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## Introduction

Jacqueline Broad and Karen Detlefsen

### 1. New Light on Old Subjects

In his 1819 essay on liberty, Benjamin Constant describes the private pleasures of men in the ancient republic of Athens—men who enjoy a certain freedom from state interference in their lives. ‘In their relations with women,’ he says of the Athenians, you will see ‘husbands, satisfied when peace and a decorous friendship reigned in their households, make allowances for the wife who is too vulnerable before the tyranny of nature.’ These men, he says, ‘close their eyes to the irresistible power of [the wife’s] passions, forgive the first weakness and forget the second’.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, the free man is capable of showing generosity of spirit toward his spouse: he is prepared to turn a blind eye to her foibles and forgive her her ‘weaknesses’. Yet the wife’s condition is one of severely diminished freedom: she is a slave to her bodily self, she is ‘vulnerable’ to the ‘tyranny’ of her biological nature, and she finds the force of her passions ‘irresistible’. More subtly, it would appear that the Athenian wife is also subject to the whims of her husband: when all is going well, she enjoys his largesse and magnanimity; but when the wider world turns against him, she cannot rely on him to forgive and forget—*her* peace and satisfaction are dependent on *his* goodwill.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Constant, ‘The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns’, in *Constant: Political Writings*, translated and edited by Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 315.

Constant's oration occupies a revered place in the history of western political thought. For some scholars, it highlights a crucial distinction between the liberty of the ancients, defined as 'an active and constant participation in collective power', and the liberty of the moderns, a right to 'peaceful enjoyment and private independence', free from excessive state control.<sup>2</sup> In the twentieth century, this distinction had a notable impact on Isaiah Berlin, someone whose language of positive and negative liberty—as freedom *to* achieve something or become someone, and freedom *from* external constraints and obstacles—still shapes and informs present-day discussions in political philosophy.<sup>3</sup> With feminist hindsight, however, we can see that Constant exhibits a certain insensitivity to the subject of women and liberty. In his passing remarks on husbands and wives, he seems curiously unconcerned about the fact that liberty for men in the political domain does not ensure liberty for women in the domestic sphere. Despite being an avowed foe to tyranny, he fails to see the injustice of a woman's subjugation in her own home—and inside her own head.

To be fair, this neglect is not peculiar to Constant. Until very recently, it was commonplace for a woman's point of view to be forgotten, neglected, or overlooked in histories of political and philosophical thought. It was as if past historians could catch only fleeting glimpses of women in their peripheral vision—as shadowy figures in the margins, perceived but never fully seen, and thus ineligible as subjects of liberty in their own right. Even today, some of

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<sup>2</sup> Constant, 'Liberty of the Ancients Compared', p. 316.

<sup>3</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Four Essays on Liberty* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 118–72.

the best accounts of liberty in the early modern era still tend to bypass or ignore the subject of female freedom.<sup>4</sup>

The main purpose of this volume is to examine those several forgotten, neglected, and overlooked ideas concerning women and liberty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Our focus is not only on the topics of women and liberty considered together, but also on what women themselves had to say about freedom—including ethical, political, metaphysical, and religious notions of freedom. Our intention is to highlight different aspects of liberty as seen from a historical female philosophical perspective.

Accordingly, this volume reflects an important trend in recent approaches to the history of philosophy, a trend that promises to produce a more inclusive and a more responsible—both historically and ethically responsible—understanding of western Europe’s philosophical past. Taken as a whole, our chapters offer new perspectives on the history of European philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For a long time, much teaching and research in the early modern period, at least in anglo-analytic philosophy, was structured by what we might call The Standard Narrative. According to this narrative, the seventeenth century was the century of continental rationalism (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz), the eighteenth century was the century of British empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume), and the two centuries progressed toward their *telos*, as captured by the synthesizing project in Kant’s philosophy.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in her superb *Ideas of Liberty in Early Modern Europe: From Machiavelli to Milton* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), Hilary Gatti offers an intricate, multi-faceted account of different kinds of freedom in the early modern era—including freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of conscience, and freedom of thought and speech—but does not touch on the topic of women’s freedom from the domination of men.

