

Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences 22

Clara Carus *Editor*

New Voices on Women in the History of Philosophy

 Springer

Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences

Volume 22

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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.

Clara Carus
Editor

New Voices on Women in the History of Philosophy

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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.

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Paderborn, Germany
Cleveland, USA
Vercelli, Italy

Ruth Hagenruber
Mary Ellen Waithe
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Contents

1	An Introduction to the Volume	1
	Clara Carus	
2	Marie de Gournay’s Use of Skeptical Strategies	7
	Margaret Matthews	
3	Elizabeth on Attributal Predication: Exclusive and Non-exclusive Dualism	23
	Emanuele Costa	
4	The Happy Life. Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht on Enlightenment Philosophy and Earthly Happiness	39
	Matilda Amundsen Bergström	
5	Conway’s World Soul and Monism	61
	Jonathan Head	
6	The Inseparability of Matter and Motion in Margaret Cavendish’s Metaphysics	79
	Pedro Pricladnitzky	
7	Émilie Du Châtelet’s Mathematical Fictionalism	93
	Maja Sidzińska	
8	Apricot Bonbons to a Free Man: Lispector and Spinoza	115
	Mary Peterson	
9	Dwelling in Improper Eternity: Rethinking Eschatology Based on Stein’s Phenomenology and Mysticism	129
	Tareq Ayoub	
10	To Feel Together. Gerda Walther’s Concept of Unification	141
	Daniel Neumann	

11 How Judging Becomes Political—Hannah Arendt’s Introduction of Judgment into the Political Realm 155
 Martin Baesler

12 Iris Murdoch and the Mystical Female Voice 173
 Silvia Conti

13 The Theory of the Aesthetic Situation of Maria Golaszewska (1926–2015) and Feminist Interventions in Philosophy 185
 Natalia Anna Michna

14 Divine Sovereignty, the Sexist Political Order, and Antigone’s Free Action 201
 Ebrahim Azadegan

Index 213

Editor and Contributors

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Clara Carus is Associate Faculty at the University of Oxford working on a DAAD funded research project on Émilie Du Châtelet's contribution to the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the Early Modern period. From 2020 to 2022, she was Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists at Paderborn University. She was previously Recipient of a 2-year DFG postdoctoral research project at Harvard University, where she worked on the idea of the senses as an uncertain and unreliable source of knowledge in the Early Modern rationalists. She earned her Ph.D. *summa cum laude* with a thesis on Kant and Heidegger from Freiburg University with 1-year Visiting Scholarship at Harvard University. She is interested in systematic questions in the history of philosophy and is specialized on the Early Modern rationalists, especially Émilie Du Châtelet, Leibniz and Wolff. She has strong interests and has published in phenomenology, especially Heidegger, Kant and the integration of women philosophers into our picture of the history of philosophy. She is Founding Member of New Voices at the Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Volume



Clara Carus

1.1 Introduction

The present volume features a collection of research papers developed through the scholarly network *New Voices on Women in the History of Philosophy*. The volume serves the purpose of recovering the work of brilliant women in the history of philosophy, politics, science and literature. It contains a compendium of selected papers on the work of intellectual women from across the ages and hailing from innumerable places. It boasts papers on Marie de Gournay, Elizabeth of Bohemia, Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht, Anne Conway, Margaret Cavendish, Émilie Du Châtelet, Clarice Lispector, Edith Stein, Gerda Walther, Hannah Arendt, Iris Murdoch, Maria Gołaszewska, as well as a paper on the literary figure, Antigone.

Until the end of the last century women's writings were suspiciously absent from teaching and scholarship in the discipline of philosophy. This has changed dramatically and exponentially over the last 50 years: we now know of a plethora of women from across all centuries and countries who have contributed significantly to philosophy, politics, science and literature. We have found entirely new work, discovered plagiarized works and accounted for books that had not been attributed to the actual female author. As more and more knowledge emerges on these women and their work, our perspective on the history of the disciplines is changing drastically. Many scholars world-wide are now working hard to explore these previously ignored and understudied figures. These scholars form a collected effort to correct our picture of the history of philosophy; one that was painted by men and women. The idea of *New Voices* was to support this growing trend by creating a space for exchange and collaboration. The group was founded by Clara Carus at the Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists, directed by Ruth E. Hagengruber, in 2020. *New Voices* is a highly productive network of international scholars with the shared purpose of

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recovering women's writings in the history of philosophy. The online New Voices Conference in February 2022 featured more than 70 speakers and 400 registered guests and was a glowing example of the growing strength of the network. New Voices now counts more than 100 members who actively pursue research on women in the history of philosophy.

