

Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences 18

Joel Katzav  
Krist Vaesen  
Dorothy Rogers *Editors*

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# Knowledge, Mind and Reality: An Introduction by Early Twentieth-Century American Women Philosophers

# **Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences**

Volume 18

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As the historical records prove, women have long been creating original contributions to philosophy. We have valuable writings from female philosophers from Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and a continuous tradition from the Renaissance to today. The history of women philosophers thus stretches back as far as the history of philosophy itself. The presence as well as the absence of women philosophers throughout the course of history parallels the history of philosophy as a whole.

Edith Stein, Hannah Arendt and Simone de Beauvoir, the most famous representatives of this tradition in the twentieth century, did not appear from nowhere. They stand, so to speak, on the shoulders of the female titans who came before them.

The series *Women Philosophers and Scientists* published by Springer is of interest not only to the international philosophy community, but also for scholars in history of science and mathematics, the history of ideas, and in women's studies.

Joel Katzav · Krist Vaesen · Dorothy Rogers  
Editors

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*To Joseph Berkovitz, Eric Olson and,  
especially, Christopher S. Hill, who made it  
possible for me to work as a philosopher.*

*—Joel Katzav*

*To Mary Ellen Waithe, Therese Boos  
Dykeman, and in memory of Sue Weinberg,  
who welcomed me to the world of  
women-in-philosophy.*

*—Dorothy Rogers*

*To Jaap Van Brakel, who introduced me to  
classical pragmatism, and thereby to the  
consolation of philosophy.*

*—Krist Vaesen*

# Series Foreword

## Women Philosophers and Scientists

The history of women's contributions to philosophy and the sciences dates back to the very beginnings of these disciplines. Theano, Hypatia, Du Châtelet, Agnesi, Germain, Lovelace, Stebbing, Curie, Stein are only a small selection of prominent women philosophers and scientists throughout history.

The Springer Series *Women Philosophers and Scientists* provides a platform for publishing cutting-edge scholarship on women's contributions to the sciences, to philosophy, and to interdisciplinary academic areas. We therefore include in our scope women's contributions to biology, physics, chemistry, and related sciences. The Series also encompasses the entire discipline of the history of philosophy since antiquity (including metaphysics, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, etc.). We welcome also work about women's contributions to mathematics and to interdisciplinary areas such as philosophy of biology, philosophy of medicine, sociology, etc.

The research presented in this series serves to recover women's contributions and to revise our knowledge of the development of philosophical and scientific disciplines, so as to present the full scope of their theoretical and methodological traditions. Supported by an advisory board of internationally esteemed scholars, the volumes offer a comprehensive, up-to-date source of reference for this field of growing relevance. See the listing of planned volumes.

The Springer Series *Women Philosophers and Scientists* will publish monographs, handbooks, collections, anthologies and dissertations.

Paderborn, Germany  
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Editors-in-Chief  
Ruth Hagenruber  
Mary Ellen Waithe  
Gianenrico Paganini

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# Chapter 1

## American Women Philosophers: Institutions, Background and Thought



Joel Katzav, Dorothy Rogers, and Krist Vaesen

**Abstract** This chapter provides the background to the American women philosophers' works that are introduced and collected in *Knowledge, Mind and Reality: An Introduction by Early Twentieth-Century American Women Philosophers*. We describe the institutional context which made these works possible and their methodological and theoretical background. We also provide biographies for their authors.

### 1.1 Introduction

Attention to women in philosophy since the publication of Mary Ellen Waithe's four-volume *History of Women Philosophers* in the 1980s has led to a large number of recovery projects. Recent scholarship includes the current work; a special issue in *Australasian Philosophical Review*; Springer's new book series on women in philosophy and the sciences; forthcoming Oxford handbooks on women philosophers; a series of articles on women in the history of philosophy initiated by the American Philosophical Association (APA); and an academic journal dedicated to research on

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women in the history of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In addition, a number of institutional initiatives are in place to enhance and examine women's role in philosophy. In recent years, the APA has introduced programs and grant funding to support gender representation in the discipline. The British Philosophical Association collaborated with the Society of Women in Philosophy to conduct a study about the status of women in the profession—a ten-year follow-up to the organization's research in 2011. Similarly, the Canadian Philosophical Association recently examined the representation of women in philosophy programs, which remain relatively low at all levels, from undergraduate enrolments to senior faculty positions (20–30%). Both the British and Canadian studies recognize the recent expansion of research on women philosophers as a positive development that may help advance gender inclusion in the discipline in the future.<sup>2</sup> Yet the women-in-philosophy movement has also contributed to the development of a parallel track, as it were, in the discipline, with women's contributions running alongside the work of canonical male figures. This phenomenon has led to others: women are considered only auxiliary figures who had little impact in the discipline, during their own time or in our own; women's ideas are often validated in and through their similarities to masculine philosophers' thought; canonical male figures continue to be at the center of philosophy and their work taken as the starting point for the majority of our discussions. In the American context, these tendencies coincide with a long-held myth that in the twentieth century analytic methods and claims emerged to challenge and ultimately to undermine philosophical idealism and speculative traditions, both of which had been dominant in the U.S.A. and Canada for decades.

With this volume, we aim to continue to contribute to recognising the place of women in twentieth century philosophy. We aim, to begin with, to do so by offering a resource for diversifying the curriculum. The work—mostly articles but also some book chapters—collected here is on topics standardly covered in knowledge and reality courses and is by more or less forgotten American women philosophers who were active from at least the early decades of the twentieth century. We also aim to offer a resource for the history of philosophy. We are providing materials for a history of philosophy that includes women as originators of what turned out later to be historically important philosophy as well as explorers of significant but relatively neglected avenues of thought. To some extent, this counters the parallel track

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<sup>1</sup> The *Australasian Philosophical Review* edition includes articles on Grace Andrus de Laguna, co-curated by Krist Vaesen and Dorothy Rogers <https://aap.org.au/APR>; the Springer series is *Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences*, edited by Marie Ellen Waithe, Ruth Hagen-gruber, and Gianni Paganini <https://www.springer.com/series/15896>; the Oxford handbooks include Lydia Moland and Alison Stone's edited collection (2021) on nineteenth-century American and British women philosophers, and Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar's edited collection (2021) on nineteenth-century women philosophers in the German tradition; the series of articles on women in the history of philosophy is published by *The Journal of the American Philosophical Association* <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-american-philosophical-association/women-in-the-history-of-philosophy>; the new journal is *Journal of the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists* (Brill) <https://brill.com/view/journals/jhwp/jhwp-overview.xml>.

