

DIVERSITY READING LIST PRESENTS:

PHILOSOPHER QUEENS

A DRL READING GROUP BLUEPRINT BY REBECCA BUXTON (WITH THANKS TO ALIX DIETZEL)

LEVEL: INTRODUCTORY

INTRODUCTION

Women have historically been excluded from the traditional canon of philosophy. This reading group aims to help students think through, first, why such exclusion has taken place and, second, to think about what ought to be done to remedy it. The reading list is therefore divided into two sections. The first two weeks focus on the deconstruction and reconstruction of the traditional canon; thinking about the exclusion of women and other marginalised groups, and then attending to the process of reconstruction (or abolition). The final six weeks of the course focus on individual women philosophers. This is (obviously) nowhere near exhaustive. But it provides a basic starting point for those wanting to read more women philosophers.

THE BOOK

This Blueprint is based around an excellent introductory book co-edited by the author, titled: *Philosopher Queens: The lives and legacies of philosophy's unsung women*. We will read some sections from it, but we recommend the entire book, of course! Here is what the publisher has to say about it:

The history of philosophy has not done women justice: you've probably heard the names Plato, Kant, Nietzsche and Locke – but what about Hypatia, Arendt, Oluwole and Young? The *Philosopher Queens* is a long-awaited book about the lives and works of women in philosophy by women in philosophy. This collection brings to centre stage twenty prominent women whose ideas have had a profound – but for the most part uncredited – impact on the world. You'll learn about Ban Zhao, the first woman historian in ancient Chinese history; Angela Davis, perhaps the most iconic symbol of the American Black Power Movement; Azizah Y. al-Hibri, known for examining the intersection of Islamic law and gender equality; and many more. For anyone who has wondered where the women philosophers are, or anyone curious about the history of ideas – it's time to meet the philosopher queens.

CATEGORIES

- History of Philosophy
- Women in Philosophy
- Feminist Approaches to Philosophy
- Gender and Equality
- Discrimination

AVAILABLE ONLINE AT:

<https://diversityreadinglist.org/blueprint/philosopher-queens/>

WEEK 1. EXCLUSION FROM THE CANON

HASLANGER, SALLY. *CHANGING THE IDEOLOGY AND CULTURE OF PHILOSOPHY: NOT BY REASON (ALONE)*

2007, *Hypatia*, 23 (2): 210–23.

Difficulty: Intermediate

ABSTRACT:

There is a deep well of rage inside of me. Rage about how I as an individual have been treated in philosophy; rage about how others I know have been treated; and rage about the conditions that I'm sure affect many women and minorities in philosophy, and have caused many others to leave. Most of the time I suppress this rage and keep it sealed away. Until I came to MIT in 1998, I was in a constant dialogue with myself about whether to quit philosophy, even give up tenure, to do something else. In spite of my deep love for philosophy, it just didn't seem worth it. And I am one of the very lucky ones, one of the ones who has been successful by the dominant standards of the profession. Whatever the numbers say about women and minorities in philosophy, numbers don't begin to tell the story. Things may be getting better in some contexts, but they are far from acceptable.

COMMENT:

In her 2007 paper, Haslanger sets out the situation of women in philosophy with a particular focus on institutional academic settings. This paper discusses how women are excluded from philosophy (both contemporary and historical) as well as thinking about disciplinary boundaries: why is it that feminist philosophy is not often thought of as 'real' philosophy?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does Haslanger's empirical data compare with how things are today?
2. Has the position of women in philosophy improved over the last ten years?
3. Do you agree that the exclusion of women from the history of philosophy is partly to do with disciplinary boundaries?
4. Why is it that women are not being published in top academic philosophy journals at the same rate as men?