But New Voices is more than the number of individuals of its group: it is a choir of different voices, creating a network of knowledge and academic support. By sharing their work and insights with an interested and knowledgeable audience they were able to grow together.

Many scholars in the field of women in the history of philosophy, when they first began to share their work on women philosophers with scholars in their field of interest or the respective period, experience that the source of their work is largely unknown to the audience. As a result, discussions at conferences or on talks, despite the well-meaning intention and interest of the audience, had to remain somewhat superficial. Many times, the work of women philosophers or scientists was compared to better known male figures in their period, while their contribution stood largely in the male figure's shadow. Through New Voices, and other dedicated projects in the field, detailed discussions on women philosophers emerged that had never been previously possible. Scholars involved were able to expand and deepen their knowledge through this exchange. They met like-minded colleagues with interests in the same female author. As a result, a number of collaborations evolved out of this network. Four members of New Voices, for example, held a panel on Du Châtelet at the British Society for the History of Philosophy Annual Congress 2022. In these ways, the detailed discussions on female authors in New Voices spilt over into other settings. Today, many women philosophers are on the brink of becoming canonical authors, which results in basic knowledge and the recognition of their work in teaching syllabi being expected of philosophy scholars in the respective field. By forming a network of scholars who work on women in the history of philosophy, New Voices is giving individual researchers in the group a wider scope material and of course people to work with and thereby receive better feedback. The group has thus manifested scholarly discussions on women in the history of philosophy in a research community that branches out to other research communities through each of its members who work in different positions, different countries, different historical periods, and different philosophical subfields.

This volume presents new cutting-edge research. It promotes entirely new insights into women's contributions to the history of philosophy and boasts papers spanning the centuries from Antigone to 20th century phenomenology, covering fields from logic to mysticism and from epistemology to political theory, stretching from Brazil to Early Modern Europe. While each piece of this volume was written by an individual author, they all profited from the information that is shared effectively through the many scholars involved in the project. The papers thus bring together the individual expertise and qualification of the author with the input and networking opportunities of New Voices.

The volume is representative of the immense scope of academic discussion women were involved in over the centuries as well as their varying styles and methods. The

papers consider philosophical positions in literature and drama, in letters and in classical philosophical treatises. The papers of this volume each contribute significantly to research on the individual women authors, who are all to date still understudied figures. The volume is structured in chronological order, with the exception of the last paper which considers Antigone as a female literary figure of Antiquity.

In the first paper, Margaret Matthews presents us with Marie de Gournay's use of sceptical strategies. She considers the apparent tension in Gournay's suggestion that Gournay will prove the equality between men and women by means of arguments, on the one hand, and the claim that she can only establish her conclusion through appeal to theological authority on the other. Matthews first considers Eileen O'Neill's popular solution to this tension. In O'Neill's interpretation, Gournay's arguments are aimed at showing the inability of reason to settle the equality question. Matthews then offers a convincing alternative solution which argues that Gournay is not a sceptic with regard to the power of reason and that her appeals to theological authority are not a response to the fideistic conclusion that the equality thesis is accessible through faith alone. Instead, Matthews argues, Gournay's adoption of sceptical strategies is better understood when considering her analysis of prejudice in her other feminist work, the *Ladies' Complaint*. In Matthews' assessment, Gournay's sceptical arguments do not address a problem with reason itself, but the social situation in which philosophical conversation occurs.