<sup>2</sup> For a synopsis and links to each study, see Weinberg (2021). See also Rogers (2009).

narrative and enables a women-first narrative. Finally, we aim to contribute to a more complex perspective on the development of American philosophy. On this perspective, positions and methods associated with analytic philosophy were developed not primarily as a critical reaction to idealism in America and Britain but by idealists and those expanding the idealist tradition under the umbrella of speculative philosophy. The distinctiveness of the tradition of analytic philosophy was not really novelty on matters of substance but in its narrowing down of philosophy solely to its analytic side (Katzav, 2018; Katzav & Vaesen, 2022). Pragmatism also emerged, largely within the speculative wing of philosophy and, with philosophy more broadly, intersected with other fields of thought, science, education and moral/religious discourse in particular. Fields that were once under the purview of philosophy, such as psychology and anthropology, were established as new disciplines, largely because their leaders embraced empirical research. The recovery of the contributions of women philosophers is central to this project of correcting the narrative. Most of the authors covered here were developing the idealist tradition even while, as already indicated, some of them were contributing ideas that later became part of analytic philosophy. Given the goals of this book, our hope is that it will be of use to scholars and students in philosophy, intellectual history, American studies, and gender studies.

Within each of this volume's parts, readers will find an introduction, followed by selections from the writings of some of the women who contributed to the philosophical questions covered in the part. Each part's introduction offers a framing of the content of the subsequent selections in the part using terminology familiar within contemporary analytic philosophy. Further, each introduction uses this framework to situate the subsequent work in relation to some key debates, mostly within the analytic tradition. While some might find our approach anachronistic in places, we hope it will facilitate the integration of the work collected here into exciting courses in philosophy, the development of women-first narratives and a better understanding of who developed analytic ideas and arguments.

In Parts II and III (Knowledge and Perception and The Objectivity of Scientific Knowledge, respectively), the introductions and subsequent material primarily illustrate key positions and arguments that precede prominent equivalents in the analytic tradition. In Part I (The Nature of Philosophy), the introduction and subsequent material primarily illustrate relatively unfamiliar positions and arguments. The same is the case with regard to Parts V and VI (Time and Freedom and the Individual, respectively). Part IV (Mind and Matter) mixes positions that became familiar in later philosophy with relatively unfamiliar positions.

Thus, in Knowledge, we find Grace Andrus de Laguna and Mary Collins Swabey critiquing the idea of sense data and supporting aspects of coherentism about knowledge, much as analytic philosophers would later critique the sense-data based foundationalism of some early analytic figures, including of Bertrand Russell. In The Objectivity of Scientific Knowledge, we find the same women, as well as Thelma Zeno Lavine and Dorothy Walsh, developing sophisticated treatments of science that, despite belonging to the early decades of the twentieth century, fit well into post-logical empiricist philosophy of science. By contrast, in The Nature of Philosophy,

the views of philosophy offered by key analytic figures are contrasted with the speculative view of philosophy Mary Whiton Calkins presents as well as with Marjorie Silliman Harris' related, metaphysics-driven approach to ethics. Marjorie Glicksman Grene's contribution to the same part neatly illustrates the methodological pluralism of the time in American speculative philosophy. Similarly, in *Time*, the views on time covered by Calkins, Ellen Bliss Talbot and Grace Neal Dolson do not comfortably fit more recent, familiar categorisations of views about time. In *Freedom and the Individual*, we present the distinction between compatibilist and libertarian views of freedom and find Talbot, Harris and de Laguna developing relatively unfamiliar versions of libertarianism. In *Mind and Matter*, we find Margaret Floy Washburn and de Laguna engaging in an exchange which juxtaposes, in a way familiar from later philosophy of mind, dualism with functionalist treatments of the mental. Yet, in the same part, Calkins offers us an absolute idealist position, a kind of position that never became prominent within the analytic tradition.

We emphasise that the work included in this volume is by no means an exhaustive collection of the significant work by our contributors. Additional, though still incomplete, information about their work is provided below. So too, there are other early twentieth century American women philosophers who, partly because of our focus on providing a resource for teaching about knowledge and reality, do not have work in this volume. Such women include, among others, Christine Ladd-Franklin, Katherine Gilbert, Helen Huss Parkhurst and Isabelle Stearns.

The end of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth centuries saw American philosophy changing rapidly. During this period, academic philosophy underwent a wave of professionalisation. This stage of professionalisation encompassed institutional, methodological and theoretical developments. Institutional developments included (a) the creation of standardised graduate programs from the 1890s, (b) the creation of dedicated professional journals, including *The Philosophical Review* in 1892 and *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* in 1904, and (c) the creation of an association for academic philosophers, the APA, in 1900 (Auxier, 2005; Katzav & Vaesen, 2022). Further discussion of the institutional background to the work of women philosophers collected here is provided in Sect. 1.2 of this introduction. The methodological and theoretical developments included the development of widely shared frameworks that delineated the methodological approaches and theoretical tasks of academic philosophers, frameworks that helped to differentiate philosophy from related academic fields, especially from theology and psychology, which were also professionalising in similar ways (Auxier, 2005; Katzav & Vaesen, 2022). Further discussion of the methodological and theoretical developments during the period under consideration is found in Sect. 1.3. Section 1.4 provides a brief summary of the work of each of the authors collected in this volume.