The emphasis was on questions in epistemology, which generated questions in metaphysics, and little attention was paid to other areas in philosophy. The story of early modern philosophy has been expanding in anglo-analytic philosophy for several decades now. Increased interest in natural philosophy, which draws together metaphysics, physics, and theology, has enriched our understanding of the nature of philosophy—and of the philosopher—in these centuries. Widening the conversation about natural philosophy to include the life sciences and medicine has provided even more opportunities to think about the breadth of topics addressed by philosophers in this period. And an increased focus on moral and social political questions has further expanded our vision of early modern philosophy. Interest in the works of women, as well as works by women and men who are specifically interested in issues that directly bear on women’s lives, have been part of this push to expand our understanding of the history of our discipline. And thus, the current volume contributes to this important new trend.

Our chapters contribute to this trend, first, by enhancing and expanding those standard narratives about the development of concepts of freedom leading up to the advent of Kantian autonomy; second, by showing how the pre-enlightenment figures in our volume anticipate many recent theorists’ critiques of the positive-negative divide, in addition to foreshadowing recent feminist interest in the ideas of relational autonomy, internalized subjugation, and non-ideal theory; and third, by bringing to the fore several neglected topics within philosophy, by highlighting the worth and relevance of different philosophical genres, and by encouraging us to think differently about ‘what counts as philosophy’ and ‘what constitutes feminism’. We will briefly outline each of these historiographical themes in turn, before demonstrating how various strands emerge in our chapters.

First, by expanding the story of early modern philosophy to include the thinking of women, this volume sheds new light on the reception of figures and themes that have been long studied in philosophy. Many women discussed in our essays take the ideas of their well-known male contemporaries, such as Descartes and Locke, and develop them in unique and different directions. The theme of autonomy—broadly speaking, the freedom to determine one’s will according to one’s own laws and principles (and not to be determined by the will of others)—features prominently in many essays in this volume. Our contributors uncover a long historical tradition of women—and of some men, such as Francois Poulain de la Barre (1648–1723)<sup>5</sup>—theorizing about female freedom and the conditions that must be met in order for women to be truly autonomous agents. Together, these papers offer an important alternative narrative arc to standard stories about the invention of autonomy leading up to Kant. They demonstrate the role that women played in facilitating the early modern shift away from traditional conceptions of what Jerome Schneewind calls ‘morality as obedience’ toward a new conception of ‘morality as self-governance’.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Gabrielle Suchon (1632–1703), this shift is taken even further: while she affirms Descartes’ idea that all human beings are capable of self-governance, she suggests that true freedom for women also requires that they are able to prescribe for themselves those rules and principles that determine their actions.

Second, many of these early writers anticipated with stunning prescience some ideas that have only recently received sustained theoretical treatment in philosophy. Prominent among

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<sup>5</sup> For brief accounts of the life and historical-intellectual context of each of our principal figures, see the Biographical Appendix to this volume.

<sup>6</sup> See J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

these themes is the idea of psychological oppression sapping women of their equal share of freedom and autonomy. Many writers discussed highlight the fact that although married women might not be prisoners in their own homes—perhaps due to the generosity and goodwill of their husbands—they are nevertheless prisoners *in their own heads*. Much like Constant, these writers observe that wives *do* have a severely diminished freedom, regardless of what conditions obtain in civil society, largely due to the tyranny of their passions and their weakness of will. As a possible antidote to these constraints, some thinkers, such as Catharine Macaulay (1731–91) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), emphasize that the absence of *domination* facilitates a highly-valued internal freedom.

Grappling with internalized constraints, and possible remedies for them, provides us with a richer understanding of differing concepts of liberty in the early modern period, beyond the nineteenth-century ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ distinction, or the twentieth-century ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ divide, and even beyond republican liberty, that neo-Roman notion of freedom as the absence of domination or dependence. This study shows us that there are other—more positive!—ways of thinking about positive liberty than is found in Berlin’s treatment of the concept. In the early modern writings, positive liberty is often shown as providing something more than what negative liberty provides, such as the self-empowerment to do something that we are not physically prevented from doing, or a self-empowerment that requires the development of a self that is as free as possible from internal constraints. An abused spouse, for example, who has the chance to leave the house (is not physically constrained from leaving) but does not leave for fear of her life, is one who has negative liberty but not positive liberty. Overcoming the fear and leaving the relationship represents the addition of positive liberty to that negative liberty, and this affirmative role for positive liberty is amply acknowledged in many thinkers discussed in our chapters.

