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Women In Early Analytic Philosophy: Volume Introduction

Maria van der Schaar and Eric Schliesser

Special Issue: Women in Early Analytic Philosophy
Edited by Maria van der Schaar and Eric Schliesser

Women In Early Analytic Philosophy: Volume Introduction

Maria van der Schaar and Eric Schliesser

The three women that form the focus of this special issue, Susan Stebbing (1895–1943), Susanne Langer (1895–1985), and Maria Kokoszyńska (1905–1981), belong to the first group of women who became recognized philosophers by obtaining a permanent university position in philosophy. Although there were women philosophers before the twentieth century, it was generally impossible for them to develop a career at a university. For this we have to wait until the time after World War I. Stebbing, Langer and Kokoszyńska can be seen as standing in the analytic tradition, in a narrow and wider sense. In the case of Stebbing and Kokoszyńska this claim is not controversial. Stebbing was, for example, instrumental in the founding of *Analysis*. While her interest in metaphysical analysis is distinctive she was part of a broader analytical conversation (e.g., [Stebbing 1932](#)). Kokoszyńska was a leading member of the Lvov-Warsaw School, which, early on already, Ernest Nagel identified as one of the founding pillars of analytical philosophy ([Nagel 1936](#)). In the case of Langer, who is now primarily associated with Cassirer's philosophy and her work in aesthetics, this identification is less obvious and we return to this below.

In the broader sense, analytic philosophy may be understood as aiming at precise concepts, providing a justification for pronounced theses, proclaiming an empirical or analytical method, and understanding itself as related to mathematics or the empirical sciences. In the twentieth century two important factors were added to analytic philosophy: the linguistic turn, and the application of a highly formalized method to problems of philosophy. Stebbing, Langer and Kokoszyńska are also part of the

movement in the more strict sense of analytic philosophy, and they were educated at the centres of analytic philosophy of their time. If we focus on the period before World War II, centres of analytic philosophy in the strict sense are to be found in Lvov, Warsaw, Vienna, Cambridge, and Harvard. Of these, perhaps, the inclusion of Harvard is controversial, but the paper by Giulia Felappi helps us to understand why it is legitimate to include Harvard.

We speak of the Lvov-Warsaw School, the Vienna Circle, and the Cambridge School of Analysis, and of British analytic philosophy in general. Perhaps, we can also speak of a Harvard School of philosophy. Whitehead was appointed as a professor in Harvard in 1924,¹ where Sheffer was already working as a logician. Together with the conceptual pragmatist C. I. Lewis, they provided a welcoming environment for analytical philosophy (see, e.g., [Hunter 2016](#)). Analytic philosophers at Harvard were more positive towards pragmatism and certain forms of Kantianism. From 1940 on, with Carnap and Tarski entering the stage and joining Quine, Harvard became the most influential centre for analytic philosophy at the time. Felappi's essay on Langer gives a sense of the kind of philosophy of language that Quine would have encountered during his education at Harvard.

Before World War I, some women were active in analytic philosophy in Britain, for example Lady Welby and E. E. Constance Jones.² The logician Constance Jones, Mistress at Girton College, probably influenced Stebbing to develop in the direction of logic. Girton College, a women's college founded in 1869, was near to Cambridge, but Cambridge did not allow women to graduate. For this reason Stebbing moved from Girton to

¹Later in life Quine and Davidson provided highly negative accounts of Whitehead's impact at Harvard. But it is worth noting that Quine's treatment of Whitehead in the Schilpp volume ([Quine 1941](#)) is not so critical, and that his 'Truth by Convention' ([Quine 1936](#)) appeared in a *Festschrift* devoted to Whitehead.

²Chapters on Welby and Constance Jones can be found in [Waithe \(1995\)](#).

King's College London, and later to Bedford College, a women's college as well. Stebbing became the first female professor of philosophy in Britain in 1933 at the University of London ([Wisdom 1944](#)). She was a major public intellectual and had great organisational talents, including offering shelter to the stateless Rose Rand in 1939, when she had fled from the Nazis.³ We return to Rose Rand below.

In the United States the situation was comparable to that in Britain. Next door to Harvard, a women's college, Radcliffe College or the 'Harvard Annex', was founded in 1879. At Radcliffe, the students were taught by the professors from Harvard. Susanne Langer, who was educated at Radcliffe, was thus taught by Sheffer and, later, by Whitehead. Women's colleges must have played an important part in the education of women, and thus made it easier for them to graduate at a university and develop a career as a philosopher than in Germany and Austria where such colleges were absent.