WAITHE, MARY ELLEN. *SEX, LIES, AND BIGOTRY: THE CANON OF PHILOSOPHY*

2020, In Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir and Ruth Edith Hagengruber (eds.), *Methodological Reflections on Women's Contribution and Influence in the History of Philosophy*, Springer International Publishing.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

ABSTRACT:

In "Sex, Lies, and Bigotry: The Canon of Philosophy" I explore several questions: What does it mean for our understanding of the history of philosophy that women philosophers have been left out and are now being retrieved? What kind of a methodology of the history of philosophy does the recovery of women philosophers imply? Whether and how excluded women philosophers have been included in philosophy? Whether and how feminist philosophy and the history of women philosophers are related? I also explore the questions "Are there any themes or arguments that are common to many women philosophers?" and "Does inclusion of women in the canon require a reconfiguration of philosophical inquiry?" I argue that it is either ineptness or simple bigotry that led most historians of philosophy to intentionally omit women's contributions from their histories and that

such failure replicated itself in the university curricula of recent centuries and can be remedied by suspending for the next two centuries the teaching of men's contributions to the discipline and teaching works by women only. As an alternative to this drastic and undoubtedly unpopular solution, I propose expanding the length and number of courses in the philosophy curriculum to include discussion of women's contributions.

COMMENT:

In this scathing chapter, Waithe argues that people who have left women out of the history of philosophy are either inept or bigoted. Rather than being an accidental fact of women's general exclusion, she argues that women philosophers have been ignored intentionally.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

5. Why have women been historically excluded from the philosophical canon?
6. What is the 'traditional canon' in philosophy and is it useful?
7. Do you agree with Waithe that, rather than remaking the traditional philosophical canon, we should simply expand it?
8. What are the dangers of this approach?

LLANERA, TRACY. *THE BROWN BABE'S BURDEN*

2019, *Hypatia*, 34 (2): 374–83.

Difficulty: Easy

ABSTRACT:

In this paper Tracy Llanera reflects on her experience as a non-white academic in an Australian university, recounting personal experiences. Many of these highlight the importance of an intersectional approach to the inclusion of women in philosophy. Llanera highlights the ongoing importance of mentorship and representation concluding that there is much more work to be done.

COMMENT:

Tracy Llanera discusses her personal experience as a non-white woman in philosophy. There is much to learn from this piece, most importantly the need for an intersectional approach. Focusing on the personal experience of women (as we also see in other pieces) is necessary to understand the whole picture of contemporary exclusion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

9. How could the inclusion of women in philosophy be more intersectional?
10. What lessons can we learn from Llanera's personal experience?

WEEK 2. RECREATING THE CANON

HUTCHINGS, KIMBERLEY. *WOMEN THINKERS AND THE CANON OF INTERNATIONAL THOUGHT: RECOVERY, REJECTION, AND RECONSTITUTION*

2021, *American Political Science Review*, 115 (2): 347–59.

Difficulty: Intermediate

ABSTRACT:

Canons of intellectual “greats” anchor the history and scope of academic disciplines. Within international relations (IR), such a canon emerged in the mid-twentieth century and is almost entirely male. Why are women thinkers absent from IR’s canon? We show that it is not due to a lack of international thought, or that this thought fell outside established IR theories. Rather it is due to the gendered and racialized selection and reception of work that is deemed to be canonical. In contrast, we show what can be gained by reclaiming women’s international thought through analyses of three intellectuals whose work was authoritative and influential in its own time or today. Our findings question several of the basic premises underpinning IR’s existing canon and suggest the need for a new research agenda on women international thinkers as part of a fundamental rethinking of the history and scope of the discipline.

COMMENT:

In this paper, Hutchings and Owens put forward a new research agenda for women's international thought. This can help us to think through how new canon's might be created or transformed. The paper therefore begins its project of bringing women back into intellectual history.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Hutchings and Owens propose a new way forward for thinking about women's international thought. Do you find this compelling?
2. Hutchings and Owens discuss the gendered and racialised reception of work. How might this be overcome?

TYSON, SARAH. *WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? WHY EXPANDING THE ARCHIVE MAKES PHILOSOPHY BETTER*

2018, Columbia University Press.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: Introduction, xiii-xxviii.

ABSTRACT:

Philosophy has not just excluded women. It has also been shaped by the exclusion of women. As the field grapples with the reality that sexism is a central problem not just for the demographics of the field but also for how philosophy is practiced, many philosophers have begun to rethink the canon. Yet attempts to broaden European and Anglophone philosophy to include more women in the discipline's history or to acknowledge alternative traditions will not suffice as long as exclusionary norms remain in place.

