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Re-Imagining the Philosophical Conversation

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The future of philosophy lies in rewriting its past. This is the simple proposition of which I hope to convince you in this chapter. The past of philosophy has been largely a conversation between men, in which women are objects, not equal subjects, in the enterprise of disclosing the future. The rewriting should transform philosophy into a conversation between the sexes, in which the future to be disclosed is the product of their joint imaginings. But from the outset, the task may seem futile. The future may be open, but the past cannot be changed. To rewrite the past of philosophy would be, surely, to distort it.

To understand what I mean by rewriting the past, one needs to distinguish the past as a totality of past events, and the past as it lives on in the present. The past as a totality of past events can never be fully captured, yet one can be pretty sure that it included as many events involving women as events involving men. There are so many past events, which took place in so many different locations, that no total account of the past is ever possible. We are confined to histories, representations of the past that survive into the present. The past as it lives in the present is a representation of past events, which is inevitably highly selective. It is a narrative that frames our understanding of the present through focusing on certain texts and people, ideas and undertakings, which are significant for us, and which allow us to make sense of who we are, while providing us with guidelines for the unfolding future.

So, in choosing to deem certain individuals as past sources of wisdom, and certain texts as worthy of study and reproduction, we define who we are in the present, and locate the origins of the trajectory that we wish to pursue into the future. Philosophy during the twentieth century, in the West, mostly represented itself as "analytic" and schooled its students in the history of this movement. Insofar as it looks to history, a scientific and secular society has chosen to teach a scientific and largely secular tradition – Descartes, Locke, Hume, Frege, Russell, Carnap, Quine, Davidson, Kripke, Lewis – with a focus

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on epistemology, metaphysics, logic, and language. Philosophy in this vein has come to see itself, not just as philosophy of science, but as itself scientific. It uses techniques borrowed from science, abounds in formalization, hopes to be "cutting edge," regrets its lack of progress (Chalmers 2015) and rather despises history.

When it comes to political philosophy the terrain is rougher. On the one hand the secular liberal tradition looks back to Hobbes, Locke, Smith, Kant, Mill, Rawls, Nozick, and Dworkin, but since the late twentieth century this tradition has been under attack from critical theorists and feminists, and from various kinds of "genealogists" – Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida, Adorno, Heidegger, Marx, and Hegel – who challenge the pseudo objectivity of liberal rationality and the suspect scientism of the analytic tradition. A certain kind of history, "genealogy," is proposed to remove the mask of disinterestedness and reveal the constraining power that lurks behind claims to "objective truth." The two traditions stand opposed, and while some valiant attempts have been made to heal the rift, neither is making much progress, one because it is bogged down in detail, the other because it has swept away the possibility of rational consensus.

Yet, while philosophers were not looking, society has been attempting to undergo an evolution. It has been transforming itself from a world governed by male elites into a society in which male and female voices vie for attention. The transformation is by no means complete. Its completion requires anchoring in history. Our understanding of our philosophic past needs to catch up with the present. We need to look more closely at our genealogy, for there are female as well as male ancestors.

In Plato's *Symposium* a woman (Diotima) appears, who is imagined by a man, Socrates (Plato 1977). She speaks of love as the desire to reproduce beauty, consigning women to the reproduction of physical beauty through bodily reproduction, while assigning to men the task of giving birth to law, and the polis. This narrative, according to which reason, law, civilization, speech, and the state are male preserves, while bodily reproduction, sexuality, nature, silence, and the home are women's lot, is repeated in many forms, and in diverse cultures. One finds it in Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel, to name only the most influential men whose texts are currently taught, and also in religious traditions. At its most extreme it turns women into objects – bodies for sexual exchange, either for pleasure or for reproduction – and excludes them from power, the pulpit, the university, and any public identity. But it has also taken another form, and been treated as though it were a reality, by some women, who have accepted the maleness of reason and found in this narrative reason to join forces with the critical theorists (Harding and Hintikka 1983; Lloyd 1984, 1993; Bordo 1987).

