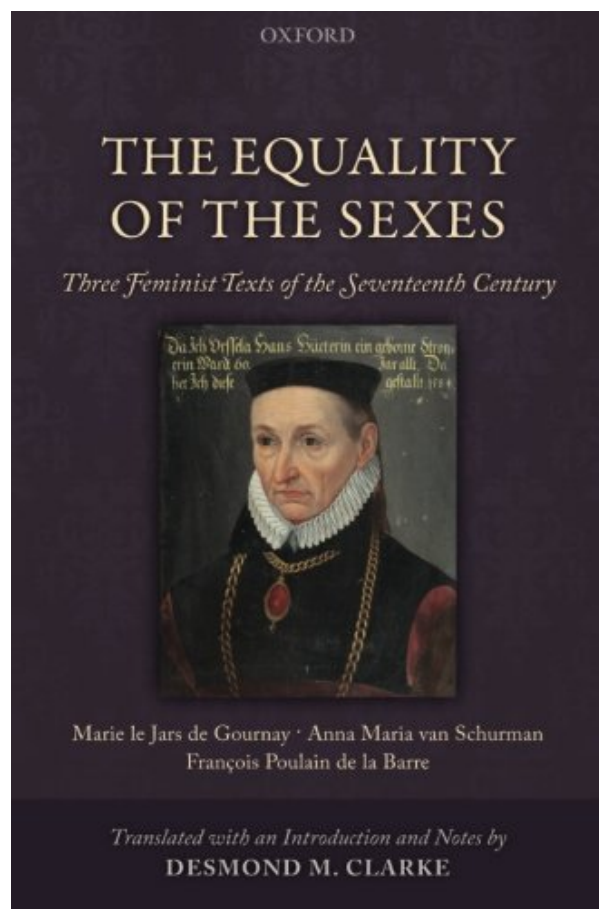


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THE EQUALITY OF THE SEXES

Three Feminist Texts of the Seventeenth Century



Marie le Jars de Gournay · Anna Maria van Schurman
François Poulain de la Barre

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
DESMOND M. CLARKE

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About the Author

Desmond M. Clarke is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the National University of Ireland, Cork. He was awarded a D.Litt from the National University of Ireland, was a Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute and a Fulbright Scholar, and is a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He is the author of a number of books on seventeenth-century philosophy, and has also translated texts of the same period from Latin and French, including Descartes and Louis de la Forge.

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Desmond M. Clarke presents new translations of three of the first feminist tracts to support explicitly the equality of the sexes. The alleged inferiority of women's nature and the corresponding roles that women were (in)capable of exercising in society was debated in Western culture from the civilization of ancient Greece to the establishment of early Christian churches. There had also been some proponents of women's superiority (in comparison with men) prior to the early modern period. In contrast with both of these claims, the seventeenth century witnessed the first publications that argued for the equality of men and women. Among the most articulate and original defenders of that view were Marie le Jars de Gournay, Anna Maria van Schurman, and Francois Poulain de la Barre. Gournay published *The Equality of Men and Women* in Paris in 1622, while one of her Dutch correspondents, Van Schurman, published in Latin her *Dissertation* in support of women's education in 1641. Poulain wrote a radical *Physical and Moral Discourse concerning the Equality of Both Sexes* in 1673, which he also published in Paris. These three feminist tracts transformed the language and conceptual framework in which questions about women's equality or otherwise were subsequently discussed. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, anonymous plagiarized editions and pirated translations of Poulain's work appeared in English, as 'vindications' of the rights of women. This edition includes new translations, from French and Latin, of these three key texts, and excerpts from the authors' related writings, together with an extensive introduction to the religious and philosophical context within which they argued against the traditional view of women's natural inferiority to men.

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