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, Axiotea of Philesia, Cleobulina of Rhodes, Hipparchia the Cynic, and Lasthena 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, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Hadewych of Antwerp, Birgitta of Sweden, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, Oliba 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 this 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 Accademia 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 Schöller 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 right 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 non-philosophy 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. 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), 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. Her discussion drew on Scholastic, as well as Neoplatonic hermetic sources. By 1673, when Bathsua Makin published An Essay to Revive the Ancient 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. 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, and the letters and conversations on education of Madame de Maintenon.

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 Rochefoaucal." But perhaps the most well known seventeenth-century woman writer of moral psychology is the précieuse, Madeleine de Scudéry. Leibniz, 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 [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 adduces 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 *Bibliotheque universelle et historique* (1699) and in the *Mercure* (1731), mentioned in Bayes’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 Merseille 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* (1653), 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 afraied 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 Triumphate 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 Steinf, 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 one to the 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 Stillingflethe 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.

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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 Choisie*.

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 Catharine 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, Tyrell, 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 theistic, 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 eighteenth 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 one 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, Elisabeth 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 contractualist 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-
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 on “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 marquise 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 State of the 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
earlier. Her forty-nine published theses (1732), which she debated for her doctorate at the University of Bologna, and her published theses concerning the nature of water (1732) can be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Four papers in natural philosophy were published in the Commentaries of the Bologna Academy and Institute of Arts and Sciences. The mathematician Maria Gaetana de Agnesi discussed topics in logic, metaphysics, and Cartesian physics in her treatise Philosophical Propositions (1738). In 1722, Giuseppa-Eleonora Barbabiccola, friend of the daughter of the Cartesian critic Giovanni Battista Vico, published a translation and critical introduction for Descartes’s Principles of Philosophy. In her introduction, Barbabiccola examined the relation of Descartes’s views, particularly on motion and form, to those of Aristotle.

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 Eloge 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 Theodicy 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, Lesure published The Women Philosophers (1881), in which chapters were devoted to such eighteenth-century figures as Mésdames du Châtelet, de Lambert, d’Épinal, and de Staël. 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 rigor 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 attacks 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 Sénastien 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, simmered, 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 an 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 Antient Education of Gentlewomen, observed in the seventeenth century: “The Barbarous custom to breed 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 pithily 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 and despair, in the form of happiness." And Stendhal, 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 Fraise 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. Fraise’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 Catharine 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
course, the real issue is not what the history of philosophy is like, come what may, but which methodology we ought to take as our ideal—even if this ideal is never achieved. Still, it is not entirely clear what the point would be of chronicling every position in the endless dialectic (per impossible), in accordance with this first method. For this model might be characterized, as Walter Benjamin noted, as one “which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly. Among medieval theologians it was regarded as the root cause of sadness.”

Perhaps a philosopher might think that, with this detailed “pure history” of philosophy before her, she would be in the best position to evaluate philosophical arguments and projects, for she then would be able to judge which were the most innovative, strategically useful, and elegant moves in the game called “philosophy.” But, of course, this historical narrative itself never attains closure; it must be revised as philosophy itself changes its rules and even, perhaps, the very goals of the game. The evaluation of moves in the game, thus, cannot be made after the detailed history is completed; the evaluations must be made as we go along rewriting the history of the discipline—as we “brush history against the grain.”

So, what might look like a philosophical interest in having a “pure history” of philosophy turns out to be a nonstarter.