In *Where Are the Women?*, Sarah Tyson makes a powerful case for how redressing women's exclusion can make philosophy better. She argues that engagements with historical thinkers typically afforded little authority can transform the field, outlining strategies based on the work of three influential theorists: Genevieve Lloyd, Luce Irigaray, and Michèle Le Doeuff. Following from the possibilities they open up, at once literary, linguistic, psychological, and political, Tyson reclaims two passionate nineteenth-century texts—the Declaration of Sentiments from the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention and Sojourner Truth's speech at the 1851 Akron, Ohio, Women's Convention—showing how the demands for equality, rights, and recognition sought in the early women's movement still pose quandaries for contemporary philosophy, feminism, and politics. *Where Are the Women?* challenges us to confront the reality that women's exclusion from philosophy has been an ongoing project and to become more critical both of how we see existing injustices and of how we address them.

COMMENT:

In her book, Tyson discusses why it is valuable to recognize the contributions of women philosophers, arguing that their lost contributions have the potential to transform the current field. This opens up interesting questions about the value of representation and how we ought to approach campaigning for the inclusion of women.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

3. Should we focus on the contribution that women philosophers can make to the discipline?
4. What is the value of representation among philosophers in the canon?
5. Do you agree with Tyson that expanding the canon will make philosophy better?
6. Do you think that, even if expanding the canon does not improve the discipline, we ought to do so anyway?

WEEK 3. HYPATIA

WHITING, LISA. *HYPATIA*

2020, In: *The Philosopher Queens: The Lives and Legacies of Philosophy's Unsung Women*. **Difficulty:** Easy
Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting (eds.). Unbound.

COMMENT:

A very clear and short introduction to Hypatia, her background, her mathematical works and her philosophical teachings. Whiting also offers a useful overview of the often misleading historiography on Hypatia as well as of 20th century feminist appeals to her character.

WATTS, EDWARD. *HYPATIA: THE LIFE AND LEGEND OF AN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHER*

2017, Oxford University Press. **Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate
Fragment: "A Philosophical Mother and Her Children", pp 63-78.

ABSTRACT:

A philosopher, mathematician, and martyr, Hypatia is one of antiquity's best-known female intellectuals. For the sixteen centuries following her murder by a mob of Christians Hypatia has been remembered in books, poems, plays, paintings, and films as a victim of religious intolerance whose death symbolized the end of the Classical world. But Hypatia was a person before she was a symbol. Her great skill in mathematics and philosophy redefined the intellectual life of her home city of Alexandria. Her talent as a teacher enabled her to assemble a circle of dedicated male students. Her devotion to public service made her a force for peace and good government in a city that struggled to maintain trust and cooperation between pagans and Christians. Despite these successes, Hypatia fought countless small battles to live the public and intellectual life that she wanted. This book rediscovers the life Hypatia led, the unique challenges she faced as a woman who succeeded spectacularly in a man's world, and the tragic story of the events that led to her murder.

COMMENT:

This book offers a deeper overview of Hypatia's life and work. In particular, it notes her political involvement and influences that she had on the city.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What did Hypatia mean by "breaking away from the world of matter"?
2. What was the impact of Hypatia's public philosophy and political activity?
3. In what way is Hypatia's execution comparable with Socrates'?

WEEK 4. MARY ASTELL

WEBB, SIMONE. *MARY ASTELL*

2020, In: *The Philosopher Queens: The Lives and Legacies of Philosophy's Unsung Women*. **Difficulty:** Easy
Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting (eds.). Unbound.

COMMENT:

Webb offers a clear summary of Astell's life and work, particularly her campaigning on women's education. This can serve as an excellent introduction to Astell's famous text, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, as Webb offers some elements of context to understand what led Astell to write this text, as well as the paradoxical aspects of Astell's feminism.

ASTELL, MARY. *A SERIOUS PROPOSAL TO THE LADIES*

2002, Patricia Springborg (ed.), Broadview Press Ltd. **Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: Part I.

ABSTRACT:

Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* is one of the most important and neglected works advocating the establishment of women's academies. Its reception was so controversial that Astell responded with a lengthy sequel, also in this volume. The cause of great notoriety, Astell's Proposal was imitated by Defoe in his "An Academy for Women," parodied in the Tatler, satirized on the stage, plagiarized by Bishop Berkeley, and later mocked by Gilbert and Sullivan in *Princess Ida*.