## 1.2 Institutional Background

Women began entering academia at the end of the nineteenth century, and their careers and scholarly work were simultaneously facilitated and constrained by this. Women began earning doctorates in philosophy at progressive institutions: Cornell (1880), Smith College (1888), University of Michigan (1891), Yale (1896), and University of Chicago (1900). They also flourished as scholars by contributing to academic journals, by all accounts on an equal footing with men. Egalitarian male colleagues deserve credit in this regard. Cornell and the University of Chicago were founded with the intention of being institutions that were open to all, and faculty were hired with the understanding that this would be the case.

The University of Michigan began accepting women in 1870 and was among the first to provide women with opportunities for graduate study—significantly while John Dewey taught philosophy there along with George Sylvester Morris. Yale allowed women to earn degrees in some graduate programs at this early period, although it remained closed to female undergraduates until the late 1960s. Yale's philosophy department chair, George T. Ladd appears to have had egalitarian views, corresponding with early (1896) doctoral degree earner, Anna Alice Cutler. Particularly important for what follows, Jacob Gould Schurmann and James Edwin Creighton developed the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell University in the 1890s. Both adopted the egalitarian goals of the Cornell family in founding the University, something reflected in the fact that the School was more successful than other schools at the time in training and subsequently placing women philosophers in academic positions. Creighton supervised five of the women whose work is included in this volume.

Schurmann and Creighton (*The Philosophical Review*) and James Eugene Woodbridge and James McKeen Cattell (*The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*) set new standards for scholarship in philosophy, and by including women, they followed a precedent set by William Torrey Harris a generation earlier in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (1867–1893). Finally, regarding the new academic networks that developed at this time, women were charter members of both the western and eastern branches of the APA. This is at a time when membership in the APA was by nomination. In the Western Division, we see two women among forty-six men on the earliest membership lists. In the Eastern Division, there were eight women and fifty-seven men at the organization's first meeting. Correspondence of Harry Norman Gardiner, one of the APA's founders and leading figures, demonstrates that he was genuinely a champion of women's participation in philosophy, and in 1920, we see his fellow faculty member at Smith College, namely Alice Anna Cutler, serving on the Eastern APA's executive committee—the first woman to serve in that capacity.

Yet barriers continued to exist. Although universities were becoming more open to women, many elite institutions maintained men-only admissions policies. For instance, Johns Hopkins and Harvard gained notoriety by withholding doctorates from Christine Ladd-Franklin (1882) and Mary Whiton Calkins (1895), respectively.

And even the most egalitarian men often passed over women as teaching assistants in graduate programs or for faculty positions at co-educational colleges and universities. They simply assumed that men were more suited for leadership positions in their own institution and that women belonged at women's colleges—or a “petticoat regime” as William James once put it. Working at women's colleges, in turn, likely restricted opportunities for research and publication (James, 1986).<sup>3</sup> The first woman on record to earn a doctorate in philosophy and hold a full-time position at a co-educational college was Marietta Kies (Michigan Ph.D., 1891; Butler College Faculty, 1896–1899). Finally, women often gravitated toward areas of study within philosophy that were branching off into independent disciplines. These fields included education, religion, and—notably for our purposes, psychology and anthropology.

### 1.3 Theoretical Background

One of the key theoretical goals that helped shape the field of philosophy, including that of the philosophers whose work is collected here, was that of engaging closely with the established special sciences—including the natural sciences but also psychology, sociology and humanistic fields such as history—in order to illuminate and learn from them (Cohen, 1910; Creighton, 1902, 1912; Katzav & Vaesen, 2022; Morris, 1935). For many working in, or in the wake of, the idealist tradition, such engagement should include a critique of the sciences that brings out some of their limitations (de Laguna, 1951; Katzav & Vaesen, 2022). The tradition that grew through such philosophical engagement with science that aimed to go beyond science is the speculative tradition. Moreover, it was the function of reflecting on science in a systematic way which partly helped to differentiate philosophy from the sciences.

The requirement that philosophy engage with science broadly construed is clearly realised in the articles collected in the present volume. Calkins' ‘The Nature, Types and Value of Philosophy’ (1907, pp. 3–13, this volume, ch. 3), included in *The Nature of Philosophy*, tells us that philosophy should always start its investigations by reflecting on available scientific information. The two main pieces in *Knowledge and Perception* are parts of broader projects that reflect on science. One of these, ‘Pragmatism and the Form of Thought’ (this volume, ch. 10), by de Laguna and her husband, Theodore, is a chapter from the book *Dogmatism and Evolution: Studies in Modern Philosophy* (1910). This chapter provides a general understanding of knowledge that is part of the book's empirical investigation of scientific knowledge. Swabey's ‘The General Nature of Reason’ (this volume, ch. 11) is from her book *Logic and Nature* (1930) and is a general account of knowledge that fits into the book's rationalist account of scientific knowledge. All the pieces in *The Objectivity of Scientific Knowledge* focus specifically on investigating scientific knowledge. (Grace) de Laguna's ‘Dualism in Animal Psychology’ (1918a, this volume, ch. 19) and Washburn's ‘The Evidence of Mind’ (1917, pp. 27–37, this volume, ch. 18), both

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<sup>3</sup> See also Rogers (2020).



in *Mind and Matter*, present opposed perspectives on how psychology should investigate mental phenomena. These pieces also explore the nature of mental phenomena, partly in light of what the sciences teach us about these. Such exploration is further found, in the same part, in de Laguna's 'The Empirical Correlation of Mental and Bodily Phenomena' (1918b, this volume, ch. 20) and Calkins' 'The Personalistic Conception of Nature' (1919, this volume, ch. 21).

While engagement with the special sciences was generally important to philosophy, engagement with evolutionary ideas was particularly important. This was so partly because of Hegel's idealist, evolutionary account of the development of ideas, according to which thought's evolution is driven by logical tensions between ideas and the goal of developing a coherent system of ideas. So too, the idea of evolution was important because of Charles Darwin's subsequently developed theory of evolution, according to which biological evolution is driven by variation and natural selection (de Laguna & de Laguna, 1910). In light of these evolutionary views, American philosophers developed a variety of views of the nature of evolution as well as of how knowledge evolved. De Laguna's already mentioned empirical treatment of knowledge, to which Swabey objects, was an evolutionary one. A common theme of evolutionary theories of knowledge was that they took understanding types of cognitive states such as, e.g., belief or perception, to be a matter of understanding the type of function for which they had evolved (de Laguna & de Laguna, 1910; Pearce, 2020). De Laguna's theory of mind treats mental states as functional states, while Washburn and Calkins object to such treatments.

