Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History

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Even if forgetfulness affects the life of the dead in the Lower World, yet even there, I would be able to remember Hypatia.

—Synesius, Letters (fifth century A.D.)

Women are not included in the standard nineteenth- and twentieth-century histories of European philosophy as significant, original contributors to the discipline’s past. Indeed, only a few women’s names even survive in the footnotes of these histories; by the twentieth century, most had disappeared entirely from our historical memory. But recent research, influenced by feminist theory and a renewed interest in the history of philosophy, has uncovered numerous women who contributed to philosophy over the centuries.

Ancient Women Philosophers 600 B.C.-500 A.D., the first volume of Mary Ellen Waithe’s History of Women Philosophers, has provided a detailed discussion of the following Greco-Roman figures: Themistoclea, Theano I and II, Arignote, Myia, Damo, Aesara of Lucania, Phintys of Sparta, Perictione I and II, Aspasia of Miletus, Julia Domna, Makrina, Hypatia of Alexandria, Arete of Cyrene, Asclepigenia of Athens, Ariothea of Philesia, Cleobulina of Rhodes, Hipparchia the Cynic, and Lasithena of Mantinea. In addition to the medieval and Renaissance philosophers discussed in the second volume of Waithe’s History (Hildegard of Bingen, Heloise, Herrad of Hohenbourg, Beatrice of Nazareth, Mechtilde of Magdeburg, Hadewych of Antwerp, Birgitta of Sweden, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera, Roswitha of Gandersheim, Christine de Pisan, Margaret More Roper, and Teresa of Avila), such humanist and Reformation figures as Isotta Nogarola, Laura Cereta, Cassandra Fidele, Olimpia Morata, and Caritas Pickheimer have been the focus of attention by scholars like Paul O. Kristeller and Margaret King. The present essay, however, focuses on early modern women’s published philosophical contributions, the recognition of this work in the seventeenth and
eighteenth centuries, and the subsequent disappearance of any mention of these contributions from the history of philosophy.

Perhaps it is wise to begin a discussion of women's inclusion in early modern philosophy with some reminders about women scholars' entrance into the academic institutions of Europe during this period. This material should prepare us for some of the upshots of this paper: women's scholarly contributions, especially in philosophy, have frequently been considered astounding feats, accomplished by "exceptional women," which, while of significant interest at the time of the circulation or publication of a text, have been taken to be of marginal value given "the long view" of history.

During the Middle Ages there had been a tradition of allowing a few women to attend or give lectures at the University of Bologna. And, in the early seventeenth century, Anna Maria van Schurman had attended (albeit behind a curtain) the lectures of the theologian Gisbertus Voetius at the University of Utrecht. But it was not until 1678 that the first woman received a university degree when the University of Padua conferred a doctorate of philosophy on Elena Cornaro Piscopia of Venice. It is difficult to overestimate the excitement that this produced; some twenty thousand spectators gathered to see the event. Immediately afterward, the university agreed to admit no more women.

On April 17, 1732, Laura Bassi defended forty-nine theses in natural philosophy in a public disputation with five professors of the University of Bologna. On the basis of this defense she was awarded a doctorate on May 12; on October 29 the senate decided to award her a university chair "on the condition, however, that she should not read in the public schools except on those occasions when her Superiors commanded her, because of [her] Sex." It had taken Herculean political efforts for Bassi to become the first woman to receive an official teaching position at a European university. Yet despite these efforts, and the academic privileges and channels of influence allowed Bassi, she held her lectureship at the university's Studium only in the capacity of a supernumerary. No other early modern woman would be granted such institutional power ever again in the sphere of scholarship. In 1750, when Maria de Agnesi of Milan, already a member of the Academy of the Institute for Sciences at Bologna, was awarded a position in mathematics at the University of Bologna, it was only an honorary chair.

While France could boast, at the same time, of such important natural philosophers as Émilie du Châtelet, women there were excluded from the universities and scholarly institutions, like the Académie Royale des Sciences or the Académie Française. It was, rather, the Academy of the Institute for Sciences at Bologna that admitted du Châtelet in 1746. Similarly, in the seventeenth century, Madeleine de Scudéry and Anne Dacier were nominated, but rejected, for election to the Académie Française, though both were accepted by the Academia de Ricovrati in Padua. With respect to university positions in France, it is noteworthy that the first woman to hold a chair at the Sorbonne was Marie Curie in the twentieth century.

In England, in 1667, Margaret Cavendish became the first woman to visit the Royal Society of London, in order to see some of Robert Boyle's experiments. Her visit caused enormous controversy. Not only was she not permitted to join the society, despite the fact that she had published numerous books on natural philosophy, but no other woman became a full member until 1945. During the whole of the eighteenth century, to my knowledge, no university degrees were awarded to women in either England or France. This occurred only in Italy, as we have seen, and also in Germany. At the University of Halle, in 1754, Dorothea Erxleben became the first woman to receive a medical degree in Germany. The first doctor of philosophy awarded to a woman in Germany went to the mineralogist Dorothea Schlözer in 1787. But throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such women were unable to establish precedents for the regular admission of women to universities.

Given the extremely limited access of early modern women to universities and other institutional spheres of scholarly activity, we might be led to think that these women could not have contributed to philosophy in any significant way. But this would be to forget the blossoming of philosophical activity outside of the schools since the Renaissance. Philosophy was being done in convents, religious retreats for laypersons, the courts of Europe, and the salons; philosophical networks, which stretched throughout Europe, communicated via letters, published pamphlets and treatises, and scholarly journals. What is surprising is the disappearance from our historical memory, until quite recently, of almost all trace of women's published contributions to early modern theoretical knowledge. Why do we no longer know any of the once praised, reprinted, translated, and commented upon books of philosophy by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women? How is it that when Dorothea Erxleben wrote a defense of women's rights to education in 1742, the preface noted that although Anna Maria van Schurman had published a book on this topic a century earlier, "it was not to be had"? Why, fifty years later, did Amalia Holst note in her book on this topic that Erxleben's text was "no longer available"?

Why were women's printed books treated as if written in disappearing ink—extant yet lost to sight? How many such books were there? Who were the early modern women philosophers? Why is it that, at best, we know no more of them than we do of Hypatia and Laura Bassi: their names and reputation, not their thought or works?

This paper will begin, to quote from French philosopher Michèle Le Doeuff's important 1977 article, "Women and Philosophy," "by recalling some women who have approached philosophy. Their very existence shows that the non-exclusion (a relative non-exclusion) of women is nothing new." In the first section I provide an overview of the published philosophical writings by female authors from England, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Mexico, and Switzerland. It will be shown that these women addressed a wide range of issues in metaphysics, epistemology, moral the-
ory, social and political philosophy, philosophical theology, natural philosophy, and philosophy of education. While many of these issues, hotly debated in the philosophical circles of their day, are now largely of historical interest only, some are the philosophical predecessors of topics of current interest. I also suggest that the relative nonexclusion of these women has sometimes been reflected in histories of philosophy, for a number of early modern historians were keenly interested in chronicling women’s role in philosophy.

