

CSTC Course Proposal

Women in Philosophy: Early Modernity (group A)

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Winter 2027 half course

Brief Rationale of how the course relates to Theory and Criticism

Women in Philosophy brings a feminist perspective to the early phases of modern European thought. My hope is to show that women thinkers are central to the major developments of philosophy associated almost entirely with men from Hobbes and Descartes to Kant.

Additionally, the course proposes to complement more contemporary theory courses with one focused on the history of theory and will cover some texts and central concepts that appear on the CSTC comprehensive exam.

Course Description

When women are included in the history of philosophy, they are presented as agitators for their rights in the political and domestic spheres. While writings by women from Christine de Pizan to Mary Wollstonecraft and beyond are crucial to the history of feminism, more recently scholars have discovered that women also play major roles in mainstream philosophy. Some, like Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and Anne Conway, are interlocutors with male philosophers, and because philosophy was still essentially conversational, their ideas mesh and surface together. This course explores the women who thought with and wrote with others, but also those who produced significant works of their own highly original design such as Margaret Cavendish.

Our investigation of women's philosophical writing will centre around their important interventions in the philosophical crisis around mechanistic materialism, the end of metaphysics, natural philosophy, and mind-body problems. One commonality among women thinkers is their contribution to non-dualisms or complex dualisms. The inclusion of women into traditional narratives of philosophy requires not only recognizing their agency in the conceptualization of innovative ideas, but also the various genres in which they wrote. Women do not always mimic the structure and argumentation of the systematic philosophical treatise and instead follow more eclectic modes. Thus, we will also look at the genres of satire and of devotional poetry by women as alternative locations for nondualist thought. The larger questions addressed by the course are about how the history of philosophy is made, and how we might expand the very notion of philosophizing into its varied forms, and in both personal and impersonal voices, for the goal of inclusivity.

Syllabus:

Primary texts will include:

Excerpts from Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, Hobbes, and Boyle as background

René Descartes, *Meditations*

The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes

Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*

The Conway letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and their Friends, 1642-1684 (excerpts)

Katherine Philips, selected poetry

Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World; Poems and Fancies*; selected other writings

Secondary texts will include contemporary scholarship by women historians of philosophy such as Jacqueline Broad, Alison Peterman, Marleen Rozemond, Lisa Shapiro, Emily Thomas, Emma Wilkins and others along with articles which critique and revise the historicization of philosophy.