Philosophical engagement with science aimed not only to illuminate the nature and limits of scientific knowledge but also to illuminate what science tells us about reality as well as reality itself. In some cases, the immediate goal was to better understand what kinds of entities a special science was committed to as well as what it presupposed about how these interact and change. Here, the philosopher engaged in what might be called regional ontology. This goal is exemplified by the discussion of the nature of mental states noted in the previous paragraph but also in Walsh's 'Philosophical Implications of the Historical Enterprise' (1937, this volume, ch. 16). Further, these regional ontologies were to be imaginatively fit together to develop a more systematic metaphysics or vision of reality that finds a place for human beings in it and goes beyond established opinion. This search for a vision of reality is illustrated in the already mentioned discussions in *Mind and Matter*. In these studies, a key question is how material, mental and other phenomena fit together. Similarly, figuring out how humans fit in with an overall vision of reality drives the articles in *Freedom and Time*, where the question is what the human individual is and how human freedom might be reconciled with our being subject to historical, social and physical causation. The articles in *Time and the Individual* consider the nature of time but do so in relation to humans and their experience of time.

Thus far, we have looked at some of the methodological aspects of American academic philosophy during our period of interest. There were, however, also specific visions of reality which were particularly influential at the time and which helped to shape philosophical discussion. Most important was the influence of absolute or Hegelian idealism. Idealism is most commonly understood to be the view that

everything is, ultimately or fundamentally, mental or psychological. There is, on this view, nothing independent of mind. One variant of idealism thus construed identifies the mental with experience. One understanding of what it means to say that, fundamentally, everything is mental is that it is to say that everything either is a mental phenomenon, e.g., a self or experience, or is an abstraction from the mental. Alternatively, saying that, fundamentally, everything is mental can be thought of as saying that everything either is mental or is what it is/exists in virtue of the mental.

Absolute idealism is sometimes presented as adding to the kind of idealism just discussed, the claim that all things are ultimately one. Thus understood, absolute idealism is the view that all things are ultimately the mental or psychological states of one experience or mind-like being, the Absolute (Connelly & D'Oro, 2019; Creighton, 1917). The Absolute is called 'the Absolute' because everything supposedly depends on it, while it depends on nothing. This version of absolute idealism can be termed psychological absolute idealism. Calkins was a proponent of psychological absolute idealism. On Calkins' view, reality comprises a single person, of which all other things, including ourselves, are parts (1907; McDaniel, 2017).

A second version of absolute idealism, non-psychological absolute idealism, tends to accept that experience is fundamental but denies that experience is ultimately to be understood in mental or psychological terms. On this view, all experience essentially involves a subjective or psychological as well as a material pole, and neither is more fundamental than the other. Indeed, for some advocates of this form of absolute idealism, experience is also essentially social. Objective experience is possible only for a subject experiencing a material object within a broader social setting. Further, according to non-psychological absolute idealism, what makes any phenomenon revealed in experience real, and indeed what makes it what it is, is its function, that is, its meaning, value or aim. Finally, the value of phenomena comprises being a part of the total, coherent system of meaning. The Absolute, here, is the concrete, unified system of meaning (Creighton, 1917; Sabine, 1925; Swabey, 1920). Creighton was a proponent of non-psychological absolute idealism. (Marjorie) Harris, Swabey and Talbot, all Creighton's students, were also absolute idealists of this kind.

Absolute idealists agree that everything, including the human individual or self, is to be understood in terms of its dependence on the Absolute. This supposed dependence meant that not only, for the reasons given above, did philosophers need to address the question of what the sciences imply about the self and its freedom but also what absolute idealism implied about these. How could our choices be free if, ultimately, what we are is fully dependent on the Absolute? Similarly, the concern with time reflects absolute idealist concerns. Since all phenomena depend on the Absolute, time too must do so. But how can time be explained by something else, something that, since it explains time, cannot itself be temporal and thus cannot change? More broadly, in taking all phenomena to be dependent on the Absolute, absolute idealists were pressed to explain what this dependence amounts to.

One challenge posed by history is of particular concern for absolute idealism in its non-psychological variety. If aspects of reality are real by virtue of having some function in the total scheme of things, there should be nothing in history that does not have some broader function. History, however, suggests that not everything that happens makes sense, as part of a broader scheme of things.

The challenges within absolute idealism led to its further development as well as to the development of rival visions of reality. Thus, while some, like Calkins, Harris, Swabey and Talbot, continued to defend absolute idealism, others, such as de Laguna and her student, Walsh, shared the speculative approach to philosophy with the absolute idealists but did not endorse an absolute idealist vision of reality. Dolson, though arguing in a way that is suggestive of an absolute idealist position, does not leave enough work to determine her vision of reality. Washburn was largely a psychologist and does not offer an overall philosophical vision, so it is hard to situate her in a philosophical context beyond noting that her psychology incorporates a form of mind-body dualism.

The most prominent rival to absolute idealism in America was (classical) pragmatism, which was made prominent at the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth centuries by William James and John Dewey. Pragmatists shared with absolute idealists the view that philosophy needs to engage with science, and especially the theory of evolution, to learn about ourselves and reality. Pragmatists also agreed that reality, ultimately, is to be identified with experience. However, pragmatists denied that experience is a single unified system. Rather, on their view, experience comprises relatively fragmentary episodes in which tensions arise between the elements of experience, e.g., between expectations and events, and consciousness and reason are activated to resolve these tensions. Success at doing so amounts to making a judgement that guides future behaviour in a way that does not give rise to further tensions within experience. Here, it is the success of an individual judgement in guiding behaviour that is the criterion for its truth rather than its function in the entire system of experience. Moreover, a successful judgement is thus just a successful adaptation to a local, problematic situation. Pragmatists took themselves to be taking their cue from evolutionary theory here. On their view, judgements were adaptations to specific circumstances in the same way as evolved behaviours generally were such adaptations (Pearce, 2020).