In the second section I discuss “the problem of disappearing ink”: Why have these philosophers’ writings become lost to sight? In addition to the problems generated by the standard practice of anonymous authorship for women, I argue that many of the broader theoretical frameworks in which women’s philosophical views had a place, and some of the major motivations for their philosophical arguments, were relegated to the status of nonphilosophy by the nineteenth century. I try to show that the feminine gender has traditionally been aligned with philosophical positions, with styles of philosophizing, and, indeed, with underlying forms of episteme, that were not to “win out” in the history of philosophy. This factor, together with slippage between gendered styles of philosophy and the sex of those doing the philosophizing, accounts for a good deal of the disappearance of the women’s writing. But I also stress that perhaps the most significant reasons for the erasure of women’s philosophical publications from the historical record were the social and political events surrounding the French Revolution.

Finally, I suggest that philosophers, however important their contributions are to contemporary philosophical concerns, not only must produce followers and critics but also must find a place in an influential history of philosophy, if they are to remain in the discipline’s memory. To my knowledge, no one has yet written a general history of early modern philosophy in which it is argued that some women deserve preeminent places either because of the important role they played in past debates or because their work, in part, has moved thought along to the place where we now are. In the final section, I turn to the issue of the revision of the history of philosophy. After briefly outlining some historiographical methods, I suggest that given some of our current philosophical interests, and given the recent recovery of women’s philosophical contributions to the debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it would seem to be high time that women be given their rightful places in the histories of our discipline.

The Inclusion of Women in Early Modern Philosophy

Voltaire, in a dedicatory epistle to Madame du Châtelet, wrote: “I dare say that we live in an era when a poet ought to be a philosopher and when a woman can boldly [hardiment] be one.” The seventeenth century already found women, throughout Europe and the New World, replacing the humanist formulas for texts addressing the querelle des femmes, or woman question, with philosophical argumentation. Thus, in The Equality of Men and Women (1622), Marie de Gournay, the adopted daughter of Montaigne, replaced the exaggerated claims about women’s superiority to men, and persuasive force based on example, with the use of skepticism as a philosophical method.4 Later in the seventeenth century, Anna Maria van Schurman, the “Star of Utrecht,” and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz of Mexico discussed woman’s nature and argued for her fitness for learning. Schurman, in Whether a Maid may be a Scholar? A Logick Exercise . . . (1659),13 presented fifteen syllogistic arguments, which drew on Aristotelian views and responded to the woman question in the moralistic writings of the period. In an attempt to defend her own scholarly activity from the criticism of the Inquisition, Sor Juana, in “Response to Sor Filotea de la Cruz” (1691; published posthumously in 1700), offered theological and political defenses of women’s natural inclination and suitableness for learning.16 Her discussion drew on Scholastic, as well as Neoplatonic hermetic sources. By 1673, when Bathshea Makin published An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen, an unbroken line of influence, explicitly acknowledged in the texts, ran from Lucrezia Marinelli’s The Nobility and Excellence of Women (1600), through Gournay and Schurman, to Makin.17 Interest in woman’s nature, her place in society, and her fitness for education led women in the second half of the century to proffer large-scale views about the relation of education to religion and to society. Detailed accounts of how girls should be educated appeared. Noteworthy among such philosophies of education are the Rule for the Children of Port Royal (1665) by the Port Royal educator Sister Jacqueline Pascal,18 and the letters and conversations on education of Madame de Maintenon.19

In the second half of the Age of Reason, women also produced a number of works on morals and the passions. For example, we have the maxims of Marguerite de la Sablière, the marquise de Sable, and the comtesse de Maure, two series of maxims by Queen Christina of Sweden, and the latter’s “Remarks on the Moral Reflections of La Rochefoucauld.” But perhaps the most well known seventeenth-century woman writer of moral psychology is the précieuse, Madeleine de Scudéry. Lebínz, in discussing a debate on the nature of divine love, said “Of all of the matters of theology, there aren’t any of which women are more in the right to judge, since it concerns the nature of love. But . . . I would like [women] who resemble Mlle de Scudéry, who has clarified the temperaments and the passions in her novels and conversations on morals . . . “ In her two sets of conversations (1680; 1684), her two sets of moral conversations (1686; 1688), and her Talks Concerning Morals (1692), Scudéry discusses such issues as “Uncertainty,” “Of the Knowledge of Others and of Ourselves,” and “The Passions That Men Have Invented.” Her style of philosophizing is quite different from that of the maxim writers or of the earlier moral didactic writers. Closer to the
dialectical strategies of Montaigne, Scudéry presents vignettes to make certain points and adumbrates arguments for the possible positions, but she draws no explicit conclusion. The reader must make up her own mind about the issue. Her works were discussed in Le Clerc’s *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* (1699) and in the *Mercure* (1731), mentioned in Bayle’s *Dictionary*, and reprinted and translated until the end of the eighteenth century.

Another type of philosophical writing by women begins to appear after 1660, to wit, the treatment of natural philosophy. In Paris, sometime after 1680, Jeanne Dumée published *A Discussion of the Opinion of Copernicus Concerning the Mobility of the Earth...*, in which she explains in detail the three motions attributed to the earth and provides the arguments that support and those that militate against Copernicus’s system. The English playwright and fiction writer Aphra Behn translated Fontenelle’s popularization of Cartesian philosophy, *A Discovery of New Worlds*, in 1688. In her preface she discusses Copernicus’s system and argues that it “saves the phaenomena” better than Ptolemy’s system; the only serious challenges to Copernicus’s picture, she claims, are the arguments that attempt to show that it is inconsistent with Holy Scripture. Behn gives the details of these arguments and charges that, given the best contemporary biblical exegesis, Holy Scripture is as compatible with Copernicus’s view as with Ptolemy’s. She concludes by noting that Scripture was never meant to teach us astronomy, geometry, or chronology.

