another matter.⁴⁷ Therefore, although form is always manifested in material, it is not dependent on a certain kind of material (wood or flesh) and it does not follow that it could only be manifested in that material.

So, although it can be said that the gender as such relies on the aspects of gender that arise from matter to specify what possibilities that gender may take, it cannot be said that gender as such is reducible to a given kind of gender. This supports the idea that gender can be realized in many different ways, as a spectrum of ways even, without eroding the concept of gender itself. Hamlyn continues, “What is true is that while a given form... is dependent for its possibility in general on its incidence in a given range of possible kinds of matter... it is dependent for its possibility on a particular occasion on its incidence in one particular kind of matter.”⁴⁸ Just as

⁴⁴ D. W. Hamlyn, “Aristotle on Form,” in *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things*, ed. Allan Gotthelf (Pittsburgh: Mathesis Publications, 1985), 62.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1036a35-40.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1036b1-3.

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1036b1-3.

⁴⁸ Hamlyn, 62.

form is dependent on matter to be realized, gender as such is dependent on arising in matter in specific ways to be realized.

In addition, there cannot be a limit on the ways in which the part of gender that contributes to form, or, gender as such, actualizes matter. Gender as such is only dependent in particular occasions upon particular matter; it is not dependent as a contributing factor to form on any specific range of particular matters. If this is true, it is not possible to limit gender expression to two binaries, or even to a range of, say, five options, since gender as a part of form is only dependent for its possibility in general on a range of incidences in matter. Aristotle explains how “it has been said that each thing and what it is for it to be are in some cases the same... but as many things as are material or as take in material along with them, are not the same as what it is for them to be.”⁴⁹ In other words, things can be material or take in different kinds of material, but that material does not define the what it is to be of those things, the material does not define the form. In some cases, like gender, it might be true that the expression of gender and the gender as such are the same (like a person of the female sex who also identifies with every female expression of gender). And yet, it can by no means be concluded that the female expression of gender belongs solely to form, as gender is an attribute that takes in material along with it. The female chromosome manifests itself in the material of the human body and therefore no expression of gender can ever belong strictly to form; gender expression can never be the same as what it is to have a gender.

It is also not true that gender can be said to be equivalent to the possibilities gender can take. Form “is not simply the properties and differences a thing can take.”⁵⁰ So gender as it contributes to form is not reducible to the different ways in which gender can be manifested, or

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1037b 1-6.

⁵⁰ Hamlyn, 65

the ways in which we recognize manifestations of gender. Specific manifestations of gender appear to be a property rather than a form. Properties closely resemble accidental attributes then, for Michael Frede explains how although “certain forms do need properties for their realization, they do not need the particular properties they have.”⁵¹ The human form is included within this, as, for example, “the form of a human being needs a body of a weight within certain limits, but it does not need that particular weight.”⁵² In much the same way, we could say that the form of a human being needs properties of gender, but it does not need any one specific property. To have some properties is necessary for form, but specific individual properties are not necessary, like the way accidental attributes as a whole are necessary but specific ones are not. Gender does need to be expressed, but it does not need to be expressed in any particular way; particular expression is only a property of gender rather than the gender as such itself.

In addition, it is not only different expressions of femininity that belong to the gender as such in form, but both ends of the spectrum, male and female. For, according to Aristotle, form can be a cause in contrary ways, both by being present and in its privation. He explains how “the same form belongs even to contrary things, since the thinghood of something lacking it the thinghood opposite to it, as health is of disease, for it is by the absence of health that there is disease.”⁵³ Just as one can be a varying degree of healthy, and possess at a certain time more health than one does disease, it would appear to also be true that one can possess more masculinity than femininity without having to have only one or the other. For Aristotle directly allows for opposites to belong to the same form, and, it follows, would allow for degrees of opposites to be within the same form. It is not just that an expression in matter, a property, can

⁵¹ Michael Frede, “Substance in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,” in *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things*, ed. Allan Gotthelf (Pittsburgh: Mathesis Publications, 1985), 25.

⁵² Frede, 25.