Elizabeth of Bohemia's philosophical work and position has so far predominantly been drawn from her letter exchange with Descartes. Emanuele Costa's paper in this volume provides us with a refreshing and promising new approach to her theory of predication, which presents her as a philosopher in her own right. He collocates her discussion of the notion of principal attributes and modifications within the context of a general abandonment of the Medieval conception of accidents and shows how Elizabeth displays an original and genuinely innovative theory of predication in this context. He views Elizabeth in the context of a dialogue with the Port-Royal logic of Arnauld and Nicole and shows that she was in fact an original contributor to the debate on the nature of predication. Costa argues that Elizabeth's interest in the subject involved an examination of the connection between a substance and its principal attributes, and specifically of the two key concepts of inseparability and inherence. The paper offers an intriguing new perspective on Elizabeth as a philosopher.

Matilda Amundsen Bergström shows that albeit not developing a consistent theory of the happy life, Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht is seriously engaged with the Enlightenment discussion on the happy life and an original contributor to the theme. In a careful analysis of three longer poems by Nordenflycht, Bergström presents Nordenflycht's elaborate considerations on how contemporary, enlightenment thought refigures the meaning of a happy life. Through her interpretation Bergström presents Nordenflycht as a writer who carefully considered the positive *and* the detrimental consequences of Enlightenment theories on the happy life.

Jonathan Head presents us with a new approach to the current debate on Anne Conway's monism by considering her conception of middle nature. The paper offers

an interesting new perspective on Conway's monism and offers an original explanation as to why she sometimes appears to hint towards existence monism (according to which nature is composed of a single substance), while only in fact committing herself to a type monism, in which nature is composed of an infinite number of substances. The paper is an important contribution to the currently heatedly debated theme of how monism in Conway is understood best.

Pedro Prikladnitsky's paper offers a reconstruction of Margaret Cavendish's argument for the conceptual inseparability of matter and motion. He argues that we can only understand her critique of mechanistic theories on the basis of her arguments for the inseparability of matter and motion, which thus become central to her metaphysical theory. Prikladnitsky's reconstruction of Cavendish's argument for the inseparability of matter and motion brings clarity into her complex position.

Maja Sidzińska's paper considers Émilie Du Châtelet's mathematical theory in relation to contemporary fictionalist theories and argues that Du Châtelet is an early fictionalist of mathematics. Sidzińska discusses Du Châtelet's metaphysical motivations for embracing a fictionalist theory of mathematics. The paper provides a theory about the systematicity and the priorities of Du Châtelet's theory of mathematics, while highlighting a link between historical and contemporary uses of fictions as well as issues in the metaphysics of science. The paper is an important contribution to the growing discussion on Du Châtelet's mathematics and presents her as a mathematical philosopher who was in many ways ahead of her time.

While scholars have noted the influence of Spinoza on Clarice Lispector, Mary Peterson is the first scholar to recognize and discuss Lispector's critical engagement with Spinoza's work. She argues that through the intimate relationship of two characters in *Near to the Wild Heart*, both of whom strive to be free in Spinozist terms but fail, Lispector shows that freedom must depend on more than reason alone. For Lispector, Peterson shows, freedom depends additionally on circumstances such as human relationships and societal structures. Peterson's paper develops an original and convincing perspective on Lispector's engagement with Spinoza, in which she is not a passive recipient of Spinoza's ideas, but an active and critical respondent, who develops her own position on freedom.

Tareq Ayoub's paper engages in a deep-going interpretation of Edith Stein's phenomenological mysticism before the backdrop of her engagement with eschatology as the study of "the last things." He argues that for Stein the life of finite beings is framed not by death in its capacity as life's inscrutable yet constitutive boundary-marker, but rather by its ontological dependence on, and participation in, the infinite source of life itself. Ayoub sensitively shows that Stein's analysis of death and dying draws attention to deep metaphysical and phenomenological questions surrounding the nature of time and experience. Ayoub shows that for Stein death opens up a new temporal dimension whereby our earthly finitude is transformed into a divinely-appropriated temporality that lacks any sort of finite limitation. He discusses the improper eternity that is attributed to human souls on this basis as resting between God's proper eternity and the timeliness of material beings.