Other examples of the anticipation of very modern ideas include the fact that many early modern women (and, in fact, men too) did not see themselves as atomistic individuals, but rather as beings who stood significantly *in relation* to others, and as such, they anticipate some features of the very contemporary idea of relational autonomy, which maintains that freedom is essential for women to be able to actively change socially debilitating customs, but which conceives of freedom as embedded within relations that require agents to modulate their behaviour in light of others' plans for their lives. To be sure, these philosophers are grounded in a seventeenth to eighteenth-century context, and as such, they conceive of their liberty in the context of their relationships with God no less than with their husbands, their families and friends, and their wider society, with these latter relations resonating more fully with contemporary theories of relational autonomy. But some writers also anticipate other present-day concerns of feminist theorists of freedom, such as 'implicit bias' and 'stereotype threat',<sup>7</sup> the danger of the marital 'merger of selves',<sup>8</sup> and the phenomenon of 'adaptive preference formation', that is, taking on preferences that one would not normally hold in order to adapt as well as possible to debilitating social conditions.

A striking feature of the works of many of the women (and men writing favourably about women) on the topic of liberty is that they engage with what has recently been called 'non-

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<sup>7</sup> See Jennifer Saul, 'Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat, and Women in Philosophy', in *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?*, edited by Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 39–60.

<sup>8</sup> See Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); and Marilyn Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003),

ideal theory'. Another way of framing this is to say that these philosophers' works often emerge from an engagement with lived experience, and in the case of early modern women, this lived experience was, more often than not, non-ideal. Many of our thinkers recognize how diminished the freedom of *married women* was in this period, a topic of special interest at the time. Married women were in positions of dependence on their husbands, and could not keep their own money or retain possession of their own property. Starting from this lived experience, the theories of freedom and autonomy that develop are often quite different from those conceived of in abstraction from the non-ideal—or more probably, theories presented as general and abstract while actually emerging from the very different lived experiences of *men*.

Third, a direct result of the expansion of our treatment of early modern philosophy to include the works of women is that erstwhile understudied topics in philosophy move to the forefront. Perhaps most obvious among these is the theme of education. In contemporary philosophy, the philosophy of education is a significantly marginalized field despite its engagement with a wide range of philosophical themes from metaphysics and epistemology, to ethics, political theory, and moral psychology, and more. Reading the women discussed in our volume highlights that they—and many of their more famous male counterparts—were intensely interested in this important philosophical topic, a topic we may hope to rehabilitate for the betterment of our contemporary field. These early modern thinkers conceive of education—and moral education, in particular—as a crucial prerequisite for a subject's freedom in the sense of her capacity for rational self-governance.

Our volume further demonstrates how women's views about ethical and political liberty were closely interconnected with foundational ideas about the metaphysics of freedom in the early

modern era. Today philosophers tend to regard the subjects of metaphysical freedom (human free will) and ethical and political freedom (the freedom of moral and political agents) as distinct and separate topics; but for these early modern thinkers, they are closely intertwined. As we will see, many of these thinkers regard an agent's internal power of free will as compatible with an agent's actions being causally determined. Our chapters thus highlight women's contributions to well-known philosophical debates to do with freedom and determinism, and the connection between metaphysical freedom and agency freedom, as well as the relationship between God's freedom and his determined nature (his necessary goodness and justice).

The chapters in this volume also encourage readers to think about what counts as philosophy, and why. Much can be learned by turning to genres atypical of anglo-analytic philosophy—plays, poems, personal letters, fiction—and much can be learned by understanding the power of different methods within these genres to deliver philosophical ideas in an especially impactful way. The emotional turmoil captured in a piece of fiction surrounding a seventeenth-century woman's grappling with the limited options to live a free life can be an especially efficient way of delivering crucial, and philosophically significant, information about liberty.