⁵³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1032b4-6.

contain some degree of each, but that the form itself allows for this flexibility in individuals, i.e. gender fluidity.

Before one can truly claim that degrees of opposites can belong within the same form, a consideration of Aristotle's contraries in Book X of his *Metaphysics* is necessary. Aristotle argues that contraries are the perfect form of difference: "there is a certain kind of difference that is greatest, and this I call contrariety."⁵⁴ Unlike opposites in genus, which "do not have a way to one another," contraries have a way to one another, and share some innate unity.⁵⁵ D.C. Schindler argues that only accidents have contraries—substances do not since "contraries require prior unity, and, according to Aristotle, substance is the most perfect kind of being, which makes it the highest 'level' of unity."⁵⁶ Substances do not have contraries but we can say that a substance does have a lack or privation of form. When one ceases being human, the underlying material has been deprived of form. Accidents can only be contrary in substance (hot and cold can only be opposites if they are in substance). As Aristotle explains, "it is clear that contradiction and contraries are not the same thing" and so the only prior unity that would be possible for a substance would be non-substance, which is only an abstraction.⁵⁷ Thus Schindler concluded that "it appears that there is no possibility of having a truly profound difference that concerns the being of things, but only the manner so to speak in which a thing appears."⁵⁸ So within a species, all are the same insofar as they share the same substantial form, but there will be differences according to matter, such as height and weight. In terms of gender, then, all humans will be engendered, as an essential attribute, and the fact that they have a gender is the

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1055a5-6.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1055a7.

⁵⁶ Schindler, D.C. "Perfect difference: gender and the analogy of being." *Communio* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 194-231.

⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1055b4-5.

⁵⁸ Schindler, 202.

same. It is only in their matter with regard to the form-matter composite that being engendered allows for differences like male or female behaviors or sex organs. So, to look back on Aristotle's divisions, humans of different genders are alike "if, not being simply the same, nor without difference in their composite thinghood, they are the same in form, just as a larger square is like a smaller one."⁵⁹ Humans of different genders are alike because they share the fact that their human form dictates that they will have a gender. This fits the earlier argument that opposite gender expressions manifesting in matter would belong to the same form, the same essence of gender as such. The universal form is having a gender, it is the expressions manifested in matter in the composite that are different.

It would also follow from Aristotle's argument that gender as a contrary, representing opposites, cannot mark a species divide (female and male is not same as horse and human).⁶⁰ This is because gender belongs to human essentially, unlike accidental attributes like hot or cold. Gender as such is essential even if specific manifestations of gender expression are accidental. Schindler then argues that Aristotle must deny that gender effects essence as such. For if gender difference is "a matter of form... it would necessitate an opposite and turn the species of human into a genus with species male and species female."⁶¹ We cannot say that male and females are different species, because they have the same form which includes the fact that they are engendered. What makes humans different is the particularities of how their form is manifested in matter in the composite. This argument would fall back in, it seems, to the earlier claim that the opposites of male and female can belong to the same form when expressed differently. Gender differences belong to matter, and not to form. If they did belong to form, then the species

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1054b4-6.

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1058a30-31.

⁶¹ Schindler, 205.

of human would have to be a genus with two species: male and female. For the opposite essential attributes would necessarily have to divide the species of human. It seems then, that the earlier conclusion in regard to gender affects essence but not essence as such fits in with Aristotle's argument on contraries.

Because opposite expressions of gender in matter must belong to the same form, it follows that gender characteristics could not belong only to one gender and not another. One scholar who investigates the ways in which Aristotelian philosophy can be considered compatible with feminism focuses in on just this idea. Sarah Borden claims that "we get equality from the commonality of our formal principle and difference from our material principle in combination with our choices."⁶² In this way, women are only different from men in the way their gender expressions are manifested in matter, and not in form. Because women and men have form in common, their capacities must necessarily be in common as well, so one cannot say that men have some capacity that women do not or vice versa. So, for example, one could not claim that women are emotional while men are not, or that men are rational and women are not.⁶³

Borden goes farther than to argue that gender is one way in which men and women differ in regards only to manifested matter and not to form, claiming that it is only in the material cause that men and women differ at all, and it is in this category that gender resides.⁶⁴ Therefore, there are no broad categories through which one can fit men or women into and exclude the other sex. All differences between the sexes are in matter and not in form, which allows the form to retain integral unity while also allowing for gender differences. The key to these differences is not in

⁶² Borden, Sarah R. *An Aristotelian feminism*. Switzerland: Springer, 2016.