Yet, since at least the fifteenth century, women have been dreaming of a different polis. This is a polis in which women and men are equally citizens,

who both participate in governing when required, who are educated to understand justice and the law, who converse with each other with respect, and whose interests are equally encompassed within the common good, which it is the aim of the law to pursue. In this respect, Christine de Pizan is exemplary. Near the conclusion of her *Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) she sums up her response to Aristotle's conception of politics – in which women are excluded from ruling because of their purported lack of prudence – by putting into the mouth of the allegorical figure, *Droiture*, the assertion that "the common good of a city or land or any community of people, is nothing other than the profit or general good in which all members, women as well as men, participate and take part" (Pizan 1983, II.54.1). She continues, "There is not the slightest doubt that women belong to the people of God and the human race as much as men, and are not another species, for which they should be excluded from moral teachings."

This proposition, that women are, along with men, ends in themselves, who have an equal right to participate in the articulation of the moral law, and in the determination of the civil law that governs the polis, is a powerful idea that will be developed in various ways by later women. Christine's immediate political aims were to promote peace, defend women against male slander, and demonstrate women's capacity to rule as queens, under certain circumstances (Pizan 1936–1940, 1959, 1967, 1977, 1994, 1999a, b, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2008; Hicks 1992; Carroll 1998; Broad and Green 2009, 10–37; Green 2006, 2007; Adams 2010). Her allegorical city contains the germ of later philosophical elaborations. *Droiture*, complaining about literature such as Ovid's *Art of Love* and Jeun de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*, observed that though men often represented women as full of lust and as duplicitous, they "never address women nor warn them against men's traps even though it is certain that men often deceive women with their false tricks and duplicity" (Pizan 1983, II.54.1; Lorris and Meun 1994). A century and a half later, in the *Heptameron* (1559), Marguerite of Navarre would attempt to rectify this situation by imagining a conversation between men and women in which they each exposed and debated their respective vices and virtues (Navarre 1999, 1984).

The frame of the *Heptameron* is a conversation between a group of men and women, dominated by Parlamente, whose name can be roughly read as "speaking love," as well as being reminiscent of "parliament." Flung together after a flood, the men and women of this informal parliament, which takes place in the meadow of a monastery, tell stories and debate the nature of love and the relative virtues and vices of the two sexes. Their discussion is colored by Platonic themes: the relationship between carnal love and spiritual love of God, between love of the creature and love of the Creator, and the question of the nature and possibility of wisdom. Marguerite's outlook is quite similar to Plato's. She endorses Socratic epistemological humility, which teaches that the wise recognize their ignorance, she believes that love is desire for the good, and that through recognizing virtue and beauty in this world, we are led to

strive for the forms of beauty and goodness, which are, in her Christian inflection, inherent in God. These ideas are redolent of Diotima's speech, but in Navarre's reworking, it is no longer women who are consigned to bodily reproduction, but men who are represented as dominated by carnal desire (Cottrell 1993; Broad and Green 2009, 77–88). She implicitly recognizes that both men and women are embodied and reasoning, that they disagree with each other with regard to many issues, and yet that it is important they seek consensus. She imagines a situation in which wisdom is sought through intelligent conversation that involves *both* the sexes. In real life, the state of Navarre that she governed with her husband became a tolerant refuge in a landscape that was soon to be riven by wars of religion.

Marguerite was writing at the high point of Renaissance humanism, but her imaginary conversation is also significant for the rise of the period that we call modernity. This is usually characterized as involving the rise of modern science. Descartes is taken to be paradigmatic, with his rejection of the ancient authority of Aristotle and scholasticism, and the introduction of a new method that starts from first principles. But Descartes was also modern in another sense, one not so explicitly recognized by contemporary philosophers. He was happy to engage in conversation with women, among them, Elizabeth of Bohemia and Christina of Sweden (Pal 2012). Modernity, at its beginning, not only disengaged from scholasticism, but also moved away from the male Latinate atmosphere of the schools, and towards a mixed-sex sociability, in which philosophy was discussed in the vernacular.