Daniel Neumann discusses Gerda Walther's unique approach to sociality. He shows that for Walther sociality does not start with an act of apperception, with some

intellectual form of recognition of the other, but with a very immediate feeling. He presents unification (an emotional connection we involuntarily establish with others) as Walther's key concept of sociality. Neumann's paper sheds light on this concept and its various modifications, presented by Walther, to account for different forms of communities. Neumann's paper shows that Walther's concept of unification is still relevant today in the context of "we-experiences" in social ontology. In contrast to some contemporary approaches, one can understand collective social phenomena in Walther's theory as the plural within the self, rather than being a pluralization of self-awareness. The paper is thus an important contribution not only to research on Gerda Walther, but also to contemporary social ontology.

Martin Baesler's paper considers Hannah Arendt's conception of reflective judgement and its significance for the political realm. The paper highlights a core aspect of Arendt's political theory: the idea that reflective judgement can become a form of civic interaction and communication in political associations. The apparently subjective act thus becomes communal and political for Arendt. The paper shows, in accordance with Arendt, that judgement is critical for preserving individual political freedom.

Silvia Conti's paper engages with Iris Murdoch's female voice, which Conti interprets as mystical. She argues that despite her ambiguous position on feminism, Murdoch's philosophical production is evidence of a mystical feminine engagement, inherited from Simone Weil and Julian of Norwich. Conti sheds light on Murdoch's redefinition of the human being as an ethics of vision; a moral pilgrimage from illusion to reality.

In her contribution on Polish Academic Maria Gołaszewska (1926–2015), Natalia Anna Michna discusses Gołaszewska's conception of empirically and anthropologically oriented aesthetics. Michna sees in this conception a prime example of a theory that accounts for the perspective of gender, and which in this sense should be acknowledged as having anticipated the main postulates of contemporary feminist philosophy. Michna presents Gołaszewska's philosophy as a valuable response to the search in feminist aesthetics for a suitable description of women's experiences related to art and aesthetic perception. She stresses that Gołaszewska's theories were developed chiefly on the basis of feminist philosophy and feminist epistemology (Elizabeth Anderson, Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, Elizabeth Potter) and shows that in recent years they have found creative applications in feminist aesthetics (Anne Eaton).

In the last paper of this volume, Ebrahim Azadegan departs from a longstanding feminist critique that the belief in God's sovereignty, understood as God having supreme authority over all creatures and controlling them according to His own will, has served to bolster the non-egalitarian and sexist political order of our world. A sovereign ruler can easily claim that his model of government is in accordance with and conforms to the model of divine sovereignty. Feminist theology, by criticizing this conception of divine sovereignty, proposes a reconciliatory resolution between theology and a nonsexist non-paternalist socio-political order, whereas the lack of this sort of reconciliatory resolution leads to tragedy. Azadegan, by interpreting Sophocles' *Antigone*, reads Antigone's deed as a feminist critique of the sexist/racist

political order of her day interpreted through her feminist theology. In his conclusion, he argues that if we see God's power and sovereignty as bestowing freedom and love, which from Antigone's feminist perspective it does, then the divine law of love and mercy and the human law of the nonsexist polis can be reconciled.

On the whole, the volume is a contribution to a broader narrative enabling women in the history of philosophy to become ever more visible. While the individual chapters each offer a valuable contribution to their respective field, author and time period, which will be of interest for other scholars in the respective area, the volume as a whole can be read as evidence of a growing library, which uncovers and recovers the women who shaped our united intellectual history.

Clara Carus is head of the DFG-Research Project "The Relationship of the Theory of Hypotheses to the Principles of Knowledge in Émilie Du Châtelet" at the Department of Philosophy and the Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists at Paderborn University. Previously, she was Associate Faculty at the University of Oxford working on a DAAD funded research project on Émilie Du Châtelet's contribution to the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the Early Modern period. From 2020–2022, she was Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Paderborn University. She is interested in systematic questions in the history of philosophy and is specialized on the Early Modern rationalists, especially Émilie Du Châtelet, Leibniz and Wolff. She has a further interest in Heidegger, Kant and the integration of women philosophers into our picture of the history of philosophy.