⁶³ It could be claimed that Aristotle would respond to this point by arguing that while women have the same form, their material prevents full realization of the form's capacities. So women are more emotional not because of a soul deficiency, but because of a deformed body. However, just because it is possible Aristotle came to this conclusion, does not mean concluding in a different way damage Aristotle's hylomorphism, as will be established later in this paper.

⁶⁴ Borden, 59.

fact, the ways they arise in men or women, or the ways in which they can be categorized, but rather, the ways in which they arise across the board, and the many factors that can influence that arising.

The differences between men and women in matter arise from a multiplicity of sources. She claims that “we get sexual difference from sexually-differentiated general biological [material] and gender difference from the combination of sexually-differentiated general biological [material], environmental and cultural [material], and our self-understanding and choices in light of these features.”⁶⁵ Notice how gender here arises from both biological material *and* environmental and cultural material. If gender were reducible to biology, we could not account for the societal factors that modern gender scholars demand be accounted for. If gender were reducible to societal factors, it would be impossible to allow for the effect biological organs have on how gender is manifested or performed. The most robust sense of gender must therefore take into account both, one arising from the human form and one arising from matter in the composite. Both are important, but it is this accounting for societal factors that is pivotal for this account of gender to be compatible with feminism.

This accounting remains Aristotelian in the way it does not ignore the influence of biological gender on gender characteristics. It is “because of the influence (among other things) of sexually-differentiated biology [that] we can develop gendered identities” in the first place.⁶⁶ Thus gender is not simply reducible to differences in matter that are influenced by societal and individual concerns but retains the importance of the impact of gender as such, which belongs to form. This view of gender thus acknowledges that the gender as belonging to form does impact

⁶⁵ Borden, 60. Borden uses the word “matter” here, which I have substituted for the word “material.” Since I am using the word matter in a very specific Aristotelian context throughout the rest of the paper, I chose a synonym to retain the integrity of Borden’s ideas without confusing the reader as to a new meaning of matter.

⁶⁶ Borden, 61.

humans, both male and female, regardless of which gender it is. The specific manifestations of gender, arising in matter in the composite, come about in conjunction with societal and personal factors, but the form of a human having a gender makes an impact as well. Because gender here is not reduced simply to biology or societal factors, which are material differences, but retains formal concerns, it remains Aristotelian.

This notion of gender and form is thus that gender as such belonging to form includes both male and female and that the manifestations of gender which arise in matter are influenced by social conditions. For the claim that male and female are both fully legitimate and appropriate—although differing—expressions of the human form seems on the face of it to contradict Aristotle. For we cannot forget his claims in *Generation of Animals* that the female is a deformed male, and that male contributes form in reproduction and the female matter.⁶⁷ But perhaps there is a way to reconcile this view of the aspects of gender which belong to form or matter with Aristotle's main metaphysical claims, although Aristotle himself did not. The first way in which this account might seem to differ from Aristotle's is through the idea that male and female could be two complete aspects of the same form. After all, Aristotle claims that they are not both completed—the “the female is as it were a deformed male.”⁶⁸ He explains that “the male is separate from the female, since it is something better and more divine in that it is the principle of movement for generated things, while the female serves as their matter.”⁶⁹ This would, on the face of it, contradict an idea that the two could be different manifestations of the same completed form.

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 716a5-6.

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 737a29.

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 732a10-12.