Central to this transition are the once widely read works of Madeleine de Scudéry, in particular the multi-volume novels, *Artamène* (1649–1653) and *Clélie* (1654–1660) (Scudéry 1972; Scudéry 2001–2005). Initially in partnership with her brother Georges, she helped to foster a new literary genre, the novel, "an epic in prose." They took the histories of ancient times, narratives of war concerned with the actions of men, and transformed them into adventures involving men and women, in which the narrative ultimately becomes a frame that plays second fiddle to the many conversations on ethical and political questions with which it is interlaced. As she matured, Madeleine de Scudéry gave up on the long narratives that had initially bound together sequences of conversations, and published shorter didactic works and collections of moral conversations (Scudéry 1669, 1671, 1680, 1684, 1686, 1688, 1692). Despite their vast, past popularity and their huge importance for the development of mixed sex sociability, philosophy does not currently include the works of the Scudéries in its history. One half of modernity, the rise of science, is celebrated by philosophers, the other half, the rise of mixed, civilized conversation, is neglected. Yet the second is just as important for the circumstances in which we find ourselves as is the first.

The mid-seventeenth century was a time of political and religious upheaval. In England the parliamentarians beheaded their king, setting in train a sequence

of events which, by 1688, had resulted in the establishment of a limited monarchy. In France, the Fronde, which might have developed in the same direction, was ultimately repressed, resulting in the establishment of the absolute monarchy that survived until the 1789 revolution. In *Clélie*, Scudéry uses Livy's history of Rome, the rape of Lucretia, and the overthrow of the Tarquins by Brutus, as the frame for a discussion of the advisability of rebellion, as well as for the discussion of friendship and civility. She questions the wisdom of revolution, while accepting that it is occasionally necessary. She prefers peace, and develops the idea that noble and civilized men, who seek truth, will also know how to treat women as friends. The mutual respect and friendship which govern relations between the sexes, and the status of women within society become a mark of civilized progress. The imagined behavior of men and women, as laid out in these novels, became a blueprint for the sociability of the salons – spaces in which philosophical conversation could be politely carried out between equals (Goodman 1989, 1994; Gordon 1994). This is not to say that Scudéry's politics were in any simple sense egalitarian; she did not think that women should compete with men for intellectual glory, but saw their role as facilitators and tender friends to men (Green 2013). She was a monarchist who advocated courtly manners and the pursuit of the arts and sciences, conversation, gallantry, and friendship between male and female equals, who were happy to leave the rudder of the ship of state in the hands of the sovereign. According to her doctrine, "the source of civility being the desire to please for some motive, whether ambition or love, this desire must be stronger in a monarchy than in a republic, because, since favors defend on a single person, the desire to please him makes it possible to please all" (Scudéry 1998, 137; Broad and Green 2009, 180–198).

During the seventeenth century, patriarchal representations of both the state and marriage began to be questioned. Hobbes had accepted that patriarchal states were built on already existing patriarchal families (Schochet 1967). Bodin execrated the gynocracy for which Christine had argued, and which had been so ably prosecuted by Elizabeth I of England, because he thought that men who docilely accepted rule by a female head of state would soon be ruled by their wives (Bodin 1961, 1002). But the Scudéries, and their many novel-writing descendants, transformed the ideal marriage from a relationship in which men ruled wives, children, and servants, into a contract of mutual friendship between tender lovers. At the same time, the state was increasingly being represented not as divinely ordained rule by a patriarchal head, but as a contract among equals. Because political philosophy continues to exclude texts written by women, this complex interaction between the politics of the public and private spheres is under-appreciated. Yet modernity is as much defined by a new attitude to women and marriage, the rise of polite models of mixed sex interaction, and of marriage based on inclination and free choice, as it is by the rise of the modern democratic state, and of science based on open debate and repeatable experiments.