The University of Vienna, for example, only allowed women to attend university lectures as guest auditors in 1878, and to become students in 1895. The situation improved with the Vienna Circle in the 1920s. Women could become members of the Circle; for example, Rose Rand, who took the official notes of the meetings. We do not know of any female member of the Vienna Circle who made a professional, philosophical career, but that may also be explained by the hostile attitude of the Nazis. Fair to say, one cannot blame the Vienna Circle for not offering Rand a job in the thirties, as the situation for Jews became most difficult in Vienna as a whole, and not a few members of the Circle had to flee themselves.

The situation in Germany for female philosophers was even more difficult than in Vienna. We see that women could become a professor's assistant at times of absence of young men,

³Biographical material on Rand's difficult life as a philosopher can be found in [Hamacher-Hermes \(2003\)](#).

due to the losses in World War I. In Freiburg, Husserl appointed Edith Stein as research and teaching assistant, but he did not support her aim to have an independent career.⁴ The hierarchical structure at German universities enforced the ideal of a professor developing a system of philosophy and a group of adherents whose value seemed to be determined by their understanding of the master's voice. Independent women may not be attracted to such a practice. Hannah Arendt was confronted with a similar situation when studying under Heidegger. The physical closeness between the two made the possibility to develop an independent career even worse, in addition to the fact that Arendt was Jewish. She had to flee from both Germany and Heidegger in order to develop as a philosopher with a recognized position.

The situation in France with its excellent education at a pre-university level was better than in Germany. The brilliant Simone Weil was a pupil of Alain (Émile Chartier) at Lycée Henri IV, just like Simone de Beauvoir. Weil could develop a philosophical mind already in the classroom, receiving her *agrégation* in philosophy in 1931, thereby gaining the right to teach at a secondary school.

The most fascinating story to be told, though, concerns the presence of women in the Lvov-Warsaw School in the 1920s and 1930s. Kazimierz Twardowski, a pupil of Franz Brentano in Vienna, was asked to set up a philosophy department as part of the Polish University in Lemberg (Lvov). Twardowski held his inaugural lecture in 1895, in a town that is now part of the Ukraine,

⁴See [Spiegelberg \(1978, 223–24\)](#). The book contains also information on other female members of the phenomenological movement, such as Hedwig Conrad-Martius. The tragic fate of the Jewish Edith Stein is described in M. Sawicki, 'Personal Connections: The Phenomenology of Edith Stein', http://library.nd.edu/colldev/subject_home_pages/catholic/personal_connections.shtml. Information regarding a research project at Paderborn University on women in the phenomenological movement can be found at <https://historyofwomenphilosophers.org/summer-school/>.

but was part of the Habsburg Empire at the time. Twardowski's students were a miscellaneous group of hard-working students; a third of the students in Lemberg were Jews. Twardowski was a great organiser, and a severe but inspiring teacher. He was able to attract the best students, and taught them a high standard of intellectual rigor. Twardowski himself was not a formal logician, although he lectured on Boole, Schröder, Russell and Frege. His students Łukasiewicz and Leśniewski absorbed the ideas of Frege and Russell, and were soon to develop a logic of their own. Alfred Tarski, a second generation member of the School, presented his lecture on the semantic definition of truth in Warsaw, Lemberg and Vienna in 1930. Students of Twardowski also got positions in Warsaw, and we now speak of the Lvov-Warsaw School.

In order to ensure that women could enter the university, Twardowski took care that a secondary school for women was founded in Lemberg.⁵ He managed to attract quite an amount of female students. If we look at pictures of the 1920s with Twardowski surrounded by his students and assistants, we see that more than a third is female.⁶ Twardowski's students also had many female students, and at least ten women of the School were able to develop a career as philosopher at a university (Pakszys 1998). The most important ones are Janina Hosiasson, Izydora Dąmbska, Maria Ossowska, Janina Kotarbinska, and Maria Kokoszyńska. The members of the group mainly published in Polish, but there are also papers in German, partly due to contact with the Vienna Circle. Rose Rand, who was born in Lemberg, but went to the gymnasium in Vienna,

⁵This secondary school (gymnasium) was established in 1920. Earlier, since 1896, Twardowski taught at the Society of Academic Courses for Women; in 1897, he became the secretary of this society. Cf. Twardowski (2014, 18, 20). We thank Anna Brożek for providing this information.