But by far the most prolific female writer of natural philosophy was Margaret Cavendish, duchess of Newcastle. The earliest influence on her ideas seems to have come from Hobbes, tutor to her husband’s family. She became a member of the “Newcastle Circle,” which included Hobbes, Charleton, and Digby. This group of philosophers had a strong interest in materialism and had been influenced by contact with Gassendi and Mersenne during the English civil war years. While exiled in Paris and Antwerp, Cavendish met Descartes and Roberval. From 1653 to 1671, she published numerous books that dealt in some way with natural philosophy. In her first work, *Poems and Fancies* (1653), Cavendish presented a fanciful atomism in rhymed verses. It appears that it was this book, along with her other early works, namely, *Philosophical Fancies* (1653), *The World’s Olio* (1655), the first edition of *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), and *Nature’s Pictures Drawn by Fancie’s Pencil to the Life* (1656), on which most of Cavendish’s critics based their responses. The responses themselves were frequently full of invective and wildly contradicted each other. For example, her friend the Epicurean Walter Charleton told her that her imaginative atomism proceeded from an “Enthusiasm” which scorned “the control of reason”; on the other hand, a number of critics argued that her work must have been plagiarized since no lady could understand so many “hard terms.” In consequence, Cavendish’s husband felt compelled to defend his wife’s authorship in an opening “Epistle” to her *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*. Either way, the upshot was that no one took the duchess seriously as an aspiring philosopher. Thus, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More wrote to the philosopher Anne Conway (who will be discussed shortly) of his amusement at hearing that in *The Philosophical Letters* (1664) Cavendish had attempted to confute Hobbes, Descartes, van Helmont, and More himself. Later More accurately predicted to Conway: “She [the duchess] is affrayed some man should quit his breeches and putt on a petticoat to answer her in that disguise... She expresses this jealousy in her book, but I believe she may be secure from any one giving her the trouble of a reply.” Cavendish makes clear, in the preface to her *Philosophical Letters*, that she had written her responses to some famous philosophers in the form of letters and “by so doing, I have done that, which I would have done unto me.” Her letters are written to a fictitious noblewoman. There are few moments in the history of women philosophers more poignant than in the letter on identity and the Trinity, where Cavendish writes to her imaginary noblewoman about another philosophical friend, Lady N. M., and concludes: “I wish with all my heart, Madam, you were so near as to be here at the same time, that we three might make a Triumvirate in discourse as well as we do in friendship.” Lady N. M. may well be Lady Newcastle, Margaret. Cavendish may have been aware that by 1664 she was reduced to writing philosophy for the trinity of her own personas.

This is particularly unfortunate since, as I hope to show in a future essay, Cavendish’s *Philosophical Letters* and *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668) constitute extremely interesting philosophical contributions. In these works she abandons her earlier commitment to atomistic materialism and embraces a possibly Stoic-inspired materialist organicism. On this view, matter intrinsically possesses some degree of vital force, sense, and intellect. The view is organicist in that causation is understood through the vital affinity one part of matter has for another, rather than via a mechanical model. Some of Cavendish’s major criticisms of Descartes and Hobbes turn on showing how the mechanical philosophers have failed to provide a satisfactory model of causation. According to Cavendish, the mechanists’ talk of the translation of motion, or of the imprinting of an image in perception, can only be interpreted in terms of a transfer model. Such a causal model, she argues, is far too crude to account for sensation and memory, and is inconsistent with a substance/accident ontology.

Another English philosopher, Viscountess Anne Conway, wrote *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, which was published posthumously in Latin in 1690 by the cabalist “scholar Gypsy,” Francis Mercurius van Helmont and was translated into English in 1692. In this metaphysical treatise, Conway argues against Cartesian dualism, Spinoza’s pantheistic monism, and Hobbes’s materialism in favor of a Neoplatonic triad of substances: God, Christ, and creatures. In her analysis of creaturely substance, Conway argues that what many philosophers take to be distinct essences (e.g., Descartes’s mind and body, or Aristotelian natural kinds) are just accidental properties of a single substance; they differ from
one another only in terms of degree, not essentially. As for creaturely substance, she holds that all of its species are gradations from active spirit to vital matter. Thus, in opposition to the view of certain Cambridge Platonists, the active principle is not a separate incorporeal substance pervading inert matter. Conway agrees with Descartes that “all natural motions proceed according to rules and laws mechanical.” But she charges that nature is “a living body, having life and sense, which body is far more sublime than a mere mechanism, or mechanical motion.”

On the Continent, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, whose letters to Descartes had exposed the weakness of the latter’s published views on mind-body interaction and free will, discussed Conway’s views with her Quaker correspondent, Robert Barclay. Leibniz and the Electress Sophie of Hanover were introduced to Conway’s Principles by van Helmont, sometime around 1696. The following year, Leibniz wrote to Thomas Burnet:

My views in philosophy approach somewhat closely those of the late Countess of Conway, and hold a middle position between Plato and Democritus, since I believe that everything happens mechanically as Democritus and Descartes maintain, against the opinion of Monsieur More and his like, and I believe that nevertheless everything also happens vitally and according to final causes; everything is replete with life and perceptions contrary to the opinion of the followers of Democritus.

Unfortunately, as Carolyn Merchant has argued, Heinrich Ritter, the nineteenth-century historian of philosophy, incorrectly attributed the Principles to van Helmont. In consequence, later scholars like Ludwig Stein, who argued that Leibniz’s concept of the monad owed much to the Principles, took it that van Helmont was the one who had influenced Leibniz. Because of this historical error, neither the late-nineteenth-century revival of interest in Leibniz nor the twentieth-century interest in essentialist metaphysics has, until quite recently, given Conway’s philosophy the attention it deserves.

Turn-of-the-century England produced Mary Astell, who in the Letters Concerning the Love of God between the Author of the Proposal to the Ladies and Mr. John Norris (1695) discussed Norris’s Malebranchean view that God alone is the cause of all things, including all of our pleasant sensations. Norris concluded from this that God should be the sole object of our love. Astell argued against Norris’s occasionalism and maintained that sensation is directly caused by the interaction of mind and body, and indirectly and mediatly caused by God. So far, the account is basically Cartesian. But Astell further suggests that something like More’s “plastic part of the soul” might be used to explain the agreement between external objects and sensations. This Neoplatonic plastic spirit was traditionally a third substance—according to More both immaterial yet extended—that mediated between inert matter and the rational soul. Thus, like the early More, Astell here proffers an amalgam of Cartesian and Neoplatonic metaphysics.

In A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II. Wherein a Method is offer’d for the Improvement of their Minds (1697), Astell realized that her 1694 proposal for founding a women’s college would not be realized. She offered women, in this second part, a manual for improving their powers of reasoning, which drew on Lockean and Cartesian views about knowledge, Cartesian “method,” and insights from the Cartesian-inspired Port Royal textbook, La Logique, ou l’art de penser [The Logic, or The Art of Thinking] (1662), penned by Nicole and Arnauld. By this stage of her philosophical development, Astell had emerged as more solidly Cartesian, as evidenced by her endorsement of clarity and distinctness as the mark of indubitable propositions, mechanism as the model for purely bodily change, dualism, and Cartesian views on sense perception and judgment.

Lady Damaris Cudworth Masham also argued against Norris’s occasionalism in A Discourse Concerning the Love of God (1696). There she criticized the Malebranchean picture of seeing all things in God not on the basis of purely metaphysical considerations but because she saw this as an unsatisfactory grounding for the Christian faith—which was part of Norris’s motivation for appropriating occasionalism. In 1693, while living with Masham and her family, Locke himself had written An Examination of P. Malebranche’s Opinion of Seeing all Things In God and Remarks upon Some of Mr. Norris’ Books, wherein he asserts P. Malebranche’s opinion of our seeing all things in God.

In 1705, Astell responded to both Locke and Masham with The Christian Religion as Profess’d by a Daughter of the Church (1705). She argued that the highest purpose of thought was to contemplate abstract ideas that would bring the mind in contact with the Good, which was immaterial and not sensory. Locke, in his Reasonableness of Christianity, had rejected abstract thought as necessary for understanding Christianity. Astell also discussed Locke’s treatment—in both his Essay and the Correspondence with Stillingfleet—of the possibility of “thinking matter,” arguing that there was a tension between his two accounts.

