



PROJECT MUSE®

America's First Women Philosophers: Transplanting Hegel,
1860-1925 (review)

Therese Boos Dykeman

Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American
Philosophy, Volume 42, Number 1, Winter 2006, pp. 164-167 (Review)



Published by Indiana University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/csp.2006.0007>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/200090>



Project
MUSE[®]
Scholarly journals online

Edwards found this conception of being too limited and insisted on the need to recognize the reality of the tendencies and propensities—what Charles Peirce would later call the *general*—that become manifest through a multitude of events and human actions. In this respect, Edwards, for all the emphasis that has been placed on his ‘Idealism’, was a realist in the philosophical sense; reality is not exhausted by particulars, because there are, as well, continuing structures in the natures of things.”

2. *Jonathan Edwards* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1959).

3. *Religion and the American Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1966).

4. See for example Anni Varila, *The Swedenborgian Background of William James’ Philosophy* (Helsinki, 1977), and R. W. B. Lewis, *The Jameses: A Family Narrative* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991).

5. R. B. Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, I (Boston, 1935), p. 130.

6. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1922), pp. 515–17.



DOROTHY G. ROGERS

America’s First Women Philosophers: Transplanting Hegel, 1860–1925

New York: Continuum, 2005. 208 pp.

When Midwest met East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Platonists from Illinois, Hegelians from Missouri, and Transcendentalists from Massachusetts traversed back and forth by train from St. Louis, Missouri to Concord, Massachusetts in search of philosophical dialogue for knowledge and practical application. The wonder of this particular period of such transaction was led in part by women who wrote and taught philosophy. The story has yet to be written which details this travel and networking of the many women engaged in philosophical exchange. This text, however, begins the tale.

The emphasis of locale in this text is St. Louis, but lines radiate in many directions, to Michigan, Chicago, California, and New England. The main connecting line is with the Concord School of Philosophy operated every summer for a ten-year period (1879–88) in Massachusetts. Offering lectures, discussions, and networking, the school was literally headquartered in the small building in the backyard of Bronson Alcott’s home. Here, the forces of the aging Ralph Waldo Emerson engaged with those of the younger William Torrey Harris. Harris, superintendent of the St. Louis schools and “founder and editor of the nation’s first journal devoted exclusively to philosophy, the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*” becomes the prevailing focus of this text. Not only Bronson Alcott but also Ednah Dow Cheney and Julia Ward Howe, who taught at the Concord School, traveled to St. Louis to further engage with Harris and see firsthand the educational sys-

tem Harris had implemented there. Most importantly, the philosophical center of attention in this text relates to the Americanization of Hegel. As in all ages, older philosophy is ever waxing and waning as newer philosophy is introduced. In this period, the idealist movement meets with the process movement; Hegel with pedagogical theory of Susan Blow, Anna Brackett, and Ellen Mitchell; Kant, in particular, with the peace theory of Lucia Ames Mead; and John Dewey with the political theory of Marietta Kies.

Dorothy G. Rogers, in gathering together her first rate research, makes possible a future history of American philosophy that will offer a more accurate and inclusive rendering. In addition, this work will be essential to further research. Always problematic in discussing women thinkers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is the term “philosopher,” a term Rogers sees rather as a matter of degree and ambiguity than as an absolute. Sufficing for the term “feminist” is the meaning—one who seeks an end to injustices to women. All the women whose lives and works are addressed in this text are philosophers to some extent, but not all are feminists, and of those, some as Rogers distinguishes them have more “maternal” than “liberal” feminist beliefs.

Before examining the lives and works of the women identified with the St. Louis idealists, Rogers introduces seven male figures in the idealist circle and identifies their dominant themes. Before I begin a closer look at this text, I wish to note that this text recognizes a wide reality—in the cross pollination of disciplines, in the academization of women philosophers, and in the forwarding of philosophical thought in practice as well as in theory. Gone is the narrow vision of the history of philosophy that kept enfolded in silence the political philosophy of Mercy Otis Warren at the inception of this nation, and before her, the pragmatic ethics of Anne Bradstreet. Unfolded here are the contributions of women at the academic turn that occurred at the beginning of acceptance of women in academe and in higher degree programs in philosophy. It is the aim of Rogers’ text to unravel the fabric of women’s hidden and/or dismissed bequest to American philosophy at this critical point, 1860–1925.

The following is a brief summary of the contributions of women in the philosophy of education, peace, and ethical politics that Rogers formulates as a legacy of American Idealism. The philosopher-educators in St. Louis agreed with Hegel’s notion that children have a right to education, and that education means confronting otherness and engaging in *Selbsttätigkeit* or “self-activity.” Susan E. Blow (1843–1916) directed the kindergarten program at the first continuous free public kindergarten system, publishing five books on the philosophy of early childhood education. Anna C. Brackett (1836–1911) was the first woman in the United States to be appointed principal of a secondary school. In directing the normal school, she applied to women and girls the educational theory of Karl Rosenkranz, Hegel’s disciple.