Suppose, then, that we are interested from the start in a “philosophical history” of philosophy, one that attempts to justify the merits of both the larger philosophical projects in which arguments are embedded and the methodological strategies relative to the philosophical goals. There are at least two models of the history of philosophy that attempt such justifications. The “internal history” model would offer a detailed historical account of the interrelations among the arguments of the women philosophers and those of their philosophical predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. It would attempt to provide the philosophical source of the women’s views by discovering their place within an ongoing dialectic internal to philosophy. Notice how different this is from the first model: we are not dispassionately chronicling philosophical views, without regard to the truth of the views or the validity of the arguments. This is also a different matter from simply providing “historical reconstructions” of philosophical views, as Richard Rorty has termed it. For here we are not attempting to make philosophical views (which we might take to be false) intelligible, by placing them in the context of the less enlightened times in which they were produced. To the contrary, this second method of historiography attempts to make past views intelligible by painstakingly piecing together the rational grounds for them. A Rortyan historical reconstruction of, say, texts about the querelles des femmes might situate these views about woman’s nature in the context of the quaint medical and religious debates of the early modern period. But the “internal history” model of historiography would be at pains to show that discussions about woman’s nature were of central philosophical concern—interrelated as they were to broader meta-

physical, social and political, and epistemological issues. By chronicling how the women’s contributions increasingly raised the level of intelligibility about these issues, and by showing the wide-ranging philosophical implications of their views for such areas as the philosophy of education, a case could begin to be made for the inclusion of these women authors in the history of philosophy.

The third type of history of philosophy is what Richard Rorty, taking Hegel as a master of the genre, has termed Geistesgeschichte. This genre of history of philosophy works at the level of problematics rather than of solutions to problems. It spends more of its time asking “Why should anyone have made the question of ___ central to his thought?” rather than on asking in what respect the great dead philosopher’s answer or solution accords with that of contemporary philosophers. It wants to justify the historian and his friends in having the sort of philosophical concerns they have—in taking philosophy to be what they take it to be.

Historians of philosophy frequently have seen their role as that of reformers and revisionists. Influential historians, like Tiedemann and Tennemann, each rewrote the history of philosophy, raising up certain figures and quickly passing over others. And typically they constructed their histories so that they conveniently “led up to” their pet philosophical projects, be it “Lockean sensualism,” “Kantian idealism,” or some other view. Indeed, most of the great philosophers themselves included elements of Geistesgeschichte in their own philosophical works, as a method of tying their arguments to the philosophical past. Consider Descartes’s treatment of the Scholastics or Kant’s depiction of himself as the synthesis of what is true in Leibniz’s “noologism” (or, to transform the Greek into Latin, “rationalism”) and in Locke’s “empiricism.” Philosophers sometimes called for a new Geistesgeschichte to be written, as a justification for a newly emerging philosophical canon. The historian Victor Cousin, in his 1828 Paris lectures to a crowd of two thousand gentlemen, said:

Let us hope that France, . . . which has already produced Descartes, will enter in her turn upon . . . the history of philosophy. . . . Every great speculative movement contains in itself, and sooner or later produces necessarily, its history of philosophy, and even a history of philosophy which is conformed to it; for it is only under the point of view of our ideas that we represent to ourselves the ideas of others.

This passage is interesting in what it suggests about the role that gender, class, ethnicity, and nationalism may have played in the actual constructions of modern histories of philosophy. But it may also lead us to wonder why we should not just abandon sweeping narratives that lead up to a particular set of contemporary interests. Critics have argued that it is misguided to turn to
the philosophy of the past as a way of justifying one's present philosophical concerns, since past philosophers cannot do a better job than we are at solving our current problems. And they argue that it is a mistake to construct history with an eye to the present, since this simply distorts the history of philosophy. To borrow the beautiful image from Walter Benjamin, the Angel of History is propelled backward into the future, ever keeping its gaze on the past.107

If we historians of philosophy do go the way of Geistesgeschichte, what we need is a narrative that makes clear why some of the women discussed in this paper should figure as major or minor figures. The plot will consist, in part, in the giving of reasons for the decision to count certain questions or argumentational strategies as central. The Geistesgeschichte that goes along with the "relative non-exclusion" of women, which currently exists, is one in which some token women are allowed to play extremely marginal roles. The story goes that these women did contribute to ongoing philosophical debates of the time but that the debates are no longer of philosophical interest, or that the women simply added fluff to the philosophical programs of major male philosophers. But, to take one example, it now seems clear—largely because of the work of "internal history" scholars—that the role that sentiment and emotion ought to play in moral deliberations was a central philosophical issue in the eighteenth century, and that women were major contributors to these debates. Writers of a new Geistesgeschichte can point out that descendants of this philosophical topic are of pressing concern to many philosophers today. The model of "internal history" saves our endeavors from turning into potty history; Geistesgeschichte draws the attention of philosophers to philosophy's past, so that it is not just those with purely antiquarian interests who will want to know about early modern women philosophers.