Several months after Astell’s The Christian Religion came out, Masham published her own account of Christian theology for women: Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life (1705). She argued for the importance of education for women and set into relief the difficulties facing a woman who educated herself about Christian theology. She also defended a number of Lockean views on knowledge, education, and the relative merits of reason and revelation. Concerning the popular topic of the basis for moral virtue, Masham argued that since our passions frequently blind us to the light of nature, the latter is an insufficient foundation for morality. What is needed is reason assisted by revelation.

Masham also conducted an intellectual correspondence with Locke, wrote to Leibniz on a number of metaphysical issues, and sent both Leibniz and Jean Le Clerc a defense of Cudworth’s views against Bayle’s criticisms.
She wrote an essay on Locke for the *Great Historical Dictionary*, and we have her biography of Locke in manuscript. Finally, her work received critical notice in such scholarly journals as the *Bibliothèque Choix*.

Yet despite this scholarly career, Masham stood in need of defense against Thomas Burnett's charge that her arguments addressed to Leibniz seemed to have come from a hand other than her own. It was the philosopher Catherine Trotter Cockburn who came to her defense. Trotter Cockburn published a number of philosophical works, including *A Defence of Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understanding* (1702), which was praised by Toland, Tylrell, Leibniz, and Norris, as well as by Locke himself. Her *Remarks upon some Writers in the Controversy concerning the Foundation of Moral Virtue and Moral Obligation...* (1743) argued in support of a theoretic, though nonvoluntarist, theory of the grounds of moral goodness and obligation. Her final philosophical work was a defense of Clarke's moral views entitled *Remarks upon the Principles and Reasonings of Dr. Rutherford's Essay...* (1747).

Locke also influenced Judith Drake, who, in *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696), used a number of his epistemological principles to argue that women's intellectual inferiority resulted from their lack of education and intellectual experience rather than from a lack of intellectual powers. The views of Locke, as well as those of Descartes and Malebranche, are also drawn upon by Lady Mary Chudleigh in her discussions of knowledge, education, and the passions in *Essays upon Several Subjects in Prose and Verse* (1710). Chudleigh corresponded with John Norris, Mary Astell, and Leibniz's philosophical interlocutor, Electress Sophie of Hanover.

In France, in the final years of the seventeenth century, Gabrielle Suchon published an ambitious philosophical text, *Treatise of Morals and of Politics*, containing three book-length parts devoted, respectively, to a treatment of "liberty," "learning," and "authority." In this work Suchon argues that although women are in fact deprived of access to all three, they are, by nature, qualified to have access to them. Her arguments display an understanding of the views of the ancient Stoics, Cynics, and Skeptics, and of Scholastics, like St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross. She also responds to arguments found in the highly influential feminist treatise *Of the Equality of the Two Sexes* (1673) by the Cartesian François Poullain de la Barre. Excerpts of the *Treatise* appeared in the influential *Journal des Savants* (1694); excerpts from a second work by Suchon, *Treatise of the Willing Single Person*, appeared in the equally influential *Nouvelles de la Republic des Lettres* (1700). Unfortunately, since the *Treatise of Morals and of Politics* was published under the pseudonym "G. S. Aristophile," Suchon fell into oblivion by the late eighteenth century.

My overview of women's philosophical publications in the seventeenth century would be incomplete if I did not say something about those women who constituted the bulk of women writers in the second half of the century, namely, the women prophets and preachers. In England alone, during the tumultuous civil war years, there are publications by, or accounts of, over three hundred women prophets from the radical religious sects, of which some two hundred were Quakers. While the pure description of visions by such popular mystics as Jane Lead are philosophically barren, religious spokeswomen like the Quaker Margaret Fell Fox, in her *Women's Speaking Justified* (1666), provided a series of arguments for women's right to take part in public discussions of religious matters. On the Continent, the quietism of Jeanne-Marie Guyon's philosophical theology and the Pietism of Anna Maria van Schurman's theological writings, after her conversion to Labadism, won both the label of "mystic" by their contemporaries. I want to emphasize here that, in the seventeenth century, mystical theology was considered a part of philosophy. But the supporters and followers of these women, and indeed the women themselves, justified both the truth of their views and their right to speak on the following claim: the women were mere instruments through which God *directly* spoke. The upshot was that the women's writings did not issue from their intellects. In sum, in the seventeenth century, mystical writings were considered to be "real" philosophy, but they were not "really" written by women. (Ironically, as we shall see in a moment, by the time freethinking historians acknowledged these women as the true authors of the mystical works, such material would no longer be deemed "philosophical").

Given the number of female contributors to philosophy in the seventeenth century and the scope of their works, the eighteenth century has often been seen as something of a disappointment. For example, the nineteenth-century historian of philosophy Victor Cousin said that the women writers of the French Enlightenment knew a little math and physics, and had some wit, but had "no genius, no soul, and no conviction." In mid-eighteenth-century England, the rather conservative Bluestockings who included Hester Chapone, Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More, and Elizabeth Carter, were the women who dominated the philosophical scene, producing a number of moral and religious works, as well as treatises on the need for women to be educated. While it must be admitted that the philosophical content of the writings of the Bluestockings was a bit thin, this was more than made up for by the surge of philosophical writing by women in England during the second half of the eighteenth century.

In 1767, Catharine Macaulay's pamphlet entitled *Loose Remarks on... Hobbes' Philosophical Rudiments of Government and Society* was published. Here Macaulay challenged a purely contractarian picture of the emergence of civil society, a purely rationalist grounding of parental rights, and arguments in support of absolute monarchy. This text was followed by several political pamphlets, an eight-volume history of England (which won the admiration of such figures as Madame Roland), and her philosophical magnum opus, *Letters on Education, with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (1790). In the tradition of Locke, this work treats education as the major test case for one's views about epistemology, meta-
physics, and morals. After a detailed exposition of her theory of education, Macaulay turns, in part 2, to a historical and theoretical account of the effects of education on manners, morals, and culture in various civilizations. Part 3 contains her sustained discussion of the metaphysical and moral views that underlie her theory of education: views on the origin of evil, free will and necessity, and the role of revelation in the grounding of moral duty. In the course of her discussion, Macaulay critically evaluates Bolingbroke’s moral theory and that of the ancient Stoics.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s early *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) was strongly influenced by Macaulay’s work. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft argues against Rousseau’s views about women’s nature, their role in society, and how they should be educated; she criticizes Madame Genlis’s *Adele and Theodore, or Letters on Education* (1782) and finds only portions of Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* . . . (1773) helpful. But she acknowledges that her opinions on education so coincide with those of Catharine Macaulay that she will simply refer the reader to her work rather than quote her at length. A review of Macaulay’s *Letters on Education* . . . by Wollstonecraft appeared in the journal *Analytical Review*.

Mary Hays echoed the feminist social and political concerns of both Macaulay and Wollstonecraft in her *Letters and Essays Moral and Miscellaneous* (1793) and the *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798). Her discussion of the works of Mary Astell, in her six-volume *Female Biography* . . . (1803), demonstrated that by the end of the eighteenth century English women were beginning to trace a history of feminist social and political philosophy that reached back about one hundred years.