Chapter 2

Marie de Gournay's Use of Skeptical Strategies



Margaret Matthews

Abstract This chapter offers a new interpretation of Marie de Gournay's use of skeptical strategies in *The Equality of Men and Women* in light of her discussion of prejudice in *The Ladies' Complaint*. Readers of *The Equality of Men and Women* have often been puzzled by an apparent tension in Gournay's methodology. On the one hand, she suggests that she will prove the equality of men and women by means of arguments; on the other hand, she suggests that she can only establish her conclusion through appeal to theological authority. Eileen O'Neill offers one influential solution to this puzzle, interpreting Gournay as a Pyrrhonian skeptic and a Catholic fideist. In this interpretation, Gournay's arguments are equipollent arguments aimed at showing the inability of reason to settle the equality question, and her appeals to theological authority are based on a fideistic understanding of the relation between faith and reason. In this chapter, I will argue instead that Gournay is not a skeptic regarding the power of reason, and that her appeals to theological authority are not a response to the fideistic conclusion that the equality thesis is accessible through faith alone. Instead, I will show that Gournay's adoption of skeptical strategies can be better understood in light of her analysis of prejudice in her other feminist work, *The Ladies' Complaint*. Concretely, I will show that the problem to which Gournay's skeptical arguments respond is not a problem with reason itself, but with the social situation in which philosophical conversation occurs.

2.1 Challenges to Establishing Gournay's Philosophical Significance

Marie de Gournay's *The Equality of Men and Women* (1622; 1641) is often credited with offering one of the first sustained philosophical arguments for the moral and intellectual equality of men and women (Broad & Green, 2009, 125; Ilsley, 1963, 205; O'Neill, 2011, 448). Whereas many earlier writers associated with the *querelle*

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des femmes debate over the relative merits of men and women proposed either the superiority of men with respect to women, or the superiority of women with respect to men, Gournay asserts that “For my part, I fly all extremes; I am content to make [women] equal to men, given that nature, too, is as greatly opposed, in this respect, to superiority as to inferiority” (Gournay, 2002, 75). Through her presentation of arguments in support of the thesis that men and women are moral and intellectual equals, Gournay transforms the preexisting *querelle des femmes* debate into a philosophical rather than merely literary genre.¹

The precise way that Gournay intends her arguments to support her thesis, however, has been difficult for commentators to establish (Lewis, 1999, 56–63; O’Neill, 2007, 20–25). On the one hand, Gournay often suggests that she will demonstrate the equality of men and women by means of arguments (Gournay, 2002, 75; 95). In her conclusion to *The Equality of Men and Women*, for example, she remarks that “in view of the instances, authorities, and reasons noted in this discourse,” she has proven “the equality—let us even say the unity—of graces and favors on the part of God toward the two sexes” (Gournay, 2002, 95). On the other hand, despite these claims, Gournay also concedes that her conclusion will always be contested, thus suggesting that she does not understand her arguments as fully decisive. She writes, “And if I judge well, either of the worthiness or of the capacity of women, I do not propose at present to prove it with reasons, since the opinionated might dispute them” (Gournay, 2002, 76). To complicate matters even further, she adds that she will establish her thesis only on the basis of authority, namely “the authority of God himself, of the Fathers—the buttresses of His Church—and of those great philosophers who have served as a light to the universe” (Gournay, 2002, 76; see also Bijvoet, 1989, 8–9).

The reader is thus left to wonder what role Gournay intends her arguments to serve (Lewis, 1999, 57; O’Neill, 2007, 23). If she does not intend them to justify her equality thesis, acknowledging that these arguments can always be disputed, and insisting that this equality thesis can only be established through theological authority, why would she include them in the first place? Some commentators have concluded that this is simply a failure on Gournay’s part, and that her methodology is ultimately lacking in rigor and internal consistency. Mary Rowan, for example, argues that Gournay uses an “outmoded exegetical technique” and a method of “conscious eclecticism” with which she “twisted” her sources to “better fit her purpose” (Rowan, 1980, 276). Similarly, Maja Bijvoet concedes that although Gournay does not intend to be a “systematic philosopher,” nevertheless, her method has “severe weaknesses” and her arguments are “muted by obvious contradictions” (Bijvoet, 1989, 10).