Finally, a further way in which these essays invite us to think about how we approach the past is to encourage a nimble view of how we think of feminism. While the term 'feminism' may not have emerged in western languages until after this period, and while self-consciously defined feminist movements are a much more recent phenomenon, understanding how frankly *radical* within their context many of these thinkers are on questions that directly address women, their lives, their liberty, and their autonomy—their very *selves*—opens up

our view of what we can rightly consider to be feminism. These women and men are often passionately committed to women's equality with men—be this equality of opportunity (as this emerges from equal duties that we hold as human beings) or equality of rights—and thus, in this volume, we recognize our fellow feminists and acknowledge what they helped to make possible.

The papers in this volume reframe philosophy from 1600 to 1800 by moving *away from* The Standard Narrative and its central seven figures, and rather taking the works of these women and men writing on liberty (often as it applies to women's lives) on their own terms. To be sure, many of the philosophers dealt with in these pages engaged, directly or indirectly, with the ideas of the more famous men. But starting with the works and interests of the women and men represented in the essays of this volume, gives rise to very different narratives and understandings of these centuries than we would gain by framing their ideas within our current understanding of the well-read canonical figures. Since most of the ideas and arguments we discuss come from the women themselves, our subjects tend to have women's concerns in their direct line of sight, and so they tend to offer a female-oriented or a feminist slant on issues to do with ethical and political freedom. Moreover, we think this study gives us a richer understanding of differing concepts of liberty in the early modern period, beyond the nineteenth-century 'ancient' and 'modern' distinction, or the twentieth-century 'positive' and 'negative' divide. Their writings provide a different perspective—an alternative narrative, as it were—on the history of philosophical concepts of liberty.

## **2. Ethical and Political Approaches**

The alternative narrative brought to the fore by our focus on women and liberty is perhaps most obviously on display with the ethical and political questions surrounding liberty, and so

our volume opens with chapters on these themes. Many of the writers discussed in this first part explicitly address the ‘tyranny of nature’ that Constant identifies in women: that irresistible pull of the passions and a powerlessness to overcome internalized prejudices. In the pre-enlightenment era, several feminist thinkers challenge the idea that women lack the power to confront such interior constraints on their choices and actions. Indeed, on moral and religious grounds, they argue that it is *crucial* for women to confront them, in order to take full moral responsibility for their choices and actions, and to attain salvation. These views can be found in the writings of Poulain, Suchon, Mary Astell (1666–1731), Mary Chudleigh (1656–1710), and the anonymous writer known only as ‘Eugenia’ (*fl.* 1701). These thinkers argue that freedom from internal tyranny requires not only positive enabling conditions, such as proper education and training (in order to obtain psychological discipline), but also the absence of disabling external conditions. Some argue that a husband’s absolute domination over his wife, for example, can have a crippling effect on her capacity for self-determination: being subject to the will of another person prevents a woman from being determined solely by her *own* will and intellect. Such subjugation robs a woman of the freedom that is necessary to cultivate virtue—it prevents her from feeling, choosing, and acting in accordance with the right motives, toward the right ends, in accordance with reason. It thus potentially leads her into unhappiness and everlasting misery.

In Chapter 1 on liberty and feminism in early modern women’s writing, Karen Detlefsen broaches many of these themes in order to argue that it is completely sensible to think of women and men of the seventeenth century as *feminist* if they espouse ideas meant to address unjust or unequal circumstances that women encounter in their lives simply because they are women. Even while some early modern thinkers may also have what we would now consider retrograde ideas about women and their social roles, we can still think of their (often

radically) progressive views on women as early examples of feminism. Moreover, Detlefsen argues, many ideas that we are only now beginning to theorize about in philosophical feminism were addressed by our early modern forebears, albeit in pre-theoretical form. Detlefsen aims to address nascent forms of feminism by looking at three conceptions of liberty in the works of Astell and Margaret Cavendish (1623?–1673). These are the ideas of freedom coming from increased rationality, of personal autonomy including a self-ownership of one's life and projects through self-awareness of one's true nature, and of what we now call relational autonomy. Detlefsen connects all three theories of liberty with (sometimes radical) prescriptions for women's lives, prescriptions that mark these two as early feminist thinkers in some important ways. In the process, Detlefsen also makes the case for expanding the kinds of texts and methods we accept as valuable in philosophy.