As a last example, let us take the research for the present essay. I began by using the method of "internal history" to locate those women who were contributing to the philosophical debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But it was the method of Geistesgeschichte that got me to wondering if anything like our present feminist philosophical concerns had ancestors in the philosophical writings of early modern women. These present feminist concerns helped to open up the past for me; I started to notice that early modern women frequently addressed issues dealing with the relation of gender to traditional philosophical topics. The philosophical interest I now have in the past motivated me to use "internal history" to discover the ways that the early modern "woman question" is continuous with, and the ways it sharply departs from, twentieth-century feminist concerns. But it was surely Geistesgeschichte that initially motivated me to make the discovery that the "woman question" constituted a major set of philosophical issues in the early modern period and that women made, perhaps, the most outstanding contributions of anyone to these debates.

EARLY MODERN WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS

It appears, then, that we are at a point, both philosophically and in terms of our knowledge of philosophy's internal history, where a rewriting of the narrative of philosophy is called for—one in which a number of the women cited here, and some of the forgotten men, will emerge as significant figures.108 Contemporary feminist philosophers have already begun to turn to the women philosophers of the past in the attempt to trace a history of feminist thought. In some sense, Michèle Le Doeuff's work is precisely the attempt to provide a Geistesgeschichte that will make women visible once again in the history of philosophy.109 A number of philosophers have also begun the detailed work of reconstructing women's contributions to the complex internal history of philosophy.110 By showing both how women's contributions to early modern philosophy are relevant to our present philosophical concerns and how their contributions are a vital part of the internal logic of philosophy, women may escape being footnotes and flourishes to the history of philosophy—makers of nothing more than silk knots and little nothings.

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Notes


2. This text and others, to which I shall frequently refer, and their abbreviations are as follows:


Whenever possible, the primary sources cited in this paper will be the original-language first editions. (I shall provide translations of foreign language titles in the main body of the paper.) In some cases, where a modern edition of a text is currently available, I shall also cite this. Unfortunately, few of the texts cited in this paper are currently in print. A recent anthology and a forthcoming two-volume work will begin to remedy this situation. Margaret Atherton’s Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 1994) contains excerpts from texts by six English women philosophers and reproduces John Blom’s translation of two French letters from Elisabeth of Bohemia to Descartes. Eileen O’Neill’s Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Collection of Primary Sources, 2 vols. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), will contain selections from some forty women philosophers, including translations from Latin, Spanish, French, German, and Italian texts.

Selected secondary sources, relevant to the work of individual women philosophers, will be cited as each figure is discussed. For a thumbnail sketch of women’s contributions to philosophy, see Eileen O’Neill, “Women in the History of Philosophy,” The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Supplement, ed. Donald Borchart (New York: Simon and Schuster/Macmillan, 1996). While the number of relevant reference works is quite large, I do want to recommend the following list of modern secondary sources, which treat early modern women philosophers and the intellectual, social, and political context in which they were situated. In what follows, they will be cited by author’s name.

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**EARLY MODERN WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS**

**INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY**


**LITERARY STUDIES**


5. Translation is from Findlen, “Science as a Career,” p. 450; see note 4.

6. In 1980, Marguerite Yourcenar became the first woman to be elected to the Académie Française.


8. See Schiebinger, pp. 26, 284 n. 47.

9. Ibid., p. 246. As Schiebinger points out, Sophie Germain did attempt to pursue studies at the Ecole Polytechnique in the 1790s.