The pragmatist view of experience does not imply that all aspects of experience have some function within broader experience. Experience is, for them, evolving and potentially unpredictable. This led pragmatists to different views of scientific knowledge, of the self and of other phenomena than absolute idealist ones. Scientific knowledge can, for example, more easily be viewed primarily as a tool for managing what is experienced rather than as a theoretical system that aims to fit all of experience together. Nor, given that judgement does not ultimately aim at a systematisation of all experience, is there a need to assume that everything can be explained in psychological, or other, terms. From amongst our authors, Thelma Zeno Lavine was a pragmatist. Calkins, de Laguna and Talbot were critics of pragmatism, though de Laguna was also influenced by pragmatism.

Some pragmatists, it is important to emphasise, not only rejected absolute idealism but also the speculative approach to philosophy that came with it. For them, pragmatism did not come with a metaphysics but focused on a view of knowledge and problem resolution (Katzav & Vaesen, 2022). A similar rejection of speculation was part of the realist, analytic response to the issues with absolute idealism, a response developed by, for example, Edwin Bissett Holt, George Edward Moore, Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones, Ralph Barton Perry and Bertrand Russell. This response

was primarily characterised by a rejection of the speculative tendency to go beyond established opinion in making claims about reality (Katzav, 2018; Katzav & Vaesen, 2017).

Non-American influences on American women philosophers writing during the first half of the twentieth century were also significant. European philosophers were, during this period, reacting to Kantian and Hegelian philosophies. Moreover, many of these reactions involved a concern with the meaning of human experience as well as other concerns shared with American philosophers. Thus, in the early decades of the twentieth century, some American philosophers, including Talbot and Harris, developed their views in dialogue with the work of Henri Bergson, who sympathised with the pragmatist view that reason was primarily a practical instrument but, unlike the pragmatists, took us to have direct intuitive knowledge of our own natures and of time. Later in the century, some American philosophers engaged in dialogue with, and sometimes joined, the existentialist and phenomenological tradition. Here too, Americans found philosophers engaged in understanding experience and the role of the subject in experience. Among our authors, de Laguna and Grene were particularly engaged with phenomenology and existentialism, with Grene identifying these as her primary influences.

## 1.4 Individual Thought

### 1.4.1 *Mary Whiton Calkins (1863–1930)*

Mary Whiton Calkins studied at Smith College, earning a BA in 1885 and an MA (in classics and philosophy) in 1887. She continued her graduate studies at Harvard, under William James, Josiah Royce and Hugo Münsterberg, but had to do so unofficially, given that the university refused formally to admit women. Her dissertation was entitled *Experimental Research on the Association of Ideas*. Despite never officially being conferred with a Harvard degree, she became an associate (1896) and subsequently full professor (1898) in philosophy and psychology at Wellesley College. Calkins published much in both fields of study. Her work on memory in psychology is still influential today (McDonald, 2005). She became the first woman to serve as the President of both the American Psychological Association (1905) and the American Philosophical Association (1918).

Calkins identified philosophy with metaphysics and took the results of the special sciences to be the starting point of metaphysics. Metaphysics aims, on her view, to explain these results and in doing so to investigate the fundamental nature of things, especially of all-that-there-is. At the same time, she thought that science deals with abstractions and thus that the metaphysicians' engagement with science should involve criticism of it. The system of metaphysics she constructed was a form of personal absolute idealism. On her view, ultimately, all phenomena are reducible to selves and aspects of selves, where selves are conceived of as immaterial. Moreover,

all finite selves are part of a single, all-encompassing self (1907). Importantly, Calkins posits a hierarchy of selves, from complex ones such as human selves, to simple ones, such as single-celled animals. The material world comprises the experiences of immaterial selves, including even of earth worms and amoeba (1919). Calkins was a sharp critic of the opponents of idealism, including, for example, of early analytic philosophy, along with its realism (1911, 1925) and of pragmatism (1925), and offered, in addition to her absolute idealism and criticism of opposing philosophies, a psychology and an ethics. Her psychology is centered on understanding the self with the aid of introspection; she defends such a view against forms of behaviourism that were dominant at the time (1901, 1921). Her ethics builds on her metaphysics and psychology, proposing a view of the good as the community of all selves (1918). She wrote numerous articles. Her major books are *An Introduction to Psychology* (1901), *The Persistent Problems of Philosophy* (1907) and *The Good Man and the Good* (1918).

#### 1.4.2 Grace Andrus de Laguna (1878–1978)

Grace Andrus de Laguna received a BA (1903) and a Ph.D. (1906) from Cornell, the latter based on a dissertation, entitled *The Mechanical Theory in Pre-Kantian Rationalism*, a study that was supervised by James E. Creighton. De Laguna moved to Pennsylvania, where she taught at Bryn Mawr College until her retirement. She held a position as an assistant professor from 1912 to 1919, as an associate professor from 1922 to 1929, and as a full professor from 1929 onwards. She became chair of the philosophy department at Bryn Mawr in 1930, and President of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division 1941–1942. After retiring (1944), she continued to be a prolific writer.