In his seventeenth-century texts, the French Cartesian Poulain de la Barre argues that early modern women suffer from an interiorized subjugation. As Martina Reuter shows in Chapter 2, Poulain believes that *self-knowledge* is the key to overcoming such subjugation. The pursuit of this knowledge requires that a woman delve deep into her self, much as she might dive into an underground cave. She must visit layer upon layer, removing the debris and obstacles in her way, until finally she reaches the deepest core. A woman's true self is submerged under 'countless hidden recesses' of internalized cultural prejudices and preconceptions about who she is. A woman is repeatedly told that she is a slave to her bodily passions, that she is incapable of using her reason, and that she is necessarily dependent on men for moral and spiritual guidance. As a result, she is typically incapable of thinking about her self any differently—and incapable of thinking *for* herself. To counter this, Poulain argues that women are morally competent agents in their own right; like all human beings, he points out, they possess freedom of intellect. Following Descartes (up to a point), he holds

that despite the disturbing bodily influences on her mind, a woman is always free to overcome those influences and act in accordance with her reason. Once a woman sees this truth, she possesses the key to her liberation from both internal and external constraints.

The French thinker Gabrielle Suchon is another early modern writer who critically adapts Descartes' philosophy of freedom for feminist ends. Like Poulain, Suchon suggests that women themselves have been unthinkingly complicit in 'forging their chains'. As an antidote, she recommends adopting the stance of 'the neutralist', a person who commits herself entirely to a life of celibacy and shuns the institutional commitments of marriage and the convent. The neutralist leads a life that is radically free from external commitments—she is someone who must strike out on her own path and decide for herself the principles that will govern her choices and actions. But as Lisa Shapiro explains in Chapter 3, Suchon is careful to distinguish the neutralist's freedom from that of the libertine who follows her own inclinations at her will and pleasure. The neutralist is free in the sense that she is at liberty to follow her inner rational law of nature, rather than the dictates of outside social institutions. To follow this internal law requires not only self-mastery—control over one's wayward passions and inclinations—but also something like *autonomy* in the Kantian sense: the freedom to follow the laws and principles of one's own will, and not the rules and dictates of others.

In Chapter 4, this theme of freedom as self-mastery in accordance with reason is taken up again, this time in an examination of female critiques of the seventeenth-century misogynist John Sprunt. In this chapter, Jacqueline Broad demonstrates that the ideal of rational self-governance—controlling one's own will in conformity with the law of reason—plays a crucial role in the arguments of Eugenia, Astell, and Chudleigh. In their critical responses to

Sprint, these Englishwomen point to the fact that the marriage state can either facilitate or thwart a woman's capacity for rational self-governance. It can facilitate this capacity if men treat women as friends and take steps toward furthering their moral and intellectual improvement; but it thwarts this capacity if a wife is expected to 'merge her will' with that of her husband (as Sprint suggests), such that she only ever thinks and desires what he himself thinks and desires. In short, these women maintain that in conditions of domination and dependence within marriage—when husbands have an absolute and unlimited power over their wives—it is not possible for women to live up to the dignity of their natures as free and rational beings.

For many of these early modern writers, then, it is crucial that women are educated to exercise their internal freedom in order to attain knowledge and virtue. These writers contrast the state of freedom with a state of licence or licentiousness. For them, neither freedom of indifference nor mere freedom of the will alone (to do 'this' or 'that', or simply to follow our inclinations regardless of their reasonableness) is sufficient for the inner freedom required for true moral responsibility and the leading of a virtuous life. Rather, freedom consists in self-determination in accordance with reason, and the freedom to do so according to one's own independent will and not the will of another.

This same idea emerges in later eighteenth-century arguments about the socio-political conditions that must obtain in order for women (and men) to be truly free in civil society.