10. On Erxleben and Schlozer, see ibid., pp. 250–60.

11. Dorothea [Erxleben] Leporinin, Gründliche Untersuchung der Ursachen, die das weibliche Geschlecht vom Studieren abhalten (Berlin, 1742); Amalia Holst, Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höheren Geistesbildung (Berlin, 1802). This observation about Erxleben and Holst is in Schiebinger, p. 270.


Lucrezia Marinelli, La nobiltà, et l’eccezienza delle donne, co’ difetti e mancamenti de gli huomini (Venice, 1600). Among the secondary sources is Ginevra Conti Oderisio, Donne e società nel Seicento: Lucrezia Marinelli e Arcangela Tarabotti (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979).


20. Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales de Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld, maximes de Madame la marquise de Sable. Pensees diverses de M. L.D. et les maximes chrétiennes de M*** [Mme de La Sablière] (Amsterdam, 1705); Maximes de Madame la Marquise de Sable et Pensees diverses de M.L.D. (Paris, 1678); Madame La Comtesse de Maure, Sa Vie et sa Correspendance suivies des Maximes de Madame De Sable, ed. Edouard de Barthélémy (Paris, 1863). Secondary sources include Victor Cousin, Madame de Sable: Nouvelles études sur la société et les femmes illustres du dix-septième siècle (Paris, 1854); Vicomte S. Menjot-d’Elbenne, Mme de la Sablière, ses pensées chrétiennes et ses lettres a l’abbé de Rancé (Paris: Plon, 1923); N. Ivanoff, La Marquise de Sable et son salon (Paris: Presses Modernes, 1927); Reynier.

Christina’s two series of maxims, “Ouvrage de Loisir” and “Sentimens,” together with Réflexions diverses sur la Vie et sur les Actions du Grand Alexandre, “Réflexions sur la Vie et les Actions du César,” a sampling of her correspondence, and unfinished autobiography, La Vie de la Reine Christina faite par Elle-même, dédié à Dieu, are published in Mémoires concernant Christina, reine de Suède pour servir d’éclaircissement à l’histoire de son règne et principalement de sa vie privée, et aux evenemens de son temps civil et literaire, ed. Johan Archenholtz, 4 vols. (Leipzig/Amsterdam, 1751–60); an early English translation of some maxims is The Works of Christina Queen of Sweden... (London, 1753). A secretarial draft of the maxims, existing in manuscript at the Royal Library, Stockholm, is considered the most authoritative version; it was published in Sven Stolpe, Drottning Christina Max-imer—Les Sentiments Heroiques, Acta Academiae Catholicae Suecanae I (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1959). Susanna Åkerman, however, has recently discovered a completed, unaltered, late edition of the maxims (ca. 1683) in the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, that may supersede all others. Christina’s notes on the maxims of La Rochefoucauld have been published in La Rochefoucauld—Maximes suivies par des réflexions diverses, du portrait de la Rochefoucauld par lui-même et des remarques de Christine de Suède sur les maximes, ed. J. Truchet (Paris: Garnier, 1967). Secondary sources include Galeazzo Guaido Priorato, The History of the Sacred and Royal Majesty of Christina Alessandra queen of Sweden... (London, 1658); Ernst Cassirer, Descartes: Lehre—Persönlichkeit—Wirkung (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag, 1939); Sven Stolpe, Queen Christina, trans. R. M. Bethel (London: Burns and Oates, 1966); Susanna Åkerman, Queen Christina of Sweden and Her Circle: The Transformation of a Seventeenth-Century Philosophical Libertine (Leiden/New York: E. J. Brill, 1991).

(Monaco: Société des Conférences, 1927); Georges Mongrédié, Madeleine de Scudéry et son salon (Paris: Tallandier, 1946); Alain Niderst, Madeleine de Scudéry, Paul Pellisson et leur monde (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976); Nicole Aronson, Mademoiselle de Scudéry (Boston: Twayne, 1978); and Harth.


33. I want to thank Sarah Hutton and Martha Bolton for identifying the Burnet in question.


39. For example, S. A. Richard, in Feminist Writers of the Seventeenth Century (see note 38), discusses the Treatise of Morals and of Politics and characterizes it as a “serious” feminist text in the tradition of the work of Poulain de la Barre. However, he attributes it to “Demeiselle G. S. Aristophile.”