De Laguna was one of the most original American philosophers of the early twentieth century as well as a significant contributor to linguistics and psychology. Her work in linguistics played an important role in the development of pragmatic linguistics (Nerlich, 2023). Her work in psychology strongly influenced Edward C. Tolman (1922), a key figure in the development of cognitive psychology (Carroll, 2017). In philosophy, she produced work in metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of science, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of language and political philosophy. Many of the positions and arguments she developed, including, for example, a critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction, meaning holism, a private language argument, functionalism about the mental and a modal ontology, were later to become central to analytic philosophy, though the precise channels of her influence are yet to be explored and thought, as she notes, analytic philosophy opposed her speculative approach to philosophy (Katzav, 2023). De Laguna's metaphysics, which was at the heart of her philosophy, aims to give us a vision of reality in its totality. She takes the world to comprise many distinct, ontologically fundamental individuals. Some individuals are purely material but, contrary to materialism, idealism and mind-body dualism, others have irreducible physical, biological, psychological and social

aspects. All individuals, further, have an irreducible teleological side, an aim. Individuals are, finally, thought by her as being irreplicable and qualitatively unique in a way that transcends what can be described in language and thus science. Her philosophy of science, in line with her metaphysics, takes the different special sciences to reveal different aspects of individuals using theories that are partially true or true-enough for the purposes to which they are put. Her epistemology of science is an evolutionary one that takes theory evaluation to be moderately holistic and relative to paradigm or research program success. Her evolutionary, dispositionalist view of properties is used to underpin a functionalist, teleological theory of the mental and the social (Katzav, 2022, 2023). She wrote many articles. Her published books are *Dogmatism and Evolution: Studies in Modern Philosophy* (1910), *Speech: Its Function and Development* (1927) and *On Existence and the Human World* (1966).

### 1.4.3 Grace Neal Dolson (1874–1961)

Grace Neal Dolson earned her BA (1896), MA (1897) and Ph.D. (1899) at Cornell, with a master's thesis on the philosophy of Henry More and a dissertation on Friedrich Nietzsche's thought. She was one of the first six women to earn a doctoral degree at Cornell, where she studied under Jacob G. Schurman and James E. Creighton. She taught at Wells College (1901–1911) and at Smith College (1911–1915). She was a charter member of the American Philosophical Association and was also a member of the American Psychological Association. In 1915, she gave up her faculty position to enter a religious order. There she adopted the name Sister Hilary.

Dolson was primarily an interpreter of the works of other philosophers and most of what she wrote focused on the works of More, Nietzsche and Henri Bergson. Nevertheless, her philosophical temperament does emerge in her selection of authors, and in her treatment, including her criticism, of these (Rogers, 2021, pp. 82–86). Dolson complains (1897) about More's limited ability to produce an argued system, which was not unrelated to his mysticism and thus to his ultimate rejection of reason. She is similarly dissatisfied with Nietzsche's lack of systematicity and his associated emphasis on the primacy of feeling over reason in guiding action. Thus, she appreciates the value of a position, such as Nietzsche's, that takes scepticism to its extreme, arguing that all judgement is in the end an individual expression of the will to power, but notes that, as a theory, such a position can but be judged by general rather than individual standards (1901, pp. 65–66). Similarly, she appreciates the originality of Nietzsche's version of egoism, but laments its arbitrariness (1901, pp. 100–103). Dolson's critique of Bergson is her most extensive critique. As she reads him, he has the view that the intellect is purely an instrument that guides action and that, in doing so, distorts the truth. True knowledge, in turn, is only possible through intuition and involves an identity between the subject and the object. Here, Dolson objects that knowledge is only possible if there is a distinction between subject and object. Instinct, further, is not deserving of the title 'knowledge' (1910). Dolson's books

were *The Ethical System of Henry More* (1897) and *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1901). Her key articles are “The idealism of Malebranche” (1906), “The Philosophy of Henri Bergson I” (1910) and “The Philosophy of Bergson II” (1910).

#### **1.4.4 Marjorie Glicksman (later Glicksman Grene) (1910–2009)**

Marjorie Glicksman Grene studied zoology at Wellesley College, before turning to philosophy (1931). She travelled to Germany to study with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, and received her Ph.D. in philosophy from Radcliffe College (1935) for a dissertation on *Existenzphilosophie*. She took up various temporary jobs (as an instructor and assistant) and was out of academia from 1944–1957. She continued to do work in philosophy, however, and met Michael Polanyi, with whom she would closely collaborate. In 1965 she became a professor in philosophy at the University of California Davis. She held this position until her retirement in 1978. From 1988 onwards, she was an Honorary University Distinguished Professor of philosophy at Virginia Tech.

Grene was important in introducing the work of key European philosophers, such as Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre, to America during the middle decades of the twentieth century. She is sympathetic to Heidegger’s goal of providing an understanding of human beings as embedded in the world but worries that his humans are not situated biologically or, except in an abstract way, historically. Sartre does better in understanding our situatedness but, in the end, also fails appropriately to illuminate how it meshes with our freedom. It is, on her view, Maurice Merleau-Ponty who, building on Heidegger’s ideas about human being, gives us a way of appropriately accounting for the biological and historical aspects of the human as well as its unique freedom (La Caze, forthcoming). Grene was, further, a philosopher of science. She argues against the reductionist view that all of science did, or could, share a single subject matter or methodology. She thus, for example, rejects the view that reality is ultimately physical, insisting instead that biology is an autonomous science (1966, ch. 8; 2002). With Polanyi, in a way that sits neatly with her work on European philosophy, she argues that scientific practice is grounded in a free commitment by individual scientists to a vision of the real and that scientific knowledge involves at least partly tacit clues that direct attention to objects in the world (ibid.). Grene was, further, an historian of philosophy and wrote on Aristotle, Descartes, Malebranche and Spinoza. She proposes that philosophical ideas should be articulated in a dialogue with past philosophers, a dialogue which understands them partly in relation to their historical contexts and partly in relation to their role in the broader philosophical dialogue (ibid.). Her books include, among others, *Dreadful Freedom: A Critique of Existentialism* (1948), *The Knower and the Known* (1966) and *The Understanding of Nature: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology* (1974).



### 1.4.5 *Marjorie Silliman Harris (1890–1976)*

Marjorie Silliman Harris earned her BA at Mount Holyoke College in 1913, where she studied under Ellen Bliss Talbot. She completed her Ph.D. in philosophy in 1921 at Cornell University, with a dissertation on Auguste Comte, under the supervision of James E. Creighton. She spent most of her academic career at Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Virginia (1922–1958), from 1930 onwards as a full professor. She served as a president of the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology (1940) and the Virginia Philosophical Association (1946).