COMMENT:

This new edition by Patricia Springborg of Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* includes helpful introductory material and explanatory annotations to Astell's text. Springborg's introduction places Astell's work in the context of the woman question and the debate over empirical rationalism in the eighteenth-century. Astell defends women-only education, arguing against the dangers of women failing to think for themselves. This text is good to use in an early modern course. It could also be considered in a course on feminist philosophy as an example of early feminist thought (predating Mary Wollstonecraft).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does Astell critique women's 'conduct books'?
2. Astell does not argue that women and men are the same. What should we think about this claim?
3. Is Astell concerned with the material position of women or their sense of self?
4. How does Astell propose that women reclaim their autonomy?
5. What benefits does Astell claim would stem from an all-women educational community?

WEEK 5. THE OXFORD FOUR

ROBSON, ELLIE. *MARY MIDGLEY*

2020, In: *The Philosopher Queens: The Lives and Legacies of Philosophy's Unsung Women*. **Difficulty:** Easy
Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting (eds.). Unbound.

COMMENT:

Robson offers an overview of the true breadth and holistic nature of Midgley's work, beyond the widely known aspects of her work such as her thoughts on animal ethics. As such it can serve as a great introduction to any of her works, from her ethics to her metaphilosophy.

LIPSCOMB, BENJAMIN J.B. *THE WOMEN ARE UP TO SOMETHING*

2021, Oxford University Press. **Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: Introduction and Chapter 1.

ABSTRACT:

The story of four remarkable women who shaped the intellectual history of the 20th century: Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch. On the cusp of the Second World War, four women went to Oxford to begin their studies: a fiercely brilliant Catholic convert; a daughter of privilege longing to escape her stifling upbringing; an ardent Communist and aspiring novelist with a list of would-be lovers as long as her arm; and a quiet, messy lover of newts and mice who would become a great public intellectual of our time. They became lifelong friends. At the time, only a handful of women had ever made lives in philosophy. But when Oxford's men were drafted in the war, everything changed. As Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch labored to make a place for themselves in a male-dominated world, as they made friendships and families, and as they drifted toward and away from each other, they never stopped insisting that some lives are better than others. They argued that courage and discernment and justice—and love—are the heart of a good life. This book presents the first sustained engagement with these women's contributions: with the critique and the alternative they framed. Drawing on a cluster of recently opened archives and extensive correspondence and interviews with those who knew them best, Benjamin Lipscomb traces the lives and ideas of four friends who gave us a better way to think about ethics, and ourselves.

COMMENT:

This text discusses the lives and work of four women philosophers in mid-20th century England: Mary Midgley, Philippa Foot, Elizabeth Anscombe, and Iris Murdoch. As such it is relevant to discussions of the challenges that women face in academic settings, but it can also serve as historical background on contemporary ethics, as these four philosophers developed ideas that revolutionised the field.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Is there anything about the political context surrounding the Oxford Four that makes their time at Oxford together distinctive?
2. Why should we think of these four women as a collective (if we should at all)?
3. How does discussing these women's relationships with one another help us to understand the development of their thought?

If you are interested in the work of Anscombe, Foot, Midgley and Murdoch, we have a whole Blueprint devoted to them! Find it here: <https://diversityreadinglist.org/blueprint/the-wartime-quartet>

WEEK 6. SOPHIE OLUWOLE

SALAMI, MINNA. *SOPHIE BOSEDE OLUWOLE*

2020, In: *The Philosopher Queens: The Lives and Legacies of Philosophy's Unsung Women*.
Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting (eds.). Unbound.

Difficulty: Easy

COMMENT:

In this chapter, Salami offers some very useful historical background on Nigeria's pre-colonial past and Yoruba thought. This helps us to understand Oluwole's situation as an African philosopher born in colonial Nigeria and influenced by Western philosophy, as well as a staunch defender of Yoruba oral genres and African philosophy as a whole. Salami also notes that Oluwole is one of the rare philosophers to have been influential and admired within and without the academy.

OLUWOLE, SOPHIE. *SOCRATES AND ỌRÚNMÌLÀ: TWO PATRON SAINTS OF CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY*

2014, Ark Publishers.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: Introduction and Chapter 1.