With the growing professionalism of philosophy, and the placement of it over against the belles lettres and religion, we also find for the first time in England “pure” philosophical writing by women. That is, we find philosophy stripped of its moorings within discussions of the woman question and theology, expressed in technical language, and written in a journalistic style. In short, we find a corpus like that of Lady Mary Shepherd, which includes *An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect, controverting the Doctrine of Mr. Hume* . . . (1824); a discussion of Berkeley, among other topics, in *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe* . . . (1827); a review of John Fearn’s book on epistemology; and an article summarizing her metaphysics for *Fraser’s Magazine*. Interestingly enough, these significant contributions to professional philosophy have disappeared from historical accounts of early modern philosophy even more completely than some of the mystical, feminist, or largely literary endeavors of some of Shepherd’s predecessors. I shall briefly explore why this is so in what follows.

Eighteenth-century France provides us with an equally impressive group of women philosophers. Anne Lefèvre Dacier, a classicist by training, was regarded in the eighteenth century as one of the most learned women in Europe. In 1691 she and her husband translated the writings of Marcus Aurelius, with Madame Dacier supplying a commentary called “Remarks on the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius.” In this commentary, she criticizes, albeit sympathetically, the writings of the ancient Stoics from the point of view of her own Christian Stoicism. Dacier actively participated in the salon of Madame de Lambert and thus was exposed to the great intellectual controversies of her day. In 1714, in response to an attack on Homer, Dacier entered the debate between the ancients and moderns; in her book *The Causes of the Corruption of Taste*, she argued in favor of the values of the ancients. So closely was the name “Dacier” associated with ancient thought, and with Stoicism in particular, that the earliest history of women philosophers produced in the modern era was dedicated to her—namely, the history of Gilles Ménage.

Dacier’s friend the renowned salonist Anne Thérése, marquise de Lambert, published a number of works on education and morals, which reflect the style of addressing such philosophical issues that prevailed in her salon—a salon frequented by such figures as Madame Dacier, Fontenelle, Mairan, Montesquieu, Marivaux, and La Motte. Hers is the art of persuasion and suggestion, enlivened by wit, which eschews all pedantry and dogmatism. Like her predecessors Montaigne and Gournay, she rejected idle metaphysical speculation in favor of “the fields of study useful to our perfection and our happiness.” And yet in the debate between the ancients and moderns on the question of taste, Lambert was clearly on the side of the moderns. She attempted to show that taste is much more a matter of sentiment than of reason. And her style was decidedly modern: refined, but concise, and not averse to novelty. Indeed, Sainte-Beuve saw her as an intermediate figure between the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment: “She is midway between them and is already turning her eyes in the direction of the more modern.”

*Letters on True Education* (1728/1729), much praised by Fénélon, shows the influence of Locke on Lambert’s views on education. It also exemplifies her reliance on secular morality, which she saw as a substitute for the no longer effective traditional piety. *New Reflections on Women* (1727), arguably her most important work, also appeared under the title *Metaphysics of Love*. In this influential protofeminist text, which was read with interest by Montesquieu, Lambert discusses the ways social customs and institutions, including the educational and legal systems, and heterosexual love, are designed to maintain male hegemony. She rejects what she takes to be the male-centered construction of heterosexual love in her time and offers an alternative conception, which she deems more favorable to women. Finally, Lambert also wrote moral treatises, including *Treatise on Friendship* (1732) and *Treatise on Old Age* (1732). These works exemplify early-eighteenth-century France’s interest in blending a Cartesian theoretical paradigm with a provisional morality based on readings of the Stoics, Plato, Cicero, and
other ancient authors. Some of Lambert’s works continued to be published a century after their original publication and went into as many as fifteen editions.53

In eighteenth-century France, the old querelle des femmes, which had questioned woman’s moral and intellectual faculties, and which debated whether she should be educated, was replaced by a new set of issues on the “woman question.” Now, not woman’s soul but the relative inputs of nature and nurture were examined in relation to woman’s character. It was assumed that women should receive some education. But woman’s role in society needed to be debated since this would determine the type of education that she should receive.

In 1772, Antoine Thomas published his Essay on the Character, Morals and Mind of Woman in Different Centuries. Diderot responded in his On Women, and Louise d’Épinay registered her reactions to Thomas in her letter to the Abbé Galiani in the same year. D’Épinay was a member of philosophical networks that included such figures as Hume, D’Holbach, Diderot, and Rousseau. Her most important philosophical contribution was her treatment of woman’s nature and education, The Conversations of Émilie (1774), which, like the work of Madame Panckoucke, was a response to Rousseau.54 Numerous treatises on education were written by women in Enlightenment France.55 Of special note is Stéphanie Félicité de Genlis’s Adèle et Théodore (1782), which provided a Rousseau-inspired philosophy of education for girls. Genlis, however, models the education of a girl more on Rousseau’s program for Émilie than for Sophie.56 In addition to an essay on education, Louise-Marie Dupin left an extensive manuscript, Observations on the Equality of the Sexes and of Their Difference, which she dictated to her secretary, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.57

The period of the French Revolution spawned numerous works, now not only on woman’s character and social duties but on her rights as a citizen as well. This genre includes Olympe de Gouges’s Declaration of the Rights of Woman (1791) and Fanny Raoul’s Opinion of One Woman on Women (1801).58

While Madame Roland, the Girondist friend of Wollstonecraft and admirer of Macaulay, did not publish works on women, her early philosophical essays “On the Soul,” “On Liberty,” “On Luxury,” and “Morality and Religion” were published in the nineteenth century.59

In the area of natural philosophy, there is no question but that Émilie du Châtelet deserves recognition as an important figure of the eighteenth century. Du Châtelet’s philosophical erudition, as well as her training in mathematics—received in part from Maupertuis—enabled her to make interesting contributions to the contemporary debates: force and its metaphysical status, and the precise formulations of the laws of motion and gravity. In Institutions of Physics (1740), she sides with the Newtonians on some of the details of the laws of nature but attempts to provide a metaphysical foundation for Newtonianism. Thus, her position can be seen as an attempt to reconcile what she takes to be most useful in Newtonian mechanics and Leibnizian philosophy. The 1742 edition of the Institutions also included a text on the vis viva, or active force controversy, which she wrote in response to the philosopher Jean Jacques Dortous de Mairan. This was followed, in 1744, by her essay On the Nature and Propagation of Fire, and at the end of her life she produced the translation of Newton’s Principia (with commentary) that remains the standard French edition of his work. Besides her writings in natural philosophy, du Châtelet also published an expansive Reflections on Happiness (1796), and her essays on such topics as the existence of God, the formation of color, and grammatical structure were published posthumously.60

The anatomist and author of an empirical study of putrefaction, Marie Thiroux d’Arconville, left us no texts on natural philosophy, but she did publish texts on moral psychology such as On Friendship (1761), Of the Passions (1764), and Moral Thoughts and Reflections (1775).61