Harris took the primary goal of philosophy to be that of exposing the limitations of our interpretations of experience and, in doing so, exploring the meaning of life and adapting our behaviour to experience. She took the attempt to offer a systematic interpretation of experience to be a suitable way of fulfilling this primary goal (1923) but also recognised the importance of a more problem-oriented approach to philosophy (1960). Her work focuses on a number of key philosophers, especially August Comte, Henri Bergson and Francisco Romero. She criticises Comte's positivism from a Hegelian perspective, for example, for failing to realise that science is not limited to knowledge of the phenomenal or subjective, and that reason must in the end aim at a vision that synthesises the subjective and the objective (1923). She expresses sympathy with Bergson's treatment of time and the individual, though she also criticises his irrationalism (1937). It is in discussion with Bergson that she develops her own idealist conception of the self and its freedom (1933, this volume, ch. 28). In the 1950s and 1960s, she developed a focus on South American philosophy and, especially, looked to Romero as a continuer of the idealist tradition and as a starting point for developing a philosophy of culture that helped to address the need for a new shared vision of reality for humanity (1960). Her books include *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (1923), *Sub Specie Aeternitatis* (1937) and *Francisco Romero on Problems of Philosophy* (1960).

### 1.4.6 *Thelma Zeno Lavine (1915–2011)*

Thelma Zeno Lavine earned a BA from Radcliffe College in 1936, and an MA (1937) and Ph.D. (1939) from Harvard University. She graduated with a dissertation entitled *The Naturalistic Approach to Theory of Knowledge*, studying with Ralph B. Perry and David W. Prall, and later with Clarence I. Lewis. She was a professor in philosophy at Brooklyn College (1946–1951), the University of Maryland (1955–1965), George Washington University (1965–1985) and George Mason University (1985–1988). She was awarded an Outstanding Faculty Member award at the University of Maryland, and an Outstanding Professor award at George Washington.

Lavine thought of philosophy as aiming to critically and systematically interpret the meanings we humans produce in the various compartments of knowledge production. The method of philosophy thus conceived she called 'verstehen', but she



recognised that it was just the method of traditional philosophy, including of idealistic dialectic (1953). She thought of pragmatism, and especially of John Dewey's pragmatism, as the best hope for continuing the tradition of the Enlightenment, with its aim of rationally improving the human lot (1988), while also adequately updating enlightenment thought for the twentieth century and beyond. Her espousal of pragmatism and *verstehen* thus conceived came along with a criticism of the positivist and logical empiricist form of naturalism according to which there is only one valid method of gaining knowledge, namely the inductive method (1953). She was equally critical of the postmodernist strand of European philosophy which, on her view, went too far in its critique of reason, leaving no room for constructive philosophy or interventions in society that aim to assist the marginalised (1988). Alongside her engagement with rival approaches to philosophy, Lavine also argued for a form of naturalism that extended to all aspects of knowledge. On her view, even the question of how evidence justifies theory should be subjected to the empirical, interpretative method; there is no *a priori* examination of the logic of justification (1944, this volume, ch. 14). Lavine wrote the book *From Socrates to Sartre: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy* (1984). Her key articles include, among others, "Naturalism and the Sociological Analysis of Knowledge" (1944), "What Is the Method of Naturalism?" (1953) and "The Interpretive Turn from Kant to Derrida: A Critique" (1989).

#### 1.4.7 Marie Collins Swabey (1890–1966)

Marie Collins Swabey received her BA at Wellesley College (1913), studying under Mary W. Calkins. She also earned an MA at the University of Kansas (1914) and a Ph.D. at Cornell University (1919), studying under James E. Creighton. Her doctoral dissertation was entitled *Some Modern Conceptions of Natural Law*. At New York University, Swabey was an instructor (1924–1928), an assistant professor (1928–1934), and an associate professor (1934–1956). She was a member of the American Philosophical Association and the Association for Symbolic Logic.

Swabey swam against the tide of the philosophy of her time. While empiricism and naturalism dominated American philosophy, she developed a sophisticated form of rationalism. Further, her rationalism underpinned the other aspects of her philosophy, including her metaphysics, aesthetics, and political philosophy. Her epistemology took reason to be a human capacity for grasping the nature of the world as a whole, one which, as such, can be thought of as supernatural. This capacity, in her view, makes possible *a priori* knowledge of logic and, via this *a priori* knowledge, of metaphysics and thus of the fundamental nature of reality. We have, on her view, synthetic *a priori* knowledge that the entities in our world are atoms, in that they are discrete entities with discrete quantifiable qualities. But these entities nevertheless have their qualities, and are governed by the laws of nature, by virtue of being part of a unified system of meanings, the universe or absolute. It is the job of philosophy to study the universe as a whole. Our ability to grasp reality as a whole, further, allows us to justify fundamental aspects of reasoning in science, including the use

of induction (Katzav & Vaesen, 2022; Swabey, 1920, 1930). Her rationalism carries over to her treatment of knowledge in the special sciences, for example, to her defence of a rationalist view of historical inquiry and criticism of then fashionable forms of relativism or scepticism about science (1954). Her defence of political liberalism involves showing that rationality justifies democracy in the same way that it justifies science (1937). Similarly, on her view, the comic involves recognition of an inconsistency and thus of impossible truth against a background assumption that the world exhibits a moral and rational order (1961). Swabey's books include *Some Modern Conceptions of Natural Law* (1920), *Logic and Nature* (1930), *Theory of the Democratic State* (1937), *The Judgment of History* (1954) and *Comic Laughter: A Philosophical Essay* (1961).

#### 1.4.8 Ellen Bliss Talbot (1867–1968)

Ellen Bliss Talbot first studied at Ohio State University, where she earned a BA in 1890. She then earned a Ph.D. in philosophy at Cornell University in 1898, with a study of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. This made her one of the first six women who managed to earn doctoral degrees in philosophy at Cornell before 1900. Her supervisor was James E. Creighton. In 1900, she became professor of philosophy at Mount Holyoke College, a position she held until 1936. At Mount Holyoke, she served as a chair of the philosophy department for over thirty years. Talbot was one of the first female members of the American Philosophical Association and one of seven women who also were members of the American Psychological Association.