However, although Aristotle did not come to the conclusion that male and female could both be completed as part of the same form, it does make sense according to his other conclusions. Aristotle “never identifies the species-form simply with one's current physical structure. Form includes the temporal pattern, with appropriate ranges for each type of thing, and not simply one's current shape.”⁷⁰ In fact, Aristotle’s forms are not static and excluding of temporal change.⁷¹ Thus it is possible to interpret “that the human form expresses itself in a number of distinct physical ways—for example, in the female and male body—and not merely in one.”⁷² This claim would also alleviate the argument that if a human were to change their gender, in some way they would depart from their species, as would seem to follow if gender really were an essential attribute. For, as Borden explains, “Aristotle had access to (and we have more evidence of) examples of individuals who, while remaining the same species, change their sex” which would indicate that he was aware of the possibility.⁷³ In addition, “Given the number of species that can and do shift between female and male (and vice versa), it seems right to accept that species-form do not require one ideal expression of their physical sex.”⁷⁴ This interpretation would allow for human form to include both male and female in the characteristic of gender as such.

The differences between gender manifestations are more than might be conventionally accounted for by accidental differences. However, although the “differences between female and male bodily appearance and physical development include more than might traditionally be called accidental, it is nonetheless not obvious... that they could not thereby fit within a

⁷⁰ Borden, 122.

⁷¹ Borden, 122.

⁷² Borden, 122.

⁷³ Borden, 123.

⁷⁴ Borden, 123.

legitimate range of appropriate expressions of the form.”⁷⁵ Just because the differences in the gender range are larger than conventional accidental changes “and include significant structural differences is not, in itself, sufficient for claiming that there are differences requiring us to call one structure a deviation from right formation.”⁷⁶ Aristotle was, after all, aware that in his time there were cases of “women of a masculine and men of a feminine appearance,” which indicate the possibility of a more fluid formal expression.⁷⁷ So although Aristotle looked at the evidence of his time and concluded that the gender as such which belonged to form was male and that female was a deformation, it does not follow that one who accepts the premises of Aristotelian hylomorphism (the idea of beings comprised of form and matter) must conclude the same way.

It is possible, upon further consideration, for a reconciliation of the ideas of gender as such as belonging to form and male and female both belonging to form. Admittedly though, “claiming that both female and male bodies are fully legitimate and appropriate—although differing—expressions of the human form will require that we understand the human form to have greater appropriate flexibility than Aristotle himself did, at least in relation to physical growth and development.”⁷⁸ Just because this idea requires additional flexibility, though, “does not make [it] thereby non-Aristotelian... insofar as it maintains the key principles of Aristotelian hylomorphism, it does not do damage to Aristotle’s overall metaphysical claim.”⁷⁹ Aristotle’s hylomorphism, as it is expressed in his *Metaphysics*, does not draw the same conclusions that *Generation of Animals* does as female as a deformed male. So because reconciling this idea of

⁷⁵ Borden, 124.

⁷⁶ Borden, 124.

⁷⁷ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 747a1.

⁷⁸ Borden, 125.

⁷⁹ Borden, 125.

form does not damage Aristotle's main claims of form and matter, coming to a conclusion other than what Aristotle did is not necessarily make it un-Aristotelian.

Aristotle was looking at the world around him to make these gendered distinctions and conclusions. Perhaps it is only now that we can look back with an understanding of how women are in a society that allows them to be educated that we can see the female form as other than a deformation. After all, "He claims—presumably based in part on his experiences of women and men—that men are more fully rational than women, that women tend to be more despondent than men, that women ought to obey while men ought to rule, etc."⁸⁰ Is it any wonder he thought the females were less rational and therefore a deformation when women were not granted equal access to education? Or, perhaps, he did not believe it after all, and was only making a concession to the popular culture of the time. Regardless of his motive, it is possible that these concessions or assertions are not metaphysically relevant, since his *Metaphysics* also allows for the opposite conclusion. As Gareth Matthews claims, "That, as it turns out, males are supposed to be successes, and females failures, is, I think, better explained by psychological and sociological factors, than by philosophical ones."⁸¹ The reconciliation of Aristotelian metaphysics and feminist metaphysics might require using the structures Aristotle built but taking into account current understanding of gender.

Feminist metaphysicians as a whole have placed quite a bit of importance on acknowledging the societal and personal accounts of gender. These attributes all fall into the category of the specific manifestations of gender that arise in matter. At this point it will be helpful to break up on one hand the aspects of gender as such that belong to form and on the

⁸⁰ Borden, 125.