In Chapter 5, Karen Green shows how a number of different women in eighteenth-century Europe exploit the contrast between liberty and licence in their political writings. Among these writers are Catherine II of Russia, Octavie Belot, Louise Keralio, Elise Reimarus, and

Catharine Macaulay. In their works, they are strongly opposed to unfettered licence, the freedom to do as one wills in the absence of external impediments and constraints (negative liberty, as defined by Berlin). They distinguish this kind of freedom from their own positive notion: the freedom to govern one's self in accordance with the moral law of reason. In this respect, these women are in close agreement with the English political philosopher John Locke. In Locke's view, where there is no law, there is no liberty: strictly speaking, he says, no man can be free when another individual has the power to dominate or tyrannize over him in flagrant breach of the moral law. In the political writings of Macaulay, these sentiments about liberty and law are taken to a radical democratic conclusion: an ideal of fair and equal representation of the people. Building on Locke's moderate theism, Macaulay repudiates Hobbes's negative ideal of freedom as the absence of external impediments to the will, and goes beyond the republican ideal of freedom from domination, toward a more comprehensive moral and political theory of self-government according to the moral law, a crucial prerequisite for personal autonomy.

By contrast, Macaulay's predecessor Mary Wollstonecraft remains republican in spirit, but uses her feminist principles to modify and adapt the republican ideal. As Lena Halldenius shows in Chapter 6, according to Wollstonecraft freedom consists in the secure entitlement to act in accordance with the dictates of reason—a freedom that depends upon the possession of a certain social standing and the absence of a dominating master. Importantly for her, freedom from domination or dependence is *relational*: it bestows a special status on the moral subject in relation to others. Freedom from subjugation and domination thus gives the individual a certain empowerment, or certain entitlement, with respect to other members of society. Taking this idea to its logical feminist conclusion, Wollstonecraft calls for equal political rights for men and women in civil society.

Earlier we noted that Berlin traces his famous distinction between ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ to Constant’s distinction between the liberty of the ancients and that of the moderns. The history of this dichotomy, as Eric Schliesser points out in Chapter 7 on Sophie de Grouchy, captures a central aspect of the liberal tradition, even while that tradition has been told as a history of men; it is told, as Schliesser puts it, as ‘a *paternal* liberal tradition’ in which the matriarchs are missing. Schliesser’s chapter aims to offer one corrective to that skewed history by showing that De Grouchy’s distinction between positive and negative rights is a version of the distinction between negative and positive liberties. Examining De Grouchy’s *Letters on Sympathy* (1798) in comparison with Rousseau’s and Adam Smith’s views on justice and property rights, Schliesser shows how De Grouchy fits into the long liberal tradition that Berlin identifies. Especially interesting is her focus on how political issues of rights and justice dovetail with the moral issue of virtue and the role that education can play in producing virtuous citizens who are also free. As Schliesser points out, including De Grouchy (and ultimately, other women thinkers) in our political and moral histories of liberalism, is a mark of ‘the inclusive spirit that is characteristic of liberalism at its best’.

Contextualist approaches to philosophy examine the historical context in which ideas are forged, and thus permit the historian of philosophy to appreciate more fully the philosophical ideas of past thinkers. In Chapter 8, Sarah Hutton urges that we think in an historically-nuanced way about the idea of liberty so that we can understand the myriad ways in which this term was used by our early modern forebears. For while we tend to think of liberty primarily in political terms, Hutton suggests, early modern thinkers conceive of liberty in ways not as central to us today. Men and women alike, in these earlier centuries, frame liberty within moral, social, or religious contexts, and both men and women are especially

interested in the liberty to philosophize. But while men's interests in this latter liberty tend to lie with the liberty to philosophize *differently* than how those before them did so, women are more concerned with the liberty to philosophize *at all*. Central to these concerns are the desire for great education in order to empower the philosopher, the recognition of the need for time and space in which to philosophize, and the use of methods of philosophizing that might help women gain a greater audience at a time when their efforts as philosophers were met with greater antipathy. Hutton's chapter powerfully shows how women's thinking about liberty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries both followed the general trend from thinking about liberty in terms such as freedom of the mind to thinking about liberty in political terms, and framed the debate in ways especially germane to women's lives, thus adding richness to our understanding of liberty in early modern thought.

