

Abstracts for the workshop on
Women, Philosophy and Academia
Female intellectual identity in Early Modern Germany

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Anne-Sophie Sørup Nielsen, University of Copenhagen

Modesty as a gendered virtue: Dorothea Erxleben and Anna Maria van Schurman on female erudition and arrogance

Dorothea Christiane Erxleben (1715-1762), the first female medical doctor in Germany, wrote a dissertation with the title *Gründliche Untersuchung der Ursachen, die das weibliche Geschlecht vom Studiren abhalten* (1742). In this dissertation, she aimed to refute all the reasons that were commonly given to prevent women from studying. In this context, she deals with the, at the time, widespread assumption that women's intellectual pursuits would damage their feminine modesty. Erxleben dismisses this claim, arguing that the opposite is actually the case, namely that a lack of learnedness leads to arrogant and immodest behavior.

Anna Maria van Schurman champions a similar idea in her famous text *Dissertatio De Ingenii Muliebris ad Doctrinam* from 1638. But later in her life, Van Schurman changed her mind and retracted all of her intellectual writings, stating that they exuded "a vain and worldly spirit." In her autobiography, *Eukleria seu Meliores Partis Electio* (1673), she now argued that being a scholar is, in fact, irreconcilable with the fundamental Christian virtue of modesty.

In this talk, I will discuss the topic of 'feminine modesty' and its role in excluding women from academia in the early modern period. I will contrast the position of Erxleben with that of Van Schurman, presenting first Erxleben's defense of female erudition followed by van Schurman's criticism of intellectual arrogance.

Corey Dyck, Western University

"Erste Erzieherinnen des Menschengeschlechts": Radical Thinking in Amalia Holst's Pedagogy

Amalia Holst (1758-1829) has recently attracted scholarly interest for her strident criticism of contemporary educational theorists, like Campe and Basedow. Holst is particularly critical of their reliance upon Rousseau's view of sexual difference and its relevance for the question of women's education. In her *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes* (1802), she makes the case for

women's access to education and indeed for the compatibility of woman's pursuit of learnedness with her traditional threefold role as Mutter, Gattin, and Hausfrau.

Left at this, Holst's text constitutes a compellingly argued if ultimately fairly conservative contribution to the querelle des femmes. However, in this presentation I will contend that a closer reading reveals a rather (more) radical project motivating her discussion in *Bestimmung*, one for the sake of which Holst implicitly and explicitly draws on the works of deists active within Hamburg, including the Reimarus family, and other freethinkers active outside of it, such as Lessing and Delisle de Sales. Reading Holst's pedagogical theory in this context not only reveals a deeper, subversive intent in her handling of traditional gender roles, but also brings into focus an ambitious pedagogical program in which women play a central role and that is founded on the rejection of the authority of the Bible, aims at purging our reliance on superstition (including our credence in miracles), and elaborates a developmental and progressive philosophy of history in direct opposition to theological perspectives.

Paola Rumore, University of Turin

Images of Wolff in the female milieu at the court of Frederick the Great

The paper I present deals with the debate on Wolff's philosophy in the female milieu at the Berlin court from the mid-1730s to the late 1750s, that is in the period that goes from the preparation to Frederick's ascension to the throne of Prussia to the death of his beloved sister, Wilhelmine von Bayreuth, one of his most appreciated philosophical conversers.

The presence of Wolffianism at the Prussian court has been at the center of a relevant number of more and less recent works; scholarship has deeply investigated the role of figures like Manteuffel and Reinbeck in the promotion of Wolff's ideas, at that time perceived as the 'national German philosophy' – as a mean to contrast the increasing presence of the French sensualistic and deistic trends warmly welcomed and encouraged by Frederick before and after his ascension to the throne. The same controversial opinion the Crown Prince had on Wolff and Wolffianism has been extensively debated since the early pioneering works on the history of the Berlin Academy (Formey, Bartholmess etc.).

What the scholarship has overseen so far is the role Wilhelmine and her mother Sophia Dorothea of Hanover played in orienting Frederick's opinion on Wolff. Both being deeply engaged in the cultural debate of the time, the two prominent female figures in the life of the Crown Prince held with him an interesting correspondence concerning Wolffianism. In their epistolary exchanges they discuss in detail the credits and blames of Wolff's philosophical system by examining, on the one hand, the claims of its Pietist detractors at the court of Frederick Wilhelm I, and on the other, the grounds of the opposition of the Newtonian front at the Berlin Academy of Sciences. The opinions of the three correspondents are not always aligned. The paper aims at presenting the image of Wolff and Wolffianism that emerges from

the considerations of the Margravine Wilhelmine and of the Queen Sophia Dorothea, and their remarkable influence on the philosophical orientation of the Crown Prince.