And Sophie de Grouchy, the marquisse de Condorcet, having first produced translations of Adam Smith’s Theory of the Moral Sentiments and Dissertation on the Origin of Languages, went on to write her own blend of rationalist and moral sentiment ethics in her Letters on Sympathy (1798).62

By the end of the eighteenth century, French women were producing broad critiques of culture and the arts, as is evidenced in the mathematician Sophie Germain’s General Considerations on the Origin of Sciences and Letters . . . (1833).63 In this text, much praised by Auguste Comte, Germain argues that there is no essential difference between the arts and sciences. But perhaps the most influential of the French cultural critics was Anne Louise Germaine Necker, baronne de Staël-Holstein, who published a number of works about the interrelations among politics, morals, and the arts in the new republican era, including On the Influence of the Passions on the Happiness of Individuals and Nations (1796) and On Literature Considered in Relation to Social Institutions (1800). Her first published work was Letters on the Character and Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1788).64

Eighteenth-century Germany spawned a number of critical treatments of Kant’s views on women, including one by an unidentified “Henriette” and a second by Amalia Holst—both published in 1802.65

The Swiss Isabelle de Charrière also criticized Kant’s moral views in some of her novels and published a Discourse in Honor of Jean-Jacques Rousseau . . . (1797).66 Marie Huber, also of Switzerland, published three Enlightenment texts in which she added her voice to the contemporary debates concerning the principles of natural religion, the controversies over disembodied souls, whether eternal damnation is compatible with God’s goodness, and the relation of science to faith. These texts are The World Unmasked (1731), System of . . . the Soul Separated from Their Bodies (1733), and Letters on the Religion Essential to Man (1738).67

Finally, eighteenth-century Italy was the home of a number of women natural philosophers, including Laura Bassi of Milan, who was mentioned
Exclusion: The Representation of Women Philosophers in Modern Histories of Philosophy

Why have I presented this somewhat interesting but nonetheless exhausting bibliographic and doxographic overview of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women philosophers? Quite simply, to overwhelm you with the presence of women in early modern philosophy. It is only in this way that the problem of women’s virtually complete absence in contemporary histories of philosophy becomes pressing, mind-boggling, possibly scandalous. So far, my presentation has attempted to indicate the quantity and scope of women’s published philosophical writing. It has also been suggested that an acknowledgment of their contributions is evidenced by the representation of their work in the scholarly journals of the period and by the numerous editions and translations of their texts that continued to appear into the nineteenth century. But what about the status of these women in the histories of philosophy? Have they ever been well represented within the pre-twentieth-century histories?

A quick look at some of the standard histories indicates a lively interest in the topic of women philosophers in France in the late seventeenth century. In 1690 Gilles Ménage wrote The History of Women Philosophers, which he dedicated to Madame Dacier. It was a doxography of some seventy women philosophers of the classical period. And the most widely read history of philosophy in the seventeenth century, Thomas Stanley’s, contains a brief discussion of some twenty-four women philosophers of the ancient world. With respect to the “moderns,” in 1663, Jean de La Forge produced The Circle of Women Scholars, and five years later Marguerite Buffet published her New Observations on the French Language ... with the Elogies of Illustrious Women Scholars Ancient as Well as Modern. And this is just the tip of the iceberg; numerous compendia of femmes savantes appeared at this time. But this long list of women philosophers gets narrowed to the mention of a handful by the nineteenth century. Most of the standard eighteenth- and nineteenth-century histories mention Queen Christina of Sweden as the patroness of Descartes. She is not, however, described as a philosopher, and no reference is made to her writings. Tennemann’s eighteenth-century history mentions the English mystic Jane Lead; Hegel tells us that Leibniz dedicated his Théodicy to Sophie Charlotte; and Renouvier, in the nineteenth century, quotes at length from the correspondence of Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. Victor Cousin, in his nineteenth-century Course of the History of Modern Philosophy, discusses four women: the mystic Madam Guyon, Damaris Masham, Jacqueline Pascal, and finally the one woman who appears in a number of the standard histories of philosophy and who is now known to almost no one: Antoinette Bourignon. The Belgian Bourignon was a seventeenth-century itinerant writer of theology whose career Leibniz and Trotter Cockburn followed with interest. She produced a large corpus, parts of which she disseminated to her followers by means of a printing press that she carried with her. A Cartesian, Pierre Poiret, renounced his former philosophical commitments, became her disciple, and published her collected works in nineteen volumes after her death. Bourignon discusses such issues as free will and predestination, and the nature of divine cooperation with respect to secondary causes, with the result that Trotter Cockburn’s friend Thomas Burnet attributed to her “solid judgment (in the greatest matters of theology oftentimes).” But Bourignon’s unorthodox quietism, as well as much of her rhetoric, got her labeled, even in her own time, as a mystic first and foremost.

So it was a handful of women—largely mystics—who figure in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century histories of philosophy. Let me stress that this absence of women in the histories is not due to ignorance about the existence of the women. In the nineteenth century, Lescure published The Women Philosophers (1881), in which chapters were devoted to such eighteenth-century figures as Mmes des Châtelet, de Lambert, d’Épinay, and de Stael. Foucher de Careil wrote books on Descartes’s relationships with Princess Elisabeth and Queen Christina, and on Leibniz’s relationships with Electress Sophie and Sophie Charlotte. Cousin even wrote books on Scudéry and Sable, yet he failed to mention them in his own history of philosophy. Why? What were the factors that led to the ink of these women’s published texts disappearing in the nineteenth century? Why was any mention of these women’s important contributions omitted from the general histories of the discipline?

To begin with, the socially encouraged practice of anonymous authorship for women clearly did not help to put them on the map of philosophy. Instead, it frequently led to misattributions (Conway), charges of plagiarism (Cavendish), charges that the woman philosopher had been “helped” by a prominent male philosopher (du Châtelet), or, most commonly, neglect pure and simple. But this cannot account for our almost complete ignorance of the large number of published texts that bore the women philosophers’ names and were evaluated in contemporary journals.
Other factors that must be considered are those that might be termed “internal to philosophy as a scholarly enterprise,” like the effects of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ “purification” of philosophy. As I indicated earlier, either the bulk of early modern women’s philosophical writing directly addressed such topics as faith and revelation, and “the woman question,” or these topics were addressed within a larger philosophical context. But by the nineteenth century, philosophy had “confined theology to its own domain,” as Cousin put it. Indeed, the story of the purification of philosophy from the taint of religion is an interesting and complex one, which goes far beyond the limits of this essay. Suffice it to note that Tennemann’s *Manual of the History of Philosophy* (1832) contains a classification called “supernaturalists and mystics.” Included under this head are not only true mystics like Jane Lead, who simply wrote of her visions and attempted no philosophical speculation or analysis, but scholars who were once taken to be major philosophical thinkers, like More and Cudworth. By allying philosophy motivated by religious concerns with an unreflective mysticism, eighteenth-century historians excised whole philosophical schools, and the work of many women, from philosophy proper. In addition, German historians, taking Kantianism as the culmination of early modern philosophy and as providing the project for future philosophical inquiry, viewed treatments of “the woman question” as precritical work, of purely anthropological interest. In sum, by the nineteenth century, much of the published material by women, once deemed philosophical, no longer seemed so.