41. Margaret Fell [Fox], Women’s Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures, all such as speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus . . . (London, 1666); A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages and Occurrences relating to the Birth, Education, Life, of the Eminent and Faithful Servant of the Lord, Margaret Fell, but by her Second Marriage, Margaret Fox, together with Sundry of Her Epistles, Books and Christian Testimonies to Friends and Others (London, 1710). Secondary sources include Isabel Ross, Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakers, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949); Patricia Crawford, Women and Religion in England 1500–1720 (London/New York: Routledge, 1993); Smith; Ezell.


Anna Maria van Schurman, EYKAHPI: seu melioris partis electio . . . [Eukleria: Or the Choice of the Better Part, As Presenting a Brief Sketch of Her Religion and Life] (Alkma, 1673; Dutch translation, Amsterdam, 1684); Korte Onderrichtingen . . . [Short Instruction Concerning the State and Way of Life of Those Persons Whom God Gathers and Has United in His service through the Actions of His Faithful Servant Jean de Labadie and His Brothers and Fellow-Workers Pierre Yvon and Pierre Dulignon] (Amsterdam, 1675); EYKAHPI-II (Amsterdam, 1684). See Joyce Irwin, “Anna Maria van Schurman: From Feminism to Pietism,” Church History 46 (1977): 46–62.

43. See Mack, “Women as Prophets,” where this is argued for persuasively (see note 40).


45. Their works include Hester Chapone’s Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady, 2 vols. (London, 1773) and The Works of Mrs. Hester Chapone . . . , 4 vols. (London, 1807); Elisabeth Montagu’s dialogues in


49. Lady Mary Shepherd, An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect, concerning the Doctrine of Mr. Hume, concerning the Nature of that Relation, with Observations upon the Opinions of Dr. Brown and Mr. Laurence, connected with the same subject (London, 1824); Essays on the Perception of an External Universe and other Subjects Connected with the Doctrine of Causation (London, 1827), excerpts from which appear in Margaret Atherton's Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994); An Essay on the Academic or Sceptical Philosophy, as Applied by Mr. Hume to the Perception of External Existence; with several shorter Essays, upon subjects relating to the Doctrine of Causation (London, 1827); "Observations of Lady Mary Shepherd on the "First Lines of the Human Mind," Parriana; or Notices of the Rev. Samuel Parr. L.L.D., collected from various sources, printed and manuscript and in part written by E. H. Barker, esq. (London, 1828-29); "Lady Mary Shepherd's Metaphysics," Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country 5, no. 30 (July 1832): 697-708. Shepherd's views are discussed by John Fearn in his reply to her review in the same volume of Parriana. See also Samuel Allibone, A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors (Philadelphia, 1858-71; reprinted Detroit: Gale Research, 1965); Ethel Kersey, Women Philosophers. I thank Margaret Atherton for bringing Shepherd's 1824 publication to my attention.

50. Anne Lefèvre Dacier, Réflexions morales de l'empereur Marc Antoine... (Paris, 1690-91); English translation, London, 1692); Des Causes de la corruption du goût (Paris, 1714). Secondary sources include Fern Farnham, Madame Dacier: Scholar and Humanist (Monterey: Angel, 1976); P.W. Gibson and Schiebinger.


52. Anne-Thérèse de Lambert, Réflexions nouvelles sur les femmes, par une dame de la cour de France (Paris, 1727); Lettres sur la véritable éducation (Amsterdam, 1729)—first published as Avis d'une mère à son Fils et à sa Fille (Paris, 1728); Traité de l'amiété, Traité de la visibilité, Réflexions sur les femmes, sur le goût, sur les richesses (Amsterdam, 1732) are all contained in Oeuvres complètes, précédées d'une notice, suivies de ses lettres à plusieurs personnages célèbres (Paris, 1808). In addition to Sainte-Beuve (see note 51), secondary sources include M. de Lescure, Les Femmes philosophes (Paris, 1881); J.-P. Zimmermann, "La Morale laïque au

53. For example, Avis d'une mère à sa fille saw fifteen editions between 1732 and 1828. See the preface by Milagros Palma to Anne Thérèse de Lambert, Réflexions nouvelles sur les femmes (Paris: Côté-femmes éditions, 1889).