Blow had studied under Froebel in Europe before opening the “first training school for kindergarten teachers in the US.” In her 1894 *Symbolic*

Education, she advanced her theory that education primarily facilitated the process of unfolding the self. Toward that end, like Hegel, she disparaged “free play” that was not directed toward “intellectual and moral growth,” the will and the intellect being intimately linked, but she disagreed with John Dewey’s notion that education be a means or “civilizing force” rather than an end in itself. Crowds of hundreds gathered to hear her speak.

One of the first women to serve as editor of a professional journal, Brackett saw teaching as a profession, the same as law, medicine, and religion. As a feminist theorist she reconfigured the Hegelian idea that “women were innately bound to home” positing that women as well as men should seek knowledge as a part of the greater spiritual process unfolding in the universe, and that to gain intellectual and moral growth they must experience the world outside the home as well. To be teachers, she argued, women should have the same opportunity for educational skills as those men enjoyed. By extending Hegelian theory to women, Brackett contributed to the philosophical movement in St. Louis. Brackett’s publications are extensive in both educational and philosophical journals as well as in books, e.g. *The Philosophy of Education* (1893), and *Women and Higher Education* (1893).

Grace C. Bibb (1842–1912) and Ellen Mitchell (1838–1920) along with Brackett were among those women of the St. Louis idealist movement who traveled to take part in the Concord School of Philosophy. Rogers calls these serious students of philosophy outside the walls of academe, “para-professional philosophers.” A member of the Kant Club, Bibb became dean of the normal department at the University of Missouri at Columbia. Mitchell lectured on “Friendship in Aristotle’s Ethics” at the Concord School of Philosophy, held a full-time appointment as lecturer at the University of Denver, wrote on Schopenhauer and Plato for *JSP*, and published *Study in Greek Philosophy* (1891), which is, according to Rogers, a model of Hegelian thought, despite the fact that his *History of Philosophy* did not appear in English until a year later.

Coming later to the idealist movement, Eliza Sunderland (1839–1910) and Lucia Ames Mead (1856–1936) developed it in both para-professional and academic ways. Rogers points out that when only 20 women received doctorates in philosophy in the 20 year period 1880–1900 Sunderland was among them. Yet, passed over because of her sex, for a position to replace Dewey at the University of Michigan, she instead lectured at the Unitarian Church on Schopenhauer, Comte, Mill, etc. Invited to speak at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 at the men’s sessions on philosophy, her lecture was published along with her other essays on “religion, ethics, and women’s rights.” Having studied under Dewey and George Sylvester Morris at the University of Michigan, she wrote her dissertation on Kant and Hegel. Half of her writings focused on the history and philosophy of religion including Islam, and a significant part on “women’s roles and rights.”

Ames Mead, tutored by her brother Charles, had no formal training in philosophy. While attending the Concord School of Philosophy, under the

tutelage of Harris, she read Kant's *Perpetual Peace* upon which she then based her "practical pacifism." Her pacifist theory published in *Patriotism and the New Internationalism* (1906), *Swords and Ploughshares* (1912), and *Law or War* (1928), defines patriotism, not as involved in making and using guns, but as serving the country as teacher, farmer, doctor, etc., a patriotism which should be embedded in the education of children. Both Sunderland and Ames Mead applied philosophy to concrete efforts.

Like Sunderland, Marietta Kies (1853–1899) was one of the few women to earn a doctorate in philosophy. At the University of Michigan Kies' graduate study was guided by Morris and Dewey. Like Ames Mead, Kies also studied under Harris at Concord. Too young to be engaged in the development of the idealist movement, Kies published Harris' lectures in *An Introduction to the Study of Philosophy*. Having taught at Mt. Holyoke, South Hadley, Massachusetts and Colorado College in Colorado Springs, at Butler College, Indianapolis, she retained a position as professor of rhetoric. According to Rogers, her important contributions to the American philosophical canon lies in her judicious application of Hegel to social and political questions (except in terms of women's rights), and in her theory of "justice" and "grace" valuable for "political philosophy today," that was developed in her original works: *The Ethical Principle* and *Institutional Ethics*.

The aim of inclusive history of philosophy is not merely to add women's names, and justify them as philosophers, but rather to specify these women's achievements in philosophy and their contributions to the discipline. To that end this text analyzes the works of seven women at a critical time in American philosophical history. Perhaps subsequent scholars will make a different case as to their individual attainments. And it may be debatable as to whether the idealist movement that interpreted and translated Hegel, Fichte, Schelling and Kant was the "first genuinely philosophical movement in the nation" or if the best characterization of these late 18th early 19th century philosophers as "pre-pragmatic" as Rogers claims is accurate. The debate begun here in this "first philosophical examination" of the works of these women must continue, for credit is due to in Mitchell's words that "little band of women," who assembled "to study and discuss the problems of philosophy."

Therese B. Dykeman

Formerly of Fairfield University

tbdykeman@aol.com



GEORGE REISCH

How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xiv + 418 pp.

In this important new book George Reisch casts valuable light on the history of analytic philosophy in the United States. In doing so, he corrects