In contrast, Douglas Lewis offers a very different interpretation of Gournay’s rhetorical strategies, helpfully proposing that they should be considered in light of her intended audience (Lewis, 1999, 56). Lewis argues that *The Equality of Men and Women* is directed toward women and that Gournay’s goal is to “persuade them to believe in their own self-worth and thereby to strive for accomplishment” (Lewis, 1999, 56). According to Lewis, Gournay’s arguments serve to “induce women to

¹ For a discussion of the ‘*querelle des femmes*’ debate, see MacLean (1977) and O’Neill (2011).

accord their own perceptions, including their self-perceptions, the authority those perceptions have by nature” (Lewis, 1999, 56). In Lewis’ view, Gournay’s goal in exhorting her women readers to grant authority to their perceptions is to “overturn her women readers’ trained habit of deferring to men’s perceptions and opinions” (Lewis, 1999, 56).

With the interpretations of Rowan, Bijvoet, and Lewis we run into the following problem, however: if Gournay’s arguments are flawed and inconsistent (as Rowan and Bijvoet maintain), or if they are only intended to persuade women to recognize the authority of their own perceptions and overcome learned habits of deference (as Lewis maintains), then it seems that they cannot play a very robust justificatory role in establishing the equality thesis (O’Neill 2007, 23–24). Moreover, if the presence of arguments in support of a thesis is what renders Gournay’s treatise *philosophical* rather than merely *literary*, and Gournay’s arguments fail to serve a robust justificatory role in establishing her thesis, can we still understand her treatise as a work of philosophy?

Eileen O’Neill offers an influential and illuminating solution to these puzzles, interpreting Gournay’s methodology in terms of Pyrrhonian skepticism, Catholic fideism, and the influence of her mentor, Michel de Montaigne (O’Neill, 2007). With regard to Gournay’s alleged skepticism, O’Neill writes, “When [Gournay] states that she will not prove her thesis of equality ‘by means of reasoning, since the opinionated can always dispute this,’ she is voicing Pyrrhonian doubts about reason’s ability to assent in the face of equipollent arguments” (O’Neill, 2007, 25). Regarding Gournay’s alleged fideism, O’Neill argues that when Gournay proposes that she will prove her equality thesis with the assistance of theological authorities, she is “signaling her Catholic fideism: our knowledge of woman’s true nature cannot be known by reason, but only through divine revelation” (O’Neill, 2007, 25). According to O’Neill, then, Gournay’s arguments do not play a justificatory role in demonstrating the positive thesis that men and women are moral and intellectual equals (O’Neill, 2007, 25). Nevertheless, she maintains that this does not render Gournay’s treatise unphilosophical. Instead, O’Neill argues that Gournay’s arguments play a “skeptical” role of displaying the “vanity of reason” (O’Neill, 2007, 25). For O’Neill, the goal of Gournay’s arguments is ultimately a therapeutic one; that is, these arguments serve to disabuse us of the possibility of rationally demonstrating *any* dogmatic thesis regarding *either* the equality *or* inequality of men and women (O’Neill, 2007, 25). According to O’Neill, this is because Gournay believes that the equality thesis cannot be established through reason at all; instead, it is established in Scripture and accessed through faith (O’Neill, 2007, 25).

O’Neill’s ‘skeptical fideist’ interpretation is helpful for recovering the philosophical character of Gournay’s thought insofar as it situates her contributions in relation to other philosophical movements of the time, specifically Renaissance skepticism and Catholic fideism, two areas commonly associated with her mentor, Michel de Montaigne (O’Neill, 2007, 35). Nevertheless, this interpretation has clear limitations, one of which is the following: in her writings beyond *The Equality of Men and Women*, Gournay presents many arguments with positive conclusions, particularly in the domain of moral philosophy. As Emily Butterworth has shown, for

example, Gournay was deeply concerned with the moral implications of slander (Butterworth, 2006). As Anna Lia Franchetti has shown, Gournay's moral philosophy is heavily influenced by ancient Stoicism (Franchetti, 2006). As Marguerite Deslauriers has argued, even within *The Equality of Men and Women*, Gournay advances a positive argument for the sameness of rational soul possessed by men and women (Deslauriers, 2019).