Katherine Goodman, Professor Emerita at Brown University

Luise Gottsched, Anglophile: Panthea

Luise Gottsched (1713-1762) was the first woman to participate in the inchoate public sphere in Germany. She did so, in part at least, in the effort to dislodge a faddish and myopic Francophilia in favor the more sober practical philosophy of the English enlightenment. Her numerous translations of English texts by authors like Addison, Steele and Pope and her imitation of Swift's satires are more or less well known (and paved the way for the later Anglophilia of authors like Lessing), but rarely is the influence of these authors on her own writing examined. Her works are more commonly associated with the rather pedantic moralism and neoclassical admonitions of her husband, Johann Christoph Gottsched. Indeed, his comments on her works have largely defined their interpretation and still often result in viewing her as his faithful "Gehilfin" (assistant or apprentice). Her only "Trauerspiel" (melodrama or tragedy), *Panthea* (1744), offers an opportunity to investigate the ways in which English influences helped her undermine some characteristics of French neoclassicism.

I begin my interrogation of her play with her husband's introductory comments on it and define her limited, but definite, indebtedness to stylistic precepts of French neoclassicist drama. The real substance of the drama, however – its action, characterizations, dialogue and projected ideals – substitutes the practical philosophy of a more egalitarian society (parliamentary monarchy) for those of a (tyrannical) monarchy. This becomes apparent with her specific adoption of ideals found in Cicero and in Shaftesbury. In England, Cicero's perceived parliamentarianism replaced Cato's dogmatic republican stance as the Whig ideal once that party came to power after 1715. Comparisons of the ideals espoused in her drama with those in Cicero's *De Officiis* as well as the contents of her library confirm the influence of the English reception of the Roman on her drama. She also expressed great admiration for Shaftesbury, a Whig, in her letters and even began a translation. Shaftesbury defined his objection to French neoclassicism in political terms, and developed a concept of "dialogue" in literature to replace "sermonizing". He did this with specific reference to the *Panthea* episode in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*.

Luise Gottsched's *Panthea* is less an example of adherence to her husband's neoclassicism and more the discreet projection of revolutionary ideas. It occupies a forward position in contemporary political and practical philosophy.

[*Synopsis of Luise Gottsched's Panthea (1744)*: The origins of the plot are found in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* where the *Panthea* material comprises two independent elements of the larger narrative. The first begins after the virtuous and beautiful PANTHEA, QUEEN OF SUSIA, has been taken captive by CYRUS, KING OF PERSIA, while ABRADATES, HER HUSBAND,

was away. ARASPES, A NOBLE FRIEND OF CYRUS, insinuates that the king might find her attractive, but the virtuous Cyrus refuses to see her for fear he will neglect his public duties if he does. Araspes rashly boasts that he is no such weakling and accepts the challenge of guarding Panthea without yielding to the power of love. When he makes advances and is repeatedly repulsed, Panthea reveals his transgression to Cyrus. Cyrus admonishes him, but offers a penitent Araspes the opportunity to use their rumored disagreement as a pretense for him to leave the Persian camp and spy on the enemy Assyrians. Reformed, Araspes later returns to Cyrus' camp, but does not figure further in the story of Panthea. In Xenophon's second Panthea segment, she assumes responsibility for Cyrus having lost a brave warrior (Araspes to the Assyrians) and promises that her husband, Abradates, will replace him. Abradates helps secure the Persian victory and dies heroically in battle. Panthea tells Cyrus they share blame for his death: she, because she had urged him to fight for Cyrus, and he, because Abradates desired to please him. She then retreats and kills herself. Cyrus erects a monument to the virtuous husband and wife.]

Astrid Dröse, University of Tübingen

Enlightenment feminism in Germany: Christiana Mariana von Ziegler and the epistolary culture of the 18th century

Christiana Mariana von Ziegler (1695-1760) is one of the most important representatives of German Enlightenment feminism. The wealthy widow, a member of Gottsched's circle and crowned poeta laureata by Wittenberg University, led an independent life as a salonière in Leipzig and left behind an extensive lyrical and essayistic oeuvre, which is of great cultural-historical source value, especially with regard to gender history and the 'Querelle des femmes' discourse of the early Enlightenment. But she was also admired for her poetry: her cantatas were set to music by composers like Johann Sebastian Bach. Ziegler's network extended beyond the university city of Leipzig: she was in contact with central players of the literary and cultural scene in the German-speaking world, such as Bertold Hinrich Brockes or Georg Philipp Telemann, to whom some of her "Sendschreiben" are addressed. Ziegler left behind four extensive collections: two volumes of poetry (1728/29), a collection of "Vermischte Schriften" (1739) and a collection of essays ("Moralische Sendschreiben", 1731). In addition, there are translations from French, including the translation of the "Conversations Morales" by Madeleine de Scudéry, with whom the German author identified and whose existence as a European femme de lettres she imitated. In my lecture, I will focus on Ziegler's "Sendschreiben", which reveal the author's emancipatory arguments. I will also discuss the genre of the "Sendschreiben" and place Ziegler's texts in the context of the female epistolary culture of the 18th century.