ABSTRACT:

Oluwole's teachings and works are generally attributed to the Yoruba school of philosophical thought, which was ingrained in the cultural and religious beliefs (Ifá) of the various regions of Yorubaland. According to Oluwole, this branch of philosophy predates the Western tradition, as the ancient African philosopher Orunmila predates Socrates by her estimate. These two thinkers, representing the values of the African and Western traditions, are two of Oluwole's biggest influences, and she compares the two in her book *Socrates and Orunmila*.

COMMENT:

This book compares Socrates to Ọrúnmìlà, an 'Orisha' or an important spirit in Yoruba. Both Socrates and Orunmila undertook their philosophy orally and passed their teachings and thinking onto students. Oluwole therefore challenges the western assumption that African philosophy does not have a long-standing on deep tradition.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is the comparison between Socrates and Orunmila so powerful?
2. What is the place of the oral tradition in philosophy?
3. Oluwole wants to highlight what is African about African philosophy. What are the main features that she highlights?

WEEK 7. BELL HOOKS

HOOKS, BELL. *AIN'T I A WOMAN? BLACK WOMEN AND FEMINISM*

1981, South End Press.

Difficulty: Intermediate

Fragment: Chapter 5: "Black Women and Feminism".

ABSTRACT:

In this classic study, cultural critic bell hooks examines how black women, from the seventeenth century to the present day, were and are oppressed by both white men and black men and by white women. Illustrating her analysis with moving personal accounts, *Ain't I a Woman* is deeply critical of the racism inherent in the thought of many middle-class white feminists who have failed to address issues of race and class. While acknowledging the conflict of loyalty to race or sex is still a dilemma, hooks challenges the view that race and gender are two separate phenomena, insisting that the struggles to end racism and sexism are inextricably intertwined.

COMMENT:

This text discusses Black women's struggle against oppression and subjugation in America, focusing on white women's role in slavery. hooks argues that this history of slavery is directly linked to Black women's contemporary marginalization.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What have 'bourgeois white women' done to feminist movements?
2. hooks says that she struggles to choose between feminist and anti-racist struggles. How does she propose we proceed instead of choosing?
3. Can feminism ever make sense of the diverse nature of women's experience

WEEK 8. IRIS MARION YOUNG

LIM, DÉsirÉE. *IRIS MARION YOUNG*

2020, In: *The Philosopher Queens: The Lives and Legacies of Philosophy's Unsung Women*.
Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting (eds.). Unbound.

Difficulty: Easy

COMMENT:

In this chapter, Lim recounts Young's childhood and educational background as a way to inform our understanding of her philosophical and political practice. In this sense, this text should deeply enhance students' comprehension of Young's feminist political thought and would serve as useful introduction to some of her writings on structural injustices and minority rights.

YOUNG, IRIS MARION. *JUSTICE AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE*

1990, Princeton University Press.

Difficulty: Intermediate

Fragment: "The Five Faces of Oppression".

ABSTRACT:

In this classic work of feminist political thought, Iris Marion Young challenges the prevailing reduction of social justice to distributive justice. It critically analyzes basic concepts underlying most theories of justice, including impartiality, formal equality, and the unitary moral subjectivity. The starting point for her critique is the experience and concerns of the new social movements about decision making, cultural expression, and division of labor — that were created by marginal and excluded groups, including women, African Americans, and American Indians, as well as gays and lesbians. Iris Young defines concepts of domination and oppression to cover issues eluding the distributive model. Democratic theorists, according to Young do not adequately address the problem of an inclusive participatory framework. By assuming a homogeneous public, they fail to consider institutional arrangements for including people not culturally identified with white European male norms of reason and respectability. Young urges that normative theory and public policy should undermine group-based oppression by affirming rather than suppressing social group difference. Basing her vision of the good society on the differentiated, culturally plural network of contemporary urban life, she argues for a principle of group representation in democratic publics and for group-differentiated policies.

COMMENT:

Young's book, *Justice and The Politics of Difference*, argues against a liberal conception of distributive justice and instead focuses on the position of the oppressed. Doing so opens up valuable discussion on how political theory ought to be done and who should be centred in our theorising.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is Young's argument against liberal approaches to distributive justice?
2. Is there anything missing from Young's account of oppression?
3. What is the concept of 'structural injustice' and how does it explain the Sandy case?
4. Do you agree that we should move from a 'liability' model to a forward-looking 'responsibility' model of justice?