⁸¹ Matthews, Gareth B. "Gender and Essence in Aristotle." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 64 (Summer 1986):23.

other hand the aspects of gender that arise matter in the composite and investigate what belongs to each. Matter is far more obvious, as the answer is deeply tied to what has just been discussed, the societal and personal accounts of gender. Charlotte Witt, one of the foremost feminist metaphysicians, “propose[d] to define the social position of being a woman and being a man in terms of the socially mediated reproductive (or engendering) functions that an individual is recognized (by others) to perform.”⁸² Gender here, in the category of matter, is deeply tied to the social position of men and women and the functions that social position requires them to perform.

This conception of gender is relational; it gains meaning only when set against society’s dictates regarding gender. In this way gender “is a relational property (an individual serves that function only in relation to other individuals).”⁸³ Gender in this light is a product of the current society’s prescriptions about how a man or woman ought to behave in light of their gender; it is normative, and “[w]omen and men are responsive to and evaluable under the social role associated with their respective social positions.”⁸⁴ Witt uses this definition of gender to define humans in light of their relational properties, as social individuals. These “[s]ocial individuals differ from both human organisms and persons because they are defined relationally as social position occupiers. Social individuals exist in relation to the social world and its network of social positions.”⁸⁵ Having a gender in this way is inherently tied to one’s position as a social individual in a social world.

Specific manifestations of gender, which we have identified as belonging to matter, lie in this realm of the social individual. Witt’s argument is that “being a man and being a woman are

⁸² Witt, 2.

⁸³ Witt, 18.

⁸⁴ Witt, 18.

⁸⁵ Witt, 55.

social positions, and that an individual is a man or a woman depending upon the engendering function the individual is recognized by others to perform.”⁸⁶ For her, gender altogether is dependent on the function of the social individual, (which may prove problematic in terms of form, which will be examined below) and tied to the society around them. What makes up gender are the “engendering functions [which] are associated with a rich, complex, and variable set of social norms.”⁸⁷ Witt also claims in this category that the “engendering functions are also embodied because there are material conditions associated with engendering and those conditions, in turn, are associated with bodies.”⁸⁸ But this becomes problematic, as, if gender as it arises in matter is both the social and bodily attributes a person possesses, it is not clear what is left to belong to the aspect of gender that contributes to form.

What Witt’s argument leaves open, then, is the question of gender in the context of form. For because we are identifying all that she has described above as the aspects of gender that arise in matter in the composite, what aspects of gender contribute to the human form is far less clear. In fact, it becomes rather unclear, and some might argue that the lack of a coherent answer here is the most poignant counterargument against the case for gender made thus far. If all of the above attributes, which are the biological, social, and relational manifestations of gender, arise in matter in the composite, what of gender belongs form alone? What is left to unify male and female expressions of gender into the larger category of gender as such? Is there anything left to unify it at all?

Some, such as Elizabeth Spelman, would argue that no, there is nothing that unifies men as men or women as women in answer to these questions. She claims that “the features that

⁸⁶ Witt, 64.

⁸⁷ Witt, 64.

⁸⁸ Witt, 65.

characterize women (and men) vary over time and across different cultures and, as a result, there are no features that are common to all women (or to all men). There is also variation within a single culture due to the intersection of gender with other social identities, like race, or class. So, even within one culture, there is no possibility of a shared feature or features common to all women or to all men that determine kind membership.”⁸⁹ Spelman thus would object to the idea that there are some features that women or men share that make them belong to the same essence manifested in the composite (that composite can only recognize human essence, not male or female essence).

However, perhaps there are yet some aspects of gender which have not yet been included in the context of matter that can comprise gender as it contributes to form. These attributes cannot be solely around procreation, although that can be a part of it, because that would exclude people who are infertile. Perhaps part of what makes us human is that we have a gender at all: some body parts belonging to a certain sense of gender, some attributes belonging to a certain sense of gender. Because we are social beings, we cannot escape the relational aspect of these attributes, but the aspect of gender that contributes to form is not only relational: it is the fact that we have bodily or relational gendered attributes at all. Therefore, this conception of gender is not tied to any one specific category of body parts or attributes.