Sabrina Ebbersmeyer, University of Copenhagen

The genius of the female philosopher: The peculiar case of Elisabeth of Bohemia and her early reception in Germany

Does philosophy require any specific talent? And if so, do women possess this giftedness, called *ingenium*, to the same extent as men? The latter question was intensively debated during the Early modern period (and beyond) in Germany. While many voices argued for the negative, we also find keen defenders of women's intellectual abilities.

In my contribution, I present some aspects of this debate and discuss the underlying arguments for the respective positions, focusing on the genre of catalogues and lexica of *gelehrte Frauenzimmer*, and on general histories of philosophy. Secondly, I compare these findings with the case of Elisabeth of Bohemia, Princess Palatine (1618-1680). Considered to be one of the most famous women philosophers of the Early modern period, she is an illustrious example of both: women's philosophical genius and the absence of it. Drawing on dedications and letters addressed to Elisabeth, I reconstruct the arguments for these conflicting assessments. Finally, I will draw some conclusions concerning the historical debate about women's philosophical talent and its relevance for today.

Ariane Schneck, Bielefeld University

Elisabeth of Bohemia and the Limits of (Self-)Knowledge

In their correspondence, Elisabeth and Descartes famously discuss what it takes to live a happy life. One crucial feature of Descartes's account is that the judgments upon which our actions are based should be correct. Elisabeth points out that it is often hard or even impossible to make correct judgments in daily life because we are frequently not in the position to know how to evaluate the situation, objects and people at stake. While Descartes seems to think that we can know the "true value" (or something close enough) of the things we assess in daily life, Elisabeth objects that we lack a way to measure these values, especially when it comes to weighing our own interests against those of others. In such cases, she thinks, our judgments and decisions are often influenced by "imperceptible prejudices" that we are not aware of. With this assumption, Elisabeth seems to put forward an account of the subconscious that goes very much against the "transparency of the mind"-thesis that Descartes is known for. In my talk, I argue that their different views on the possibility of knowing the true value of objects and persons (including oneself) is in the end rooted in very different metaphysical background assumptions. These different metaphysical views and the related different estimation of the possibility of acquiring (self-)knowledge explain why Elisabeth does not share Descartes's optimism about making correct judgments, which for him is one of the important requirements for leading a happy life.

Juliane Engelhardt, University of Copenhagen

Changing gender roles through private testimonies

This presentation analyses private testimonies written by radical Pietists, such as Rosamunde Juliane von der Asseburg, Adelheid Sibylle Schwartz, Johanne Eleonora Petersen, Johann Wilhelm Petersen, and anonymous women and men in central German towns, 1692-93. The presentation addresses how the writers through private testimonies developed a discourse, which allowed them to experiment with the role of women and the female scope of action. The main thesis is that the private testimonies offered emotional and discursive refuge from the patriarchy and traditional power relations. In this, they offered visionary spaces of new social hierarchies.

Throughout the testimonies, many female writers described themselves as being a passive tool of the will of God. They often spoke of themselves as having the soul and the heart of a child, and that God had infused everything they felt or said in them. The way, in which radical Pietists described themselves as passive and childish-minded instruments, is in clear contrast to the actual content of the testimonies. Often these contained harsh criticism of traditional power holders, both the clergy and the political rulers. In other testimonies, male writers described their dreams of women being religious leaders or prophets. Some wrote narratives of how they had met a woman named Debora in their dreams. Debora was a biblical figure, who prophesied the victory of the Israeli. The analogy in their own time was probably that God elected women to prophesy.

The presentation discusses how the testimonies offered spaces of emotional and discursive refuge from prevailing codes of honour and gender roles. The testimonies offered both immunity (through descriptions of the receiver as passive and childlike) and authority (through the language of election) in particular among radical religious women. Within these new discourses, the traditional interpretation of the Holy Trinity as supporting a patriarchal social structure was suspended, and new models of a different social order were envisioned.

Mathilda Amundsen Bergström, University of Copenhagen

Becoming a Learned Lady: Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht's Autobiographical Letter

In 1745, Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht (1718-1763) was asked by historian Anders Anton von Stiernman to write her autobiography, which was to be used as material for a projected catalogue of learned Swedish ladies. Though the catalogue was never finished, Nordenflycht's autobiography was printed in 1763 and has thus been preserved. In the text, the Swedish poet describes her upbringing, education, and early attempts at poetry.

When the letter was written, Nordenflycht had published two well-received collections of poetry but was at the beginning of what would become her remarkable career as Sweden's

first female professional poet. In this paper, I will argue that she is using the textual and rhetorical space provided by Stiernman to create an original story for herself, serving to justify and explain her extraordinary position as a female poet. I will discuss the autobiography as modelled on the catalogue genre and explore what happens when one of the learned ladies themselves is given the opportunity to shape her own biography.