⁶A lot of information on women of the Lvov-Warsaw School can be found in Woleński (1989). Cf. also Pakszys (1998). Page 32 of Woleński's book shows a picture of Twardowski surrounded by 5 male and 8 female students.

could read Polish, and translated writings of the Lvov-Warsaw School at a later date. The Vienna Circle came into contact with the Lvov-Warsaw School through Alfred Tarski and Maria Kokoszyńska. Kokoszyńska met most members of the Circle at the pre-conference in Prague in 1934, and she visited Vienna in 1934 for five months, where she was immediately invited to the meetings of the Circle. Besides her own contributions, she was there an advocate of Tarski's semantic account of truth and of the ideas in the Lvov-Warsaw School in general.

To what extent is the fact that Stebbing, Langer, and Kokoszyńska were women relevant not only to their philosophical career, but also to their writings? Both Langer and Stebbing wrote an extensive introduction to logic, while Kokoszyńska worked on a logical semantics. Did they choose logic, simply because it attracted so many creative intellects at the time, or is logic more open minded towards outsiders? Could it be that the criteria for quality are more sex-neutral in logic than in other parts of philosophy? At the same time, their interest in logic turned out not to be purely formal. Kokoszyńska was interested in a scientific metaphysics, and the semantic notion of truth. Stebbing became an important public intellectual, starting with her book *Thinking to Some Purpose* (1939). And Susanne Langer developed into a very famous philosopher of music and art in general.⁷

The women that form a focus of this volume also have a non-sectarian interest: looking at other schools in order to understand how they could develop their own mind, as well as to inform the schools of each other. Kant and Neo-Kantianism was a lifelong influence on Langer. Kokoszyńska and Stebbing mediated between the Vienna Circle and their own analytic school, while at the same time pointing out the differences. Stebbing

⁷See, for example, the extraordinary profile by Winthrop Sargeant (1960). We thank Branden Fitelson for calling our attention to it and making it available to us.

invited Carnap, and organised the 4th conference on the Unity of Science at Girton College in 1938. The topic was the language of science, and Janina Hosiasson and Maria Kokoszyńska presented a paper there (Stadler 1997). As Frederique Janssen-Lauret shows, Stebbing was not a mainstream analytic philosopher, as she stood positive towards British idealism. In this sense our volume may also be understood as an endorsement of a broader view on analytic philosophy, both from a historical and a philosophical point of view.

The paper on Stebbing understands her as a transitional figure. Janssen-Lauret points to an influence of Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* on Stebbing. A form of holism is thus present in Stebbing's writings, visible in her holistic view on philosophical analysis. This idea must have been an important influence on Susan Haack's so-called foundherentism, and is in accordance with the developments of analytic philosophy in the U.S., especially at Harvard. Stebbing's thesis that symbols can only be called complete or incomplete relative to a given usage, makes room for a view on analysis that does not assume a Russellian epistemology or metaphysics. Stebbing also uses her sharp mind to criticise Russell's use-mention confusions.

Giulia Felappi focuses on Langer's earlier, lesser known writings. Langer explicitly stresses the relevance of logic for other parts of philosophy, especially epistemology and metaphysics. Under the influence of Whitehead she understands metaphysics to be a rational science. On Langer's linguistic variant of Kantianism—and this inclines us to include the 'Harvard school' within analytical philosophy—though, metaphysical questions are not independent of questions of meaning and mind: a fact is composed of objects already interpreted.

Anna Brożek introduces Maria Kokoszyńska to a wider public, and focuses on those aspects of her writings that refer to problems discussed in Vienna, thereby showing the differences between the Vienna Circle and the Lvov-Warsaw School. Like

her supervisor Twardowski, and the Lvov-Warsaw School in general, Kokoszyńska defended the thesis that a scientific metaphysics is possible, and that one should not limit the logic of science to syntax. Furthermore, she criticized earlier, more radical interpretations of the idea of the unity of science. Last, but not least, her defence of Tarski's semantic notion of truth, and her own semantic explanation of truth may have contributed to a further positive reception of Tarski by members of the Vienna Circle. Carnap in particular became convinced that a logical semantics, and an exact definition of a certain role of truth, is possible.

The three women that form the focus of this volume agree in at least two important aspects. Their ideas on what analytic philosophy is, seems to be less narrowly defined than in the case of many of their male peers: each of these women had an interest in metaphysics already at an early date. And, they were interested in the ideas of the other schools of analytic philosophy. Where many male philosophers may sometimes see other schools as rivals, these women were convinced that philosophy may improve by understanding what is going on elsewhere.

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