But what about those texts that were solidly philosophical from the post-eighteenth-century vantage point? Here we have to admit that a number of the women’s works have dropped out of sight simply because their views or underlying *episteme* were ones that simply did not “win out.” Thus, the writings of Schurman and Suchon, because of the Scholastic exposition, or of Scudéry and Conway, with their underlying Neoplatonic *episteme*, may seem too removed from our present philosophical concerns to gain a position in our histories. Notice that such a decision assumes that our histories of philosophy take present philosophical concerns as their main point of departure in reconstructing philosophy’s past. I will return to methodology in the history of philosophy in a moment, but first I want to point out an odd feature of “philosophical views that did not win out,” namely, that they have frequently been characterized as “feminine.” For example, as Benjamin Farrington has shown, Francis Bacon’s description of ancient—particularly Aristotelian—philosophy as “feminine” is meant to convey that it is weak and passive as opposed to the active, potent experimental philosophy that Bacon introduces. I have tried to show elsewhere that the Neoplatonism of the seventeenth-century French salonists and of the Cambridge Platonists, as well as of the Hermeticists, came to be regarded, at the end of the seventeenth century, as “feminine.” Here again, the point was not that it was the philosophy of women but rather that it was a degenerate philosophy of both men and women, which was on its way out. But given that one meaning of “feminine” is “that which befits a woman,” will there not be some slippage between “feminine” (i.e., outdated) philosophy, which perhaps “deserves” to be left out of the canon, and philosophy written by women? Might there not be an unarticulated presumption that women’s philosophical work is “feminine” philosophy par excellence, and thus worthy of forgetting? I think my speculation may be supported by an examination of yet another factor, namely, philosophical form or style.

Londa Schiebinger, in her illuminating study *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science*, has recently shown that “poetic” style in the eighteenth century was identified with the feminine, at the same time that it was being ushered out of the domains of philosophy and science. So, for example, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the natural historian Buffon was hailed as combining the rigors of mathematics with rhetorical and poetic style. But by the end of the century, Madame d’Épinay expressed the general consensus that Buffon’s work was more “poetic” than “true.” By the end of the century, the salonists would be seen as literary figures and, by that very fact, not philosophers. It would seem, then, that feminine style could be had by men or women, and that it once again signaled an exclusion from the sphere of the philosophical. But Rousseau’s attack on the scholarly style issuing from the French salons, in his “Letter to M. d’Alembert on the Theater” (1758), raises my earlier concerns. For it is not feminine style per se that he attacking but the influence of women on style. He charges that the decadence of arts and letters in France is due to men’s practice of “lowering their ideas to the range of women,” since “everywhere that women dominate, their taste must also dominate; this is what determines the taste of our age.” At the end of the century, Louis Sébastien Mercier will make the point explicitly with respect to philosophy: “What claim to fame has the woman who suddenly decides to make her entrance into the sanctuary of the muses and philosophy? She has ogled, bantered, simpered, made silk knots and little nothings.” It would seem that the end of the eighteenth century in France not only marked the end of the feminine poetic style in philosophy but also signaled a material change in women’s acceptance into philosophy’s domain. In her *New Reflections on Women*, Madame de Lambert lamented: “There were, in a earlier time, houses where [women] were allowed to talk and think, where the muses joined the society of the graces. The Hôtel de Rambouillet, greatly honored in the past century, has become the ridicule of ours.” In short, Lambert no longer lived in that era in which women could boldly be philosophers.

In Germany, which was to become arguably the hub of philosophy by the nineteenth century, the historian of philosophy Karl Joël described the French Enlightenment as a time when “woman was philosophical and philosophy was womanly.” He viewed this period as an interregnum between the “manly” philosophy of the English Enlightenment and the “masculine
epoch" of the German philosophy introduced by Kant. Notice that Joël juxtaposes and possibly elides feminine philosophy and women's presence in philosophy. When Kant himself describes the masculine character of the profundity of philosophy, he refers not to gendered systems or styles but to sexual difference: "A woman who has a head full of Greek, like Madame Dacier, or one who engages in debate about the intricacies of mechanics, like the Marquise du Châtelet, might just as well have a beard; for that expresses in a more recognizable form the profundity for which she strives." 

Let me sum up the hypothesis I have presented so far about the absence of women in the history of philosophy. In the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, there were a number of developments, internal to philosophy, regarding what constituted the main philosophical problems, the proper method of inquiry, and the appropriate style of exposition. In consequence of these developments, numerous men, as well as women, came to disappear from our historical memory. But the alignment of the feminine gender with the issues, methods, and styles that "lost out," together with a good deal of slippage between gender and sex, and the scholarly practice of anonymous authorship for women, led to the almost complete disappearance of women from the history of early modern philosophy.

But there would also seem to be another factor that plays some role in accounting for the absence of any mention of early modern women philosophers' published texts in the general histories of philosophy. I shall call it the "oxymoron problem": early modern European thought has generally presupposed that a woman philosopher is something barely possible and always unnatural. As Bathshea Makin, in her An Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlemen, observed in the seventeenth century: "The Barbarous custom to bred Women low, is grown general amongst us, and hath prevailed so far, that it is verily believed... that women are not endued with such Reason, as Men; nor capable of improvement by Education as they are. It is lookt upon as a monstrous thing; to pretend the contrary. A Learned Woman is thought to be a Comet, that bodes Mischief, when ever it appears." 

A full century later, Samuel Johnson, who in fact did much to encourage the writing of the Bluestocking philosophers, commented that "a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs... you are surprised to find it done at all." By the nineteenth century, Proudhon would pitifully state: "The woman author does not exist; she is a contradiction... [A] woman's book is... philosophy on nothing." Because philosophy written by a woman has been so difficult for early modern culture to conceive of as possible—and thus because the reality of it has always come as something of a shock—history has deemed it sufficient to note that it has been done by some "Tenth Muse," some time ago. Thus, Hypatia and a few other Titans get mentioned. These exceptional authors need not be read; it is enough that philosophy was ever done by a woman at all. In this way, the inclusion in the standard histories of philosophy of one or two women of mythic proportions acts as a strategem of exclusion.

But the account I have given so far still does not explain the extent of the disappearance of women's published contributions from the histories of philosophy. My hypothesis, about the alignment of the feminine gender (and women) with ultimately unsuccessful philosophical topics and methods, applies equally well to the erasure of some women from seventeenth-century histories as it does to the more extensive disappearance of women philosophers in subsequent centuries. And while my focus on the rise of Kantian critical thought and the "purification" of philosophy does identify the nineteenth century as the pivotal era of disappearance, it is unable to explain why virtually all women's philosophical contributions are lost to sight at this point. In short, I have not yet explained what happened in the nineteenth century. Why did this century not produce texts like Stanley's seventeenth-century history, which included numerous female contributors to the discipline?