Let us imagine, for a moment, that all the possible gender attributes and body parts were listed. This list would not appear as one box of male parts and attributes and one box of female parts and attributes that a human is then comprised of. Rather, imagine one large box of parts and attributes that individuals are born with and/or select with a measure of independence but in light of social circumstances. Possessing any combination of these parts or attributes does not in any

⁸⁹ Spelman, Elizabeth. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.

way lessen one's participation in having a gender as such, in gender as it contributes to form; it is just the specific way in which one's manifestations of gender appear. Gender as it contributes to form is therefore gender as such, and that is unifying across all the different manifestations of gender arising in matter. All humans, as humans, possess engendered body parts, regardless of the specific gender of those parts, and this basic fact is part of their form.

The original focus of this paper, to study gender as an essential or accidental attribute, was in light of current conceptions of gender as fluid or a spectrum. The idea was to discover if there was anything in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that could clarify the status of gender given current conceptions. The conception of gender we have reached is as essential with regard to form but accidental with regard to matter. So it stands to reason that the next step is to see if this conception of gender holds up given contemporary ideas. Conceptions of gender after the mid-20th century faced the wide-reaching poststructuralist and postmodernist movements focusing on deconstructing grand narratives. These movements helped spur the discussion of gender away from binaries of male and female and towards an idea of gender that more closely resembled a spectrum.

The idea of gender as a spectrum has pervaded most areas of gender study. Surya Monro surveys the effects of poststructuralism and postmodernism on gender theory, explaining how these movements have widened the scope of what we consider gender to be. She considers these theories and their particular application to transgender studies, describing how "poststructuralist accounts offer many useful insights into transgender, in particular concerning the discursive production of sex and gender. It provides a means of beginning to theorise the areas beyond the structures of 'male' and 'female' via the notion of the freeing of gender and sex signifiers from

the body.”⁹⁰ In this way, considering gender as a spectrum rather than a set of binaries opens up the concept to those who elect to change their gender throughout their life, some in minor ways through dress or behavior, and some in major ways such as sex reassignment surgeries. The gender spectrum allows the individual to consider many things as markers of gender and included in the category of gender aside from strictly male or female sex organs.

On the face of it, viewing gender as a spectrum does not appear to contradict anything in the Aristotelian model of gender that has thus far been discussed. Every expression of gender on the spectrum would fall into the category of matter, the expression of specific manifestations of gender. In addition, individuals could change the ways in which they express their gender, and, so long as they do not give up having a gender as such, they would not need to exit the species. This caveat retains the essentialist character of this view of gender: gender as such is the essential attribute, removal of which would necessitate a new species. Specific manifestations of gender, however, are only accidental, and can change without harming the integrity of the species. In this way, it appears that this model of gender does in fact align with current conceptions in gender studies. However, it is not necessarily convincing that just because it aligns with the broad idea of gender as a spectrum that it could actually be useful to modern gender theorists, so a deeper dive into the theories of some of these scholars will be useful.

Monro’s view of the poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches to the gender spectrum centers on their application. She explains how “at present, only poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches enable the inclusion and representation of the full range of gender diversity, including gender fluidity, multiplicity, and non-male and non-female identities.”⁹¹ These theories have revolutionized the way we consider gender because of their enabling

⁹⁰ Monro, 3.

⁹¹ Monro, 14.

capacity. They achieve this enabling “by deconstructing discrete male and female categorisation, showing how the idea that there are only male and female people, and that everything else must be temporary or abnormal, is socially constructed.”⁹² But Monro takes issue with some parts of these theories, advocating instead “pluralist gender theory [which] is based on a combination of postmodernist and structural analysis.”⁹³ This theory of gender goes a step further than either of the other two, considering the lived experience of individuals in forming conclusions.