57. Louise-Marie Dupin, "Idées sur l'éducation" published posthumously in Le Portefeuille de Madame Dupin, dame de Chenonceaux, ed. le comte Gaston de Villeneuve-Guibert (Paris, 1884). According to Lee, Dupin's manuscript was sold at an auction in the 1970s and was being prepared for publication by Professor Leland Thielemann.


61. Marie Thérèse D'Arconville, Mélanges de littérature, de morale et de physique, 7 vols., ed. Rossel (Amsterdam, 1775). In addition, she published translations of English scientific works and of Lord Halifax; her Vie du Cardinal d'Ossat was reviewed by Diderot. Her circle included Voltaire and Lavoisier. Secondary sources include Schiebinger and Alich.


70. I principi della filosofia di Renato Des-cartes tradotti ... da Giuseppe-Eleonor Barbapiccola ... (Turin, 1722). Secondary sources include Mozans; Ogilvie.

71. Gilles Ménage, Historia mulierum philosopharum ... (Lyon, 1690; English translation, 1702); a recent English translation is cited in note 1.


73. Jean de La Forge, Le Cercle des femmes scâvantes ... (Paris, 1663). Marguerite Buffet, Nouvelles observations sur la langue française ... Avec les éloges de illustres scâvantes tant anciennes que modernes (Paris, 1668).


Sophie Charlotte, who became the first queen of Prussia, was the daughter of the Electress Sophie of Hanover and niece of Elisabeth of Bohemia. She corresponded with Leibniz and John Toland, among others. Secondary sources include Louis Foucher de Careil, Leibniz et les deux Sophie (Paris, 1876); Merchant; Beatrice H. Zedler, “The Three Princesses,” in H.


Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de La Motte Guyon attempted to convince her readers of the doctrines of Catholic quietism, including the importance of achieving indifference and passivity of the soul, in works such as Moyen court et très-facile pour l’oraison ... (Grenoble, 1685) and Les Torrents spirituels (Amsterdam, 1704). She was imprisoned several times for her allegedly heretical published views, which included, among other things, disparaging ceremonial devotion and claiming that in the soul’s union with God the soul is beyond good and evil (see note 42).


I wish to thank Richard Popkin for invaluable information about women preachers, prophets, and mystics in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, especially about figures like Guyon and Bourignon. I am particularly indebted to him for bringing Margaret Fell Fox to my attention.


83. Eileen O'Neill, "Women Cartesian, 'Feminine Philosophy,' and Historical Exclusion" (see note 21).

84. Schiebinger, pp. 153-54.

85. Translation in ibid., p. 156.

86. Louis Sébastien Mercier, Tableau de Paris (Amsterdam, 1782-88), pp. 295-96; translation in Lee, pp. 76-77.

87. Translation in Schiebinger, p. 110.


89. Immanuel Kant, Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen (Königsberg, 1764); translation in Schiebinger, p. 146.

90. Makin, An Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen ..., p. 3 (see note 17).


93. I am indebted to Burton Drebner for suggesting that I examine more closely the relation of the French Revolution to the disappearance of women from the philosophical sphere—that is, for suggesting that factors "external to philosophy proper" might turn out to be quite illuminating here. It is not at all clear that Drebner would accept my interpretation of the import of these political factors.


95. Stendahl [Henri Beyle], De l'amour (Paris, 1822), cited in Fraise, p. 69.

96. Ibid.

97. Sylvain Maréchal, Projet d'une loi portant défense d'apprendre à lire aux femmes (Paris: Massé, 1801); translation in Fraise, p. 11.

