

Women's Studies Fall Lecture Series

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“Including Early Modern Women Writers in Survey Courses: A Call to Action”

There are many reasons to include texts written by women in our history of early modern philosophy survey courses. The most obvious one is accuracy. Early modern women wrote texts and engaged in debates that shaped the philosophical landscape of the time. Thus to craft a syllabus that wholly excludes women is to give students an inaccurate picture of the early modern period. Since it seems fairly safe to assume that teachers of early modern philosophy aim for as much accuracy as possible, this should be reason enough to include women in our survey courses. In this paper I nonetheless offer an additional reason: When students are exposed to philosophical texts authored by women, they start seeing that women have been, are, and can be, philosophers. Given just how underrepresented women are in philosophy, this finding is significant. It means that if we aim to change the face of philosophy—so that it includes more women—we must include texts written by women in our syllabi. In other words, we cannot afford to exclude women from our history of early modern survey courses any longer. In this paper I offer arguments for these claims, and also consider the obstacles faced by those who work to respond to this call to action.