Gournay's presentation of positive views on moral philosophical issues would seem to be in tension with any thoroughgoing skepticism, especially of the Pyrrhonian variety attributed to her by O'Neill. Admittedly, on O'Neill's reading, Gournay's skepticism is what commentators would call 'urbane' rather than 'rustic;' that is, her skepticism does not target the "non-theoretical judgments of ordinary life," only attacking theoretical judgments concerning the ultimate nature of reality (O'Neill, 2007, 24). Nevertheless, even if Gournay's skepticism were the less radical 'urbane' variety, the conclusions she draws regarding moral matters such as virtue and vice would seem to be precluded. For this reason, I will propose that although Gournay *adopts* many Pyrrhonian strategies to undermine the dogmatic conclusions of her misogynistic opponents, nevertheless, Gournay is not herself a thoroughgoing skeptic.

In what follows, I will present another avenue for interpreting Gournay's argumentative and rhetorical strategies in *The Equality of Men and Women*. I will show that Gournay's use of skeptical strategies in *The Equality of Men and Women* can be better understood in light of her other feminist work, *The Ladies' Complaint* (1626; 1641). In *The Ladies' Complaint*, Gournay exposes the variety of ways that prejudice excludes women from full participation in philosophical discourse. What I will show is that Gournay adopts skeptical strategies in response to the issue of prejudice, and not in response to skeptical doubts regarding the power of reason to settle the equality debate.

2.2 The Problem of Prejudice in *The Ladies' Complaint*

In *The Ladies' Complaint*, Gournay states that her central topic is "the subject of conversation, with particular regard to the participation of women" (Gournay, 2002, 103). On the surface, *The Ladies' Complaint* does not appear to have the argumentative rigor of *The Equality of Men and Women*. It has even been described by Marjorie Ilesley as an "outburst of temper" based on Gournay's "own bitter experience" (Ilesley, 1963, 209). Despite its surface-level lack of argumentative rigor, I will show that this work contains an important aspect of Gournay's philosophical thought, one that can help us better understand the argumentative and rhetorical strategies she adopts in her more overtly philosophical work, *The Equality of Men and Women*.

Throughout *The Ladies' Complaint*, Gournay explores the ways women are excluded from participation in philosophical discourse, citing numerous examples of ways that women are ignored, dismissed, and treated as less credible by their male interlocutors. Throughout *The Ladies' Complaint*, the phenomenon that Gournay

explores shares much in common with what contemporary philosophers term 'epistemic injustice.'² As the concept has been coined and developed by Miranda Fricker, "epistemic injustice" is "a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (Fricker, 2007, 1). As Fricker argues, epistemic injustice exists in multiple forms, including "testimonial injustice" which "occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (Fricker, 2007, 1). Although Gournay obviously does not use the language of contemporary social epistemology to describe the effects of prejudice in philosophical conversation, the phenomenon she is discussing, namely the ways that women are wronged in a specifically *epistemic* capacity, shares much in common with the concepts of 'epistemic' and 'testimonial injustice' as they are used today. For this reason, I will borrow some of Fricker's vocabulary to explain Gournay's discussion of prejudice.

In what follows, I will present some of the main points that Gournay establishes in *The Ladies' Complaint*. In the first paragraph, Gournay establishes the ethical stakes of her topic. Beginning with an ironic allusion to the Beatitudes, she writes:

Blessed art thou, Reader, if you are not of that sex to which one forbids everything of value, thereby depriving it of liberty; indeed, to which one also forbids almost all the virtues, removing from it public duties, responsibilities, and functions—in a word, cutting it off from power, by the moderate exercise of which most of the virtues are formed—with the object of setting up as its only happiness, its crowning and exclusive virtues, ignorance, servitude, and a capacity to play the fool if a woman likes that game (Gournay, 2002, 101).

Gournay addresses her reader, a reader who she presumes to be male, and calls him "blessed" because he is unimpeded in the exercise of the capacities that allow him to develop virtue. Gournay frames this "blessedness" in negative terms: the reader is blessed because he is *not* forbidden "everything of value" and because he is *not* impeded in his exercise of power and consequent development of the virtues.