98. Proudhon, as cited in d'Hericourt, A Woman's Philosophy of Woman, pp. 73-74 (see note 92). Cf. this report regarding Marie-Charlotte Corday in an official newsheet, as quoted in Linda Kelly, Women of the French Revolution (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p. 102: "She was a virago more brawny than fresh, graceless and dirty in her person as are almost all female philosophers...."

99. Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, Lettres d'un bourgeois de Newhaven à un citoyen de Virginie sur l'utilité de partager le pouvoir législatif en plusieurs corps (1788); cited in Fraise, p. 52.


103. Ibid., p. 257.

104. For a clear exposition and defense of this form of historiography, see Wolfgang Mann, "The Origins of the Modern Historiography of Ancient Philosophy," History and Theory 35, no. 2 (1996): 165-95. It is not clear Mann would agree with my characterization of this form of historiography or with the use to which I would put it.


106. Cousin, Course of the History of Philosophy, pp. 63-64, 230 (see note 28).


108. Another way in which a narrative of the history of philosophy could be rewritten would be from a vantage point external to philosophical dialectic. One such narrative would be a postmodern intertextual one, in which women philosophers, together with forgotten female writers of fiction, autobiography, poetry, and so forth, would be portrayed as heroines and interwoven into the plot. Here the justification for the presence of women philosophers in an emerging new canon of Western thought would not make reference to any moves interpreted to be internal to philosophy. On this view there would be no such moves, since "moves purely internal to a discipline" would simply be taken to be illusions—as in Marxist historical materialism. But where historical materialism rejects any philosophical justification of the plot and ranking of figures in favor of a political/economic/social explanation, postmodernism gives up the privileging of any type of explanation: our canons are simply expressions of the sheer "pleasure of texts" and our delight in thinking through their interrelations. But philosophy, as we have known it in the West, takes justification as a constitutive ideal. It is what we have been aiming at, even if philosophy is a series of (occasionally somewhat brilliant) failures—even if we have never fully been able to justify a philosophical position. I do not have space here to argue for my view that postmodern intertextualism and Marxist historical materialism cannot provide satisfactory histories of philosophy, since they fail to value sufficiently this constitutive ideal of philosophy.

110. See, for example, the papers that have been delivered at the APA meetings of the recently formed Society for the Study of Women Philosophers, and the articles in *HWP* and *HD*.

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**PHILOSOPHY OF PERSONS**

"Human Nature" and Its Role in Feminist Theory

**LOUISE M. ANTONY**

A whistling woman and a crowing hen
Will never come to a good end.

—Midwestern proverb

**Philosophical Appeals to "Human Nature"**

Essentially positive conceptions of human nature have figured prominently in the normative theories of Western philosophers: Aristotle, Rousseau, Kant, and many others based their general ethical and political systems on substantive assumptions about the capacities and dispositions of human beings. Many of these views have been interpreted as affirming the inherent moral value and essential equality of all human beings, and a few have provided inspiration for emancipatory movements, including feminism.

Nonetheless, for anyone who would find in these theories a message of universal equality, there is one immediate difficulty: none of the major philosophers intended their claims about the natural entitlements of "man" to be applied to women.¹ Contrary to what’s maintained by many contemporary exegetes, it’s unlikely that the philosophers’ use of masculine terms in the framing of their theories was a "mere linguistic convenience."² For if one looks at the (very few) places at which the major philosophers explicitly discuss women, one finds that women are expressly denied both the moral potentialities and the moral perquisites that are supposed to accrue to "man" in virtue of "his" nature.³ If "man" is generic, and women are "men," then how could this be?

It’s possible that the philosophers in question believed that men and women did not share a nature at all, in which case all their talk of "man" would be simply and literally talk of men. But this seems unlikely. Philosophers have not really wanted to claim that men and women are members of distinct kinds. Aristotle, Rousseau, and Kant, for example, who all made the possession of reason criterial of humanity, agreed that women could not plausibly be claimed to be utterly devoid of rationality.⁴ Alternatively, then, the view must have been that men and women shared some sort of "human" nature, even while women differed from men in morally relevant respects.