One of the reasons why Monro embraces pluralist gender theory is that she takes issue with some of the applications of poststructuralism and postmodernism. Monro explains how “poststructuralist transgender theory lacks grounding in lived experience in several ways. It raises a paradox: ‘reality’ is constructed, but at the same time it is necessary for our existence. We cannot escape reference to the structures we seek to transcend, even though we can reconfigure our bodies, forms of sexual expression, language, and social institutions.”⁹⁴ In other words, there has to be something more to gender than just the various ways we experience it in relation to society. Monro cites the experiences of those in the transgender community, explaining how this theory does not enable them to consider what about gender is universal, what transcends the ways in which it can be lived out, and thus makes it harder for them to come to terms with the structure of gender apart from the ways it can be expressed or transcended.⁹⁵ Gender theory, therefore, is missing a vital aspect of the experience of gender.

Perhaps what is missing from this conception of gender is the idea of gender as an ingredient in form: the overarching, universal category of gender as such that every person has necessarily by their participation in the species human. We need to conceive of this categorical

⁹² Monro, 13.

⁹³ Monro, 16.

⁹⁴ Monro, 13.

⁹⁵ Monro, 14.

attribute to make sense of the lived experience of gender, particularly for individuals for whom it is so impactful as those who ultimately elect to change or alter their gender. It appears that the understanding of gender as it is manifested in matter and form can actually add to current conceptions of gender, instead of just failing to contradict them. At least, we see this with Monro's work, which has been considered revolutionary in its own right because of its incorporation of the first-hand experiences of the transgender community.

Another gender scholar, Helen Daly, approaches the issue from a more conventional academic setting. She advocates for the "many strands model of sex/gender."⁹⁶ This model sees gender as a spectrum with male on one side and female on the other, with many strands running between them both. Each strand represents a different aspect of gender performance, gender identity, or sex characteristics. Each strand is given a color of which there are infinitely many shades, and each person has a unique shade depending on their gender identity. For example, style of clothing might be a green thread, with light green for masculine clothes and dark green for feminine clothes. Each person will have a different shade green thread, representing their personal style of clothing.⁹⁷ Likewise we could consider a yellow thread representing waist-to-hip ratio, with the average male ratio the lightest red and the average female ratio the darkest thread. On and on for each characteristic we could assign each person a color of thread based on their characteristics, and braiding their threads together would result in their gender.

In this model, each person's gender is explained by their collection of threads. Each strand is an aspect of gender, in our model, part of gender arising in matter. But the fact of the strands together comprises the what of gender contributes to form, the what it is to be to have a gender, gender in and of itself. Regardless of which strands comprise one's specific gender, one

⁹⁶ Daly, 72.

⁹⁷ Daly, 85.

has the same engendering process that everyone else has. Daly comments, “Because the many strands model reflects the ambiguity of sex/gender, it can represent those different meanings of ‘woman’, making explicit what is often murky in our own minds. In that way, it contributes to greater self-understanding and it offers support for diverse gender identities by helping us to communicate them more effectively.”⁹⁸ Her model emphasizes the importance of considering gender as such in enabling individuals to understand and communicate their own identities. The essentialist model of gender therefore not only seems to also coalesce with this scholar’s gender theory, it adds to it as well. Because it is so easy to see the gender in matter and not in form, gender as such might get lost in such a theory if it were not for the emphasis placed on it by the essentialist model.

The essentialist model of gender decided on was based on a consideration of Aristotelian essentialism itself and it in regard to evolution and reproduction. These considerations led to the conclusion that while having a gender itself is an essential attribute which cannot change, particular manifestations of gender are accidental and fluid. Considering this thesis in light of feminist metaphysicians clarified the ways in which this model allows for the unique expression of nearly unlimited attributes of gender in matter while retaining the integrity of gender as such in form. Ultimately, then, the question became, did this theory contradict the work of modern gender scholars like it would appear that Aristotelian essentialism did? The answer was no, this essentialist model of gender stands up to current conceptions and even helps to clarify them. It not only melds with the conceptions it adds to them by rescuing the idea of the gender as belonging to form, of gender as such. This model allows for gender as it arises in matter in the composite to be relational and social but also recognizes that there is more to gender than just

⁹⁸ Daly, 86.

what is relational and social. It appears, then, that Aristotle's *Metaphysics* still has much to offer current gender scholars.