If modernity is misrepresented by a history of philosophy which fails to include texts written by women, the same can equally be said for the Enlightenment. By the eighteenth century women's right to be treated as men's moral and spiritual equals had been reiterated sufficiently often that women increasingly took it upon themselves to engage as equals with men in the scientific, ethical, and political debates of their time. The laments, defenses, proposals, and apologies of Gournay, Marinella, Fonte, de la Barre, Astell, and Suchon were transcended by the serious scientific, political, and philosophical engagement of Cockburn, Du Châtelet, Gottsched, Reimarus, and Macaulay (Gottsched 1739; Du Châtelet 1740; Cockburn 1751; Macaulay 1763–1783; Fonte 1988, 1995, 1997; Suchon 1988, 1994, 1999, 2002, 2010; Astell 1996, 1997, 2013; Marinella 1999; Gournay 2002a, b; Reimarus 2005; Clarke 2013; Broad 2015; Poullain de la Barre 2015). As is clear from the dates of these cited editions, it is only fairly recently that female scholars have undertaken the laborious work of editing, translating, and reissuing these women's works. The scholarship that has been completed to date is, in many cases, only the tip of the iceberg. What it, nevertheless, already demonstrates is the rich legacy of philosophical texts by women that are available to be woven into the history of ideas. By continuing to ignore them, mainstream philosophy perpetuates its self-representation as a battle for intellectual dominance among powerful males – truth as power – and forgoes an alternative self-image as a conversation among equals of both sexes, committed to the reasonable search for a truth, which it may be beyond the means of the powerless to defend.

One outstanding example of the way in which our understanding of the development of democratic and republican ideas during the eighteenth century is distorted is evident in the excision from that narrative of the works of Catharine Macaulay. The first five volumes of her eight-volume history of the Stuart monarchy, the English Civil War, the virtues of the parliament, and duplicity of Cromwell, played an important role as a conduit whereby seventeenth-century republican debates were transmitted to eighteenth-century radicals in America and France (Hammersley 2010). Yet standard accounts of these political philosophies and radical movements continue to ignore the political and philosophical contributions of this controversial "republican virago." Her histories were widely discussed and celebrated during her lifetime, in particular by people who were deeply involved in the American revolution, such as Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Otis, and his sister Mercy, who married Joseph Warren. Light has recently been shed on Macaulay's critiques of Burke, her correspondence with Hume, her interaction with French radicals and with the fathers of the American revolution, her educational ideas and her influence on Mary Wollstonecraft and Mercy Otis Warren (Hill 1995, 1992; Titone 2004; Davies 2005; Green 2011). Yet in general her works have been neglected and unstudied for so long that standard histories of the development of republican ideas completely ignore them. This choice of past scholars to ignore Macaulay and

other female thinkers has distorted intellectual history, the genesis of feminism, and the origins of the language of the "equal rights of men."

In order to determine how philosophy might progress, one needs first to have some conception of what progress consists in. It will have been clear to any intelligent reader that I have conceived of philosophy's progress as intertwined with a certain "progressive" account of society. I have assumed that a society in which beliefs and laws are arrived at through free, rational debate, in which men and women are equally respected and listened to, is better than one in which elite males impose their doctrines, either by force or denigration, or by processes of explicit exclusion. I have assumed that philosophers share this progressive concept of society. And I have gone on to assume that, in order for society to progress in the future it needs to represent itself as building on the ideas from which its present progressive aspects germinated. Within the political landscape, there are two fundamentally opposed conceptions of the state. At the extremes of both right and left, it is represented as a sovereign power, benefiting an elite, upheld by force of arms and ideology. A different tradition, developed by Macaulay and others, represents it as a limited power, held in trust for the common good of all the people, men and women, and as such, as having a duty to debate and discuss, to the best of its ability, what is in the long-term best interest of all. According to this conception, just as reason ought to govern the actions of embodied humans, so reasonable debate should determine the principles of action which govern the body politic. The full inclusion within such a polis of women – who because of their embodiment and child-bearing are traditionally relatively powerless – and within the intellectual tradition that it takes to be its own, is the culmination of the associated concept of progress, which identifies our flourishing with our self-realization through sociable, practical activity within the polis, in accord with reason.

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