### **3. Metaphysical and Religious Approaches**

In the second part of this volume, our contributors examine the views of early modern women with respect to the metaphysical subject of 'freedom and determinism' and personal agency, topics which undergird many aspects of the ethical and political themes dealt with in the earlier papers. Like their male counterparts, these writers discuss the freedom of persons and their actions, and they are closely concerned with the problem of reconciling the existence of human freedom with divine causation and natural and physical necessity. Their views are reflective of a general intellectual shift in the early modern era—one away from the Calvinist doctrine of predestination toward a standpoint that permits individuals to be morally responsible for their actions, despite their dependence upon God. By and large, the women in this volume are compatibilists: they regard the proposition that 'some human actions are free' as logically compatible or consistent with the assertion that 'every natural event is causally determined', whether it be determined by God or by nature itself.

One notable exception to this rule is Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle. In Chapter 9, Deborah Boyle provides support for the claim that Cavendish is an incompatibilist—more specifically, an indeterminist and a libertarian. Cavendish denies that every event is causally determined and she permits human beings some degree of freedom of choice in their actions. In her natural philosophy, she posits the existence of certain ‘norms’ of nature—certain rules and principles that govern the way the parts of nature should behave, in order to maintain peace, order, and regularity overall. But this does not amount to a determinist position. Rather, Cavendish envisages the relationship between human freedom and the norms of nature more along the lines of a dance: while human beings must participate in the dance, they nevertheless remain free in the sense that they might choose where to place their feet, how to hold their partner, and whether to dance well or badly, enthusiastically or begrudgingly, in accordance with the choreography. To put it literally, in Cavendish’s view, human beings are subject to the norms of nature, but they are nevertheless free to accept or reject those norms as they see fit—they are not determined or necessitated to act in accordance with them. In her mature metaphysics, Cavendish holds that every animate part of nature has a free power of self-determination; and, as parts of nature, all human beings are capable of spontaneously initiating their own actions.

Other women writers in our volume—such as Anne Conway (1631–79), Damaris Masham (1659–1708), Mary Astell (1666–1731), Emilie Du Châtelet (1706–49), and Catharine Cockburn (1679–1749)—find that a compatibilist notion of freedom is more amenable to their moral and religious commitments. For Conway and Astell, in particular, compatibilism enables them to explain how human beings can be causally necessitated by God to love and desire the general good, and yet also be free to love and desire particular goods at the same

time, thus leaving the way open for error and sin. Compatibilism gives these writers a *theodicy*, in other words, a way to explain God's ways in light of the existence of evil in the world.

As Marcy Lascano shows in Chapter 10, Conway suggests that God's power to move his creatures toward the good is like an almighty tempest that besieges a sailor in a boat. The sailor is completely powerless to stop the wind from blowing her vessel to shore, but she is nevertheless capable of using her rudder to avoid the rocks and other vessels on the way, to stop the boat from sinking, and thus to navigate the safest route to her destination. More literally, though God has given us a natural and irresistible inclination toward the good, according to Conway, he is not to blame if we choose badly or if we make poor moral decisions—this is the result of our own limitations as finite creatures and our ignorance about what constitutes the true (rather than merely apparent) good. Our freedom consists in exercising choice over the means we might take to our destination, not the freedom to specify our own ends.<sup>9</sup> This kind of freedom is compatible with the fact that God has naturally determined us to love the good—it is also consistent with the fact that God rewards or punishes us, depending on how we choose.