To satisfactorily answer these questions I believe we must look far beyond developments internal to philosophy proper. In addition, such a factor as the "oxymoron problem" itself requires an explanation, pointing beyond the dialectics internal to Enlightenment arts and letters more generally. The dramatic disappearance of women from the histories of philosophy in the nineteenth century can be fully understood only against the political backdrop of the aftermath of the French Revolution.
participation in civic, economic, and political power. Thus, even such figures as Constance de Salm and Madame de Staël, who boldly entered this public sphere via their writings and salons, and who advocated the education of women, would retain assumptions about sexual difference entailing that any claim to such power for women be rejected. Madame de Staël would write: “It is right to exclude women from political and civic affairs. Nothing is more opposed to their natural vocation than those things that would set up a rivalry with men; and for a woman, fame itself can only be a source of grief bursting forth in the form of happiness.” And Stendahl, the Enlightenment defender of women’s education, added that only the economic necessity of having to support a family could provide a justification for a woman to be an author. As Fraisse argues, by 1800, the woman author came to epitomize a new phenomenon: all women’s increasing access to “individual autonomy and economic independence.” The woman author thus became an “emblem of social transformation.” She symbolized the possibility of dismantling the patriarchal order.

It is not surprising, then, that the nineteenth century is filled with invective against the female author. Fraisse’s analysis helps us to make sense of the seemingly bizarre text of Maréchal, The Proposed Law Prohibiting Women from Learning to Read (1801). Why would one want to prevent women from learning to read? Because “reason does not desire, any more than French grammar, that a woman be an author” and “reading is extremely contagious; as soon as a woman opens a book, she believes she can write one.” We are also in a better position to understand what is motivating the earlier quotation from Proudhon about the woman author as a contradiction. I would add that while women authors in general were scoffed at, female theoretical authors—especially philosophers—received a particularly nasty reception in the nineteenth century. The following remark by Proudhon is indicative of the level of invective I have in mind: “It may be affirmed without fear of calumny, that the woman who dabbles with philosophy and writing destroys her progeny by the labor of her brain and her kisses which savor of man; the safest and most honorable way for her is to renounce home life and maternity; destiny has branded her on the forehead; made only for love, the title of concubine if not of courtesan suffices her.” The woman philosopher, by the nineteenth century, is to be compared to the courtesan, for the latter is one of the few classical roles open to women in the sphere of the polis.

In the nineteenth century, philosophy was still considered the pinnacle of theoretical knowledge; it was seen to have the power to demarcate and distinguish all the other branches of knowledge, to decide the value of alternative avenues of inquiry and methodology. To be admitted into the sphere of philosophy, publicly via published texts, was to partake of a singular form of public power: to be a philosopher was to be a shaper of culture. But what if the sphere of philosophy became democratized? What if, for example, “philosopher queens” ruled in the polis? To imagine such a dismantling of male hegemony at the birth of modern democracy was more than even Condorcet, its staunchest supporter, could manage. Even he claimed that while women had displayed “genius” in a number of fields, so far none had done so in philosophy. He says this, while also citing Catherine Macaulay, Marie de Gournay, Madame du Châtelet, and Madame de Lambert as examples of women lacking “neither force of character nor strength of mind.”

My examination of the reasons for the absence of women in modern histories of philosophy has moved us from a consideration of reasons internal to philosophy’s own development to reasons ultimately rooted in the emerging democratic political order. In part, my aim has been to show that while explanations are readily available for the disappearance of women from our histories, only rarely are there justifications for the exclusion of specific women. And, as we might have expected, no justification exists for the wholesale exclusion of women philosophers from the history of our discipline. Perhaps all of this should make us suspicious about our histories; about the implicit claim that our criteria of selection justify our inclusion of philosophers as major, minor, or well-forgotten figures; about our ranking of issues and argumentative strategies as central, groundbreaking, useful, or misguided. The historiography of philosophy is an important and thorny subject, which I cannot hope to tackle here. But I do wish to conclude this essay with some notes on the subject, in relation to the project of making women’s philosophical contributions visible once more in history.

THE RECOVERY OF WOMEN’S CONTRIBUTIONS AND THE REWRITING OF HISTORY

In this section I sketch three models for the historiography of early modern philosophy. Two of these models are useful ideals, a mixture of which usually underlies any given attempt at doing such history—or so I shall suggest. But the third model will not be particularly attractive to a philosopher who is doing the history of philosophical thought.

Let me begin with the latter model, which I shall term the “pure history” model. According to this historiographical method, evaluations of philosophical arguments and projects, while crucial to philosophy, are irrelevant to the history of philosophy. Scholars who use this model, like the nineteenth-century historian of ancient philosophy Eduard Zeller, see the history of philosophy as a dispassionate chronicling of every move in the dialectic of philosophy. Of course, for all their attempts at writing the “pure history” of philosophy, even the followers of Zeller omitted the women, who were seen as significant contributors to the field in their own time. This suggests that the particular interests and blind spots of the historian, and of the era in which the historian lives, will come into play—come what may. But, of
The history of philosophy is not just a matter of the works, but also the context, the time, and the people who created them. Understanding the historical significance of philosophical ideas requires an awareness of the social, political, and philosophical issues of the time. This is why a full understanding of the history of philosophy is essential for anyone interested in the field. The study of philosophy is not just about understanding the ideas themselves, but also about understanding the context in which they were developed. This context includes the political, social, and cultural factors that shaped the development of philosophical thought. In order to fully appreciate the importance of a philosophical idea, it is necessary to understand the historical and cultural context in which it was developed. This is why a full understanding of the history of philosophy is essential for anyone interested in the field.
The continuation of anyone to these debates.

The early modern period and the women who were part of the eighteenth century...
Literary Studies

1972


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EARLY MODERN WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS

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IMPORTANT: This document contains information about the early modern period, including women's contributions and philosophical works. It discusses various topics such as women's role in the arts, education, and society. The text also includes references to key figures and events in the history of women's education and philosophy.

- Significant contributions of women in the arts during the early modern period
- The role of women in education during the early modern period
- Philosophical works by women during the early modern period

For more information, please refer to the following resources:

The continuing debate over the identity of philosophy continues to evolve, with new perspectives and interpretations emerging. This issue is not just about historical figures and their contributions; it also involves contemporary debates about the nature of philosophical inquiry and its relevance to modern society. The question of who is a philosopher and what constitutes philosophical thought remains a subject of ongoing discussion and scholarly inquiry.

This debate is not confined to the academic realm; it permeates into everyday discussions, influencing how we think about our own lives and the world around us. Philosophical ideas can have profound implications for our understanding of reality, ethics, and the human condition. As such, it is crucial that we continue to engage with these questions and explore the diverse ways in which philosophy can be practiced and understood.

In this issue, we feature a variety of contributions from leading philosophers and scholars, each offering unique insights into different aspects of philosophy. We hope that these articles will stimulate further discussion and encourage readers to explore the rich tapestry of philosophical thought for themselves.
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Essentially positive conceptions of human nature have figured prominently

Philosophical Appeals to "Human Nature"

Philosophers proposed

1. Will never come to a good end

2. A wise-looking woman and a crowning hea

LOUISE M. ANTONY

Human Nature and its Role in Feminist Theory

PHILOSOPHY OF PERSONS