Although Gournay does not explicitly address any arguments for the equality of men and women here, her remarks have implications for this debate. In *The Equality of Men and Women*, for example, Gournay rehearses and challenges various arguments for the idea that women are unequal to men due to an allegedly distinct and inferior nature (Gournay, 2002, 81–93). Although Gournay does not explicitly attack these arguments from nature in *The Ladies' Complaint*, she does suggest a few ideas that challenge them. For one, she suggests that the key difference between men and women's exercise of power and displays of virtue depends upon the presence of some sort of impediment. By describing women as "forbidden" rather than "incapable" of exercising their power, Gournay suggests that the impediment is an external rather than internal one. This external impediment is based on custom rather than an inferior nature.

Gournay continues her description of this impediment and the imbalance it causes, writing, "Blessed again are you, since you can be wise without offense, your masculinity allowing you—as much as one forbids these to women—every action

² Forbes (2023) has drawn a similar connection with Fricker in her account of prejudice in Marie de Gournay. Since this chapter was submitted and accepted before Forbes' article was published, I was unable to take her helpful account into consideration.

of lofty purpose, every preeminent judgment, and every expression of subtle speculation” (Gournay, 2002, 101). Here, Gournay establishes the central problem underlying her discussion of women’s exclusion from philosophical debate: the problem is an asymmetry in the credibility that is afforded to men and to women by their interlocutors. This asymmetry resembles what Fricker describes as a “credibility excess” and “deficit” (Fricker, 2007, 17). A speaker experiences a “credibility excess” when her words are interpreted as more plausible than they would otherwise be on account of some prejudice, whereas a speaker experiences a “credibility deficit” when her words are interpreted as less plausible than they would otherwise be on account of some prejudice (Fricker, 2007, 17).

Once again, Gournay suggests that the cause of this asymmetry is custom rather than nature. Gournay relies on the language of prohibitions rather than capacities to describe women’s inability to perform certain actions. She describes women as “forbidden” rather than “incapable” of certain actions and judgments, and she describes her male readers as “allowed” rather than simply “capable” of the same actions and judgments. Women are “forbidden” “actions of lofty purpose” and “preeminent judgements” in the sense that their actions and judgments are never interpreted as such by their interlocutors. In contrast, Gournay calls her male reader “blessed” because his wisdom is never interpreted as “offensive,” and not necessarily because he is *in fact* wise. Her suggestion is that the same wisdom displayed by a woman would be interpreted in a negative light. Gournay suggests furthermore that it is the quality of “masculinity” that accounts for this asymmetry. Just as Gournay’s reader’s “masculinity” affords him greater credibility in the eyes of his interlocutors, so too does her lack of that same quality diminish hers.

Gournay remarks that she will develop this theme of prejudice in a narrower sense, specifically as it relates to women’s participation in philosophical conversation. She writes, “But to hold my peace, for a moment, about the other grievances of this sex, in how unjust a manner is it commonly treated, I ask you, in conversations, insofar as women engage in them?” (Gournay, 2002, 101). In what follows, Gournay heaps up a series of examples of how women are excluded from philosophical conversation by being mocked, silenced, ignored, or misrepresented. She will use this narrower case of prejudice to shed light on the larger issues of inequality, injustice, and virtue raised in the opening of the piece. As she suggests in the opening of her discourse, women’s exclusion from philosophical conversation is just one case of how women are “cut off” from the “exercise of their own power” and consequently impeded in the formation of virtue (Gournay, 2002, 101). Here, we can see how Gournay views the problem of prejudice in philosophical conversation as an issue with both ethical and epistemological stakes.

Before turning to her series of examples, Gournay briefly considers the possibility that stronger arguments could solve the problem of prejudice toward women in the context of conversation. She writes, “If women possessed the arguments and profound thoughts of Carneades, there is no man, however mediocre, who does not put them in their place with the approval of most of the company, when, with merely a smile or some slight shaking of his head, his mute eloquence pronounces, ‘It’s a woman speaking’” (Gournay, 2002, 101). Here Gournay emphasizes the extent of