In Chapter 11, Alice Sowaal examines the religious foundations of Mary Astell's views about love and liberty. Like Conway, Astell emphasizes that the attainment of human perfection depends upon making the best choices in our moral deliberations, especially in our choices

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<sup>9</sup> On this topic more generally, see Robert Sleigh, Jr., Vere Chappell, and Michael Della Rocca, 'Determinism and Human Freedom', in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ii, pp. 1193-1278.

about what to love. Astell makes the seemingly paradoxical claim that in order to be truly free, human beings must be utterly obedient to God—they must love and desire him alone. The paradox disappears if we see that, for Astell, freedom consists in the rational mastery of our body-derived passions: by exercising our will in accordance with our reason and not our unenlightened bodily emotions. Faith plays a crucial role in enabling us to attain this mastery. According to Astell, faith gives us a ‘lively relish’ or an inward joy, an internal sensation of God and his goodness, that inspires us to love and desire him as we should. Once we have acquired this faith, our love for God enables us to love other people and particular goods with a disinterested goodwill. We do not get passionately angry, envious, fearful, or proud whenever other people slight us or abuse us in some way; rather, our emotional response becomes one of generosity of spirit, an attitude of fair-mindedness toward others, based upon a strong sense of our own worth. Once we have acquired this generous disposition, according to Astell, it follows that, even in the most oppressive external circumstances (such as abusive marital relationships), we are nevertheless free—we retain our inner capacity for rational self-mastery and governance of the passions.

Many early modern thinkers offer systematic philosophies in which metaphysics, physics, morals, and often more, are integrated into a single systematic vision of the nature of the world. In Chapter 12, Ruth Hagengruber demonstrates how Emilie Du Châtelet offers just such a system, but intriguingly, with women’s lives, and especially their freedoms, conditioning what such a system might look like. Bringing together Du Châtelet’s views on physics and morality, and by using the topic of free will through which to deal with Du Châtelet’s moral theory, Hagengruber shows that the problem of free will helps to inform Du Châtelet’s physical theories on living forces. But further, Du Châtelet also connects her views on force, and the need in physics to presuppose an equilibrium of forces, to her views on

morals, and the current *disequilibrium* within the social world between men and women. Du Châtelet's interest in the laws of physics, Hagengruber argues, are matched and tightly connected with her interest in the laws of society, specifically with women's lives and roles in society at the forefront.

In addition to examining the nature of human freedom in relation to God and the created world, early modern women also reflect on the freedom of *God himself* in relation to his creation. In Chapter 13, Emily Thomas shows how an intellectualist (or anti-voluntarist) conception of God underpins Catharine Cockburn's explanations of how God can be both a most free agent (the orthodox religious view) and yet bound to create a world that accords with his divine nature. Cockburn claims that God was not bound to create an absolutely best possible world, given that he had the free capacity to choose which world he might create—perhaps as one among several *equally good* possible worlds, for example. However, since he has created this world, we can know that the moral fitness relations in our world are necessary, given that God's will always conforms to the eternal and immutable reason, fitness, and nature of things. In short, Cockburn holds that God is capable of acting freely with regards to his creation, even though he cannot arbitrarily will the moral fitness relations that obtain in the world that he chooses.

A generation earlier, along similar intellectualist lines, Anne Conway had argued that God is a most free and yet a most necessary agent. Unlike human beings, she says, God does not have any indifference of will—the ability to act or not to act, to do or to forbear, spontaneously. Rather, he is necessitated to act in accordance with his own perfect knowledge and benevolence—this is why he cannot create anything that changes only for the worse; his will cannot trump his wisdom and benevolence in this respect. At the same time,

however, Conway affirms that God is free in the sense that he is not bound or compelled to act by any *external* force or agency; he is completely self-determining.

For many of these women, then, the locus of freedom resides in an agent's internal power of *self-determination*. This notion of freedom is compatible with an agent's actions also being determined by outside forces, such as the eternal and immutable order of nature (in the case of God) or divine causal power and natural and physical necessity (in the case of human beings). A person is nevertheless free when he or she is determined by his or her *own* will and intellect. It is precisely this focus on inner freedom that comes to the fore in the ethical and political views of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century writers represented in this volume.

As these thirteen chapters amply demonstrate, women, and men writing about women, in the 1600s and 1700s in Europe cover many of the complex and multifaceted themes collected under the broad umbrella of the philosophical topic of liberty. But these writers add something new to our historical understanding of that topic. For by focusing, as they often do, on women and their concerns, many new themes and insights related to liberty emerge with full force. As such, this volume contributes to the on-going, vital, and important work of gaining a fuller and more inclusive understanding of the European philosophical past.