

## **Sex, Lies and Bigotry: The History of Philosophy** by Mary Waithe

What does it mean for an understanding of the history of philosophy that women have been left out and are now being retrieved?

The compendium: All written philosophy, past, present and future.

The historical canon: Works and authors from the compendium regularly cited in professional philosophical literature, regularly considered essential for a PhD in philosophy. Largely white males.

Under normal circumstances, the canon evolves organically and informally from the compendium. But racism and sexism obscure it; the historical canon is not, therefore, a 'true' canon.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls made people realize that nobody could claim to know the history or canon of Judaism or Christianity. A new tapestry was rolled out. The tapestry of philosophy must similarly be re-examined.

Confidence on the basis of race and gender is misplaced. Yet, historians systematically omitted women philosophers, in spite of the fact that their works and thoughts were just as available and significant, leading entire schools of philosophy. Such things make the historical canon distorted, illogical, false and misleading; and this, in a discipline in which discipline, precision and clarity are highly valued.

What kind of a methodology of the history of philosophy does the retrieval of women philosophers imply?

First, we need to understand how and why women's works were excluded. (Scribal recension, the invention of the printing press & moving type, the rise of the democratic republic.) We need to reclaim, translate and discuss those works in their own right, and in their ownmost relation to the tradition.

Scribal recension: Copyist errors, omissions, inclusion of their own notes, binding a woman's works behind a man's with no indication of its inclusion.

With decline of monastic and conventual scriptoria, the rise of the democratic republic and the printing press, women were excluded from reference materials, etc. of earlier epochs. Accomplished women like du Chatelet as a novelty.

It was socially unacceptable for women to publish works of theology, philosophy, medicine and science. Largely, men became historians of philosophy; they omitted the works of women, and Waithe dubs this the "lazy boy" methodology, and opposes it polemically with the "female detective" methodology, relying on more subtle clues than simply tables of contents.

To what extent have women philosophers been included in philosophy?

A list of names—Plato, Aristotle, Stobaeus—who include women in their philosophy are mentioned. But not so much after the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Catharine Trotter Cockburn (one of only two people who defended Locke when he was alive!), Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera, Zeb un Nissa, Teresa de Avila, Mary Somerville, du Chatelet, Mary Everest Boole, Hypatia, May Sinclair, Christine Ladd-Franklin, Hildegard von Bingen, Catherine Beecher, Jane Addams.

Is feminist philosophy related to the history of women in philosophy?

Three problems concerning the marginalization of the former:

1. Scarcity of women in the profession (in the accepted canon, and in graduate programs etc.)
2. Masculine image of the professional philosopher (pervade the image of a philosopher and the content of philosophy)
3. Anti-feminists: Refusal to grant feminism proper status as legitimately philosophical. Dismissiveness on the basis of it being “specialized”, “marginal”, of primary interest only to women.

Sex complementarianism: The argument that men and woman are different (but equal). Their virtues are different but of equal importance.

Margaret More Roper: Someone who wrote an astute feminist analysis, but was put down as a ‘devotional’ treatise on the Paternoster.

Are there any themes or arguments common to women philosophers?

Feminist issues, certainly. But as such, they have engaged with exactly the same topics and issues as their male counterparts.

Does the inclusion of women philosophers require a reconfiguration of philosophical inquiry?

No. What we need to do is acknowledge that in recent history, philosophers have failed in the basic task of asking the right questions. See how they moved the discussion along, contributed an original insight, refined existing ideas, etc.

[professorwaithe@sbcglobal.net](mailto:professorwaithe@sbcglobal.net)