

Fighting Philofolly! Rewriting the History of Philosophy by Professor Ruth Hagengruber

Is a canon invented? Who invents a canon? And how does one improve a canon?

A canon is shaped by contemporary and changing interests. So, is a canon which demands for the inclusion of women also “only” a reflection of transient interests? A study of history offers insight into “alternative kingdom of” ideas.

1. What is the use of a history of philosophy *in* doing philosophy?
2. Examples of alternative ideas
3. Methodology of doing history
4. How would philosophy look like if women philosophers had been able to shape the canon and our philosophical categories?
5. Universalist claims & particular claims with regards to women.

Example of alternative ideas: Emilie du Chatelet. Wrote her main volume in 1740. Was among the most important books of her time. Was very prolific; not true that women philosophers have “not written”. So why are we not familiar with her? Her magnum opus (Institutions) can be regarded as a hidden source to Kant’s transcendental philosophy.

Kant claimed with Pure Reason that he overcame all philosophy before him with his “transcendental turn”. But many opponents said it was not novel at all; and one of them, Eberhard, in order to make that argument, quoted du Chatelet.

Kant also called this turn in perspective the “Copernican turn”. You don’t read a lot of Copernicus in Kant, but du Chatelet herself was very familiar with Newton, Copernicus, etc. And at the beginning of Institutions, she says “Copernicus made us understand how we explain the world independent of how...”

du Chatelet recognized the lack of a “system of calculation” for metaphysics, like mathematics. And this is what Kant is famous to have made.

But can we be sure that Kant read du Chatelet? When he was ~25, he wrote his first dissertation on a text by du Chatelet— “On the living forces”.

She (and not Kant) says: We do not access reality, but we have certain concepts which disclose reality. The idea to understand in the philosophy of science and philosophy as a systematic process with hypothesis is also perhaps first expressed by her (Newton, etc. thought of it as direct access to reality).

Another important figure in her time: Elisabeth of Bohemia. She disagreed with Descartes’ two-substance idea in letter-exchanges with him, and had discussions with Leibniz. It was her who originally made Leibniz acquainted with Anne Conway, who was a big influence on him.

Laura Bassi: A few years younger than du Chatelet. There was a competition for the “Minerva” of each nation across Germany, France and Italy. Historian Jakob Bruckhardt claimed women were as talented as men. Places Bassi in the tradition of excellence.

But he was only at the end of a tradition of retracing women. Christine de Pizan wrote such a text. Her methodology found “Lady Reason” at the center. A universal concern, and not a concern particular to women; and this universal concern is what opposes sexist philosophy. It is on the basis of such purely *universalist* concerns that women went up against Aristotle and St. Augustine.

Some exposition with reference to her article "Pressure on Enlightenment. Criticizing the Bible and Philosophy. From Nogarola to Du Châtelet".

Equal rights and societal participation: Plato argues for it in the Republic, which was an important text in the period. It's also presented in utopias of the time. Different notions of how to get at equality.

So, it is not true that Kant, etc. "was a product of his time" with reference to his sexism. So why did all these women go?