Talbot was primarily a metaphysician. She focused on the nature of the human individual, its freedom and its relationships with time and value (see, e.g., her 1906, 1909, 1915, this volume, ch. 24). She also aimed to understand how and why objective value has come to be realised in our world (1906, pp. 119–122). Her explanation, which was not articulated fully, at least not in print, was a form of non-psychological absolute idealism. She believed in the fundamental reality of individuals developing in time (1915, this volume, ch. 24; 1917). She also believed, however, that this development to some extent realises, and aims to realise, the Absolute, conceived of as some form of ultimate value in which all oppositions found in actuality are unified (1906, p. 67). Her vision of reality is largely an interpretation of that of Fichte (Talbot, 1906, 1907). She was, however, critical of Fichte's treatment of the Absolute. Fichte, on her reading, thought of the actual world of finite consciousnesses as all that is actual, though this actuality, on his view, strives to realise the Absolute. This, in her view, raises the worry of whether Fichte had an adequate explanation of the extent to which we are forced to adapt to external constraints (1907). She criticises pragmatism's equation of reality with malleable experience on similar grounds (1907) and, indeed, argues against the pragmatist view that a theory's truth is its workability in favour of the view that its truth is its correspondence to the facts (1917). She wrote a single monograph, *The Fundamental Principle of Fichte's Philosophy* (1906). Key articles of hers include "The Philosophy of Fichte in its Relation to Pragmatism"

(1906), “Individuality and Freedom” (1909), “The Time-Process and the Value of Human Life. II” (1915) and “Pragmatism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth” (1907).

#### 1.4.9 Dorothy Walsh (1901–1982)

Dorothy Walsh first studied in Canada, receiving a BA from University of British Columbia in 1923 and an MA from the University of Toronto in 1924, before moving to Bryn Mawr in the U.S., where she earned her Ph.D. in 1926. Her doctoral dissertation was supervised by Grace A. de Laguna, and addressed the objectivity of the judgment of aesthetic values. In 1935 she became an assistant professor at Smith College, where she taught until her retirement in the early 1960s. She was a member of the American Philosophical Association throughout her career and remained professionally active into the 1970s.

Like her teacher, de Laguna, Walsh put metaphysics at the heart of philosophy. And, again like de Laguna and others working in the wake of absolute idealism, Walsh thinks of metaphysics as aiming to offer a vision of reality as a whole (1938, p. 76, this volume, p. 54). She, however, presented no fully developed system, but wrote on diverse issues within metaphysics, including the nature of facts, historical events, causation, modality and, especially, the objects of literature and, more broadly, art. She also wrote of diverse kinds of knowledge, including, especially, those provided by philosophy, history and art. It is through the investigation of types of knowing and experience that she developed her metaphysical theses. Walsh’s study of fact gives us a glimpse of a metaphysics according to which reality comprises non-deterministic processes in which possibilities are selected for actualisation. Facts, as opposed to processes, are epistemic rather than entities to which beliefs correspond. Factual knowledge is ultimately the givenness of certain processes to the largely volitional self (1943a, pp. 649–651). Art, on her view, provides a type of knowledge that is distinct from that of philosophy or the sciences. A work of art is a sensuous, self-sufficient structure that aims to mirror a kind of possible order, one characterised by “plenitude and richness with structural self-sufficiency” (1943b, p. 449). Literature, more than science, gives us ultimate knowledge, knowledge that is true to certain structures of experience, comes from living through events rather than inference and is redemptive in the face of the transitoriness of experience (1969). Walsh’s monographs include *The Objectivity of the Judgment of Aesthetic Value* (1936) and *Literature and Knowledge* (1969). Some of her significant papers are “Philosophical Implications of the Historical Enterprise” (1937), “The Poetic Use of Language” (1938), “Fact” (1943a) and “The Cognitive Content of Art” (1943b).

### 1.4.10 Margaret Floy Washburn (1871–1939)

Margaret Floy Washburn studied psychology, first at Vassar College and Columbia University, then at Cornell, to become the first woman at the university to receive a Ph.D. in psychology (1894). Washburn was a charter member of the American Philosophical Association. She was also a member of the American Psychological Association and served as its president in 1921. She taught psychology (and philosophy) at Wells College (1894–1900); part-time at Cornell, while also serving as a “warden” of women (1900–1902); the University of Cincinnati (1902–1908), and, during most of her career, as a full professor at Vassar (1908–1937). She was a prolific writer and still is one of the most cited psychologists of the twentieth century.

Washburn argued, contra some forms of behaviourism and in accord with the introspective approach of her teacher Edward B. Titchener, that essentially subjective mental states are an appropriate object of study for psychology, in addition to behaviour. This view is applied in her use of inductive reasoning, on the basis of shared anatomical structure and behaviour, to investigate the kinds of subjective mental states of dozens of kinds of animals, including microscopic organisms (1917). Her view that psychology should concern itself with the subjective and the physiological reflected a firm commitment to psycho-physical dualism (1919, Woodworth, 1948, p. 281). Her dualism went along with a dualistic treatment of consciousness, perception and learning. She argued that the subjective experience of consciousness is the result of the inhibition of one tendency to behaviour by another such tendency (1930). Perception involved two aspects, the having of subjective sensory impressions and motor preparation for action in relation to the object perceived. Learning, on her view, was a form of association between such states of motor readiness. In some cases, association between these states brought with it the association of ideas (1930, Woodworth, 1948, pp. 282–283). Washburn was, however, not primarily a theoretician. She was an experimentalist, performing experiments on skin sense, depth perception, after images, memory of emotional experience and more (Woodworth, 1948, pp. 279–280). Her books include *The Animal Mind: A Textbook of Comparative Psychology* (1908) and *Movement and Mental Imagery: Outlines of a Motor Theory of the Complexer Mental Processes* (1916).

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