

An abstract painting with vibrant colors including red, blue, yellow, and purple, featuring expressive brushstrokes and splatters. The background is a complex, layered composition of these colors, with some areas appearing more saturated and others more washed out. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and artistic freedom.

# Women Philosophers Throughout History: An Open Collection

Prof. Marcy Lascano  
Kevin Watson  
Rafael Martins

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University of Kansas Libraries  
Lawrence, KS 66045

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# Women Philosophers Throughout History: An Open Collection

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### Section 2 Renaissance

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## Introduction

Vast bibliography<sup>1</sup> and the American Philosophical Association<sup>2</sup> have called attention to the gender-gap in philosophy, *viz.* the fact that women are abysmally underrepresented in all the dimensions of the universe of philosophy: undergraduate majors, graduate programs, faculty<sup>3</sup>, journal editors, and peer-review boards<sup>4</sup>. There are serious reasons to believe that is problematic.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies<sup>6</sup> discuss explanatory hypotheses for the gap. One of them is that philosophy syllabi are invariably devoid of female authors, *especially in introductory courses*.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, evidence shows that “the biggest drop in the proportion of women in philosophy occurs between students enrolled in introductory philosophy classes and philosophy majors.”<sup>8</sup> Georgia State University philosophy program has attempted to address this problem by requiring graduate students teaching introductory-level courses in philosophy to use syllabuses that include at least 20% of women philosophers.<sup>9</sup> However, the scarce availability of texts from women philosophers poses serious challenge for that and other noble initiatives currently on course to narrow up the gender-gap. In other words, it is still very difficult to find trustworthy material published by women philosophers prior to 1923.

That had not always been the scenario, though. If we look at the history of philosophy more carefully, we find a large number of women-authored contributions to philosophy. Notwithstanding, access to that material remains extremely challenging. The majority of those works have not been published since they were originally written and many of them can only be found in a few libraries or on microfilm.<sup>10</sup> To make things even more complicated, uncountable women-authored philosophical classic texts have never been translated into English, making the pool of women-authored philosophical resources even more restricted.

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<sup>1</sup> American Philosophical Association Committee on the Status of Women Reports:

<http://www.apaonlinecsww.org/workshops-and-summer-institutes>

Paxton, Figdor, Tiberius. **Quantifying the Gender Gap: An Empirical Study of the Underrepresentation of Women in Philosophy.** *Hypatia*, v. 27, Issue 4, 2012. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2012.01306.x>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.apaonline.org/page/diversity\\_resources](https://www.apaonline.org/page/diversity_resources)

<sup>3</sup> Women make up 21% of philosophy faculty in the English-speaking world.

<sup>4</sup> Krishnamurthy, Liao, Deveaux, Dalecki. **The Underrepresentation of Women in Prestigious Ethics Journals.** *Hypatia*, v. 32, Issue 4, 2017. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/hypa.12351>

<sup>5</sup> Jenkins, Fiona, and Katrina Hutchison (2013). Introduction: **Searching for Sofia: Gender and Philosophy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.** In Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins (Eds.), *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?*(1–20). Oxford University Press.

Friedman, Marilyn (2013). **Women in Philosophy: Why Should We Care?** In Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins (Eds.), *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?* (21–38). Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Baron, Dougherty, Miller. **Why Is There Female Under-Representation among Philosophy Majors? Evidence of a Pre-University Effect.** *Ergo*, v. 2, n. 14, 2015.

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ergo/12405314.0002.014?view=text;rgn=main>

<sup>7</sup> Paxton et. al. 2012; and Hall, Pamela C. (1993). **From Justified Discrimination to Responsive Hiring: The Role Model Argument and Female Equity Hiring in Philosophy.** *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 24(1), 23–45.

<sup>8</sup> Paxton, et. al. 2012

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/06/28/georgia-state-tries-new-approach-attract-more-female-students-philosophy>

<sup>10</sup> Atherton, Margaret. **Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period**, Hackett, 1994.

However, note that these efforts have all been translated into upper level courses, which are almost exclusively for graduate students, leaving yet untouched introductory courses, where the turning point of gender-gap takes place, the critical site of the problem. The current texts and textbooks used in introductory level philosophy courses are often compilations of the most essential classics of philosophy—the vast majority of which fail to include any women philosophers. Both Frederick Copleston’s classic *A History of Philosophy*<sup>11</sup>, in eleven volumes, and the most authoritative encyclopedia of philosophy in Brazil, *Os Pensadores*<sup>12</sup>, in fifty-six volumes, do not include a single woman thinker. Oxford University Press’ *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*, edited by Steven Cahn in 2015, does not include any woman until the second half of the twentieth century. These editions misrepresent the philosophical debates of the past for not including a more accurate lineup of thinkers who were active members of those debates. This project addresses that most sensitive stage of early academic life by providing easy and open access to the works of four significant women philosophers for instructors and students interested in diversifying the narrative of their courses.

The work is divided into four sections, each containing an introduction for the included text, references to sections of the texts that we take to be of primary interest, and a list of additional readings instructors and students related to the works. The first text, the *Dialogue of Divine Providence* by Saint Catherine of Siena was produced around 1378, and the second, the *Interior Castle* by Saint Teresa of Avila, written in 1577. Both of them share the method of using meditative practices stressing the introspective and emotive ways of acquiring knowledge, accessing the truth, pursuing self-knowledge, experiencing the divine, and exercising virtue. It is likely that these works, when not ignored, have been secluded from philosophical circles for being taken as plain mysticism or theological preaching. The problem is, to view these works as mere mysticism or theology would be to ignore the epistemological and prudential importance of the works. Both works provide a detailed and sophisticated account of virtue and self-knowledge, as well as providing the tools necessary to acquire them.

The third work, Judith Drake’s *Essay in Defense of the Female Sex*, produced in 1696, aims to address the political state of affairs regarding the rights and social positions of women in the England of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The central question Drake grapples with in her *Essay in Defense* is “whether the time an ingenious Gentleman spends in the Company of Women, may justly be said to be misemployed, or not?” According to Drake, spending time with others is properly employed when the mind gains either an “Improvement of the Understanding or a Diversion and Relaxation of its Cares and Passions.” It is critical of rationalist ideas often cited as reason to conclude women were intellectually inferior to men, arguing that both sexes are equally susceptible to folly and, as a result, would benefit from greater education.

Finally, Susanna Newcome’s *Enquiry into the Evidence of the Christian Religion*, the first edition of which was published in 1728, in grapples with a number of subjects including the nature and existence of God, human happiness, and what humanity would be rationally required to do were the Christian religion true, among others. The work sets itself up as presenting an argument in favor of the existence of God that does not rest on *a priori* judgement, appealing to Newtonian physics to defend the claim that the chains of cause and effect we experience either require external support for their continued existence or can come to an end—eventually concluding that the cause of the universe must be eternal, independent, unchangeable, intelligent, powerful, perfect, omnipresent, omniscient, and free.

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<sup>11</sup> Continuum editions, various dates, 1946 thru1986.

<sup>12</sup> Sao Paulo: Abril Cultural/Nova Cultural, 1<sup>st</sup> print 1973/5 thru 2004.