Chapter 2

A GOOD WOMAN WHO CAN FIND?
READING THE PASTORALS IN CONTEXT

And truly no man durste
ever so farre dispreyse woman kynd:
but he must nedes confesse that
a good woman is the best treasure,
and most lucky and prosperous thynge that can be.
And as Xenophon saythe,
she is the grettest cause of man’s felicite.
--Juan Luis Vives, 1523

Introduction

From the Jewish scriptures1 to the Ladies Home Journal, from Xenophon to feminist scholars, the “search for a good woman”2 has persisted throughout recorded history in Western civilization. In this philosophical, ethical, and religious literature, theoretical and practical definitions of women’s ethical “goodness” are quite often linked to their biological sex; that is, compared to men, women are held to different standards for virtue and moral

1 The reader may call to mind in the title of this chapter the King James Version of a verse from the Jewish scriptures, Prov 31:10, “A virtuous woman who can find? for her price is far above rubies.” The Revised Standard Version changed this to: “A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.” (The Hebrew and Greek words for “woman” may also be translated as “wife.”) The text goes on to elucidate the many activities of such a woman (one of the first female multi-taskers), who rises early and goes to bed late, since she is occupied with providing food and clothing for her family, buying and planting fields, running a business in “linen garments” and “sashes,” and helping the poor (NRSV, 31:10-31). As a result of these activities, she is praised by children and husband, and even in the city gates. I employ this Proverb for its evocation of the existence of and alleged difficulty of such a “search”; the expected answer to “Who can find?” seems to be “hardly anyone, because she’s as rare as expensive stones.” The “reversed” syntax of the English reflects the sentence order of the Hebrew, which has in turn been carried over into Greek. The Hebrew reads: אשה נאה וברכה מ商报ה יזמה מפרסים צפתה, which probably explains the NRSV translation: “A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.” The Septuagint (LXX) has translated the Hebrew as: Γυναίκα ἀνδρείαν τίς εὐρήσει; τιμωτέρα δὲ ἐστιν λίθων πολυτελῶν ἡ τοιαύτη, an unusual use of the word ἀνδρείας, which is sometimes applied to brave women, but more strictly means “manly,” or “courageous” (BAGD 76A). The Greek texts that I am investigating frequently use the more typical words ἄγαθος and καλὸς to define the good-ness of such a woman. Female displays of virtues will be discussed in later chapters. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

2 Beginning in Greek classical literature, the word “good” is linked with other concepts like “moral/ethical” (ἡθικός), “honor” (τιμή), “proper/fitting” (πρέπον), and “virtue” (ἀρετή). The emphasis in the term “good woman” falls on the word “good,” manifesting the general assumption in the ancient world that it was straightforward enough to figure out who was a “woman.” For the historical development of concepts of binary genders (or “opposite sexes”), see L.D. Derksen, Dialogues on Women: Images of Women in the History of Philosophy (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1996).
behavior. Stated more succinctly: goodness has been gendered. Thus, theologians, philosophers, psychologists, and political thinkers along with more popular writers, have described the “good woman” as she who demonstrates “womanly” characteristics, “feminine” appearance, and/or behavior “appropriate” to her sex. While the authors of the texts I examine propose different bases for their conceptions of women’s morality—divine decree, natural order, scientific objectivity, or ideological principles—in each case the basis serves to strengthen the authority of the text’s description of the “good woman.”

Although the depictions of women’s virtue differ quite a bit across place and time, to this day, governments, religious movements, and scholars among others, continue a sometimes vociferous debate on the topic of what (or who) constitutes a “good woman.” In contemporary American society, for example, the possible answers are numerous, often contested, and sometimes overlapping: stay-at-home mom or working woman, straight or lesbian, married, single, or divorced, celibate or promiscuous, passive or aggressive, quiet or sassy, all have been used to describe a “good woman.” Each version has its advocates, and the ideals affect the lives of real women through social expectations, legislation, and religious teaching.

I have called this historical impulse to define morality for women a “search,” but the activity is more complicated than that. In both modern and ancient discussions, it is not enough for the “good woman” just to be found, she must then be formed. Once a definition

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3 In the classical Western philosophical texts, while men’s morality has been delineated in contradistinction to that of women, standards for men sometimes stand in for generic “human” morality. Women’s moral behavior may be treated as a separate category (or sub-category) under both kinds of ethical thought. I will discuss masculine goodness along the way, since feminine goodness is defined in opposition to it, but like many Greek and Roman writers, I am slicing “women’s morality” off from the major philosophical topic of ethics.

4 Some general definitions of terms: I use “sex” to denote a person’s biology, either female or male (realizing that even these are not always distinct categories themselves). The noun/verb “gender” will refer to (creating) social constructions or expectations of a person based on their sex; the terms “masculine” and “feminine” are synonyms for these gender-differentiations based on one’s sex. I employ the words “man/men” and “woman/women” somewhat more loosely, although I try to confine their use to “real” persons, e.g., the female authors and supposed audiences of the texts I am examining.
has been settled on—out of religious beliefs, philosophical principles, or historical reconstructions—there is usually the expectation that actual women will model themselves after (or occasionally, reject) the chosen ideal of female goodness. Such a purpose is as true of Greek and Roman philosophical letters of advice as it is of 20th century attempts to recover the exemplary stories of feminist foremothers. The ancient texts, as well as many of the modern ones examined in my project have this twofold objective: to persuade the audience (female and male) to a certain point of view regarding “good women,” and then to motivate women to behave in line with that paradigm. This is one reason why the ongoing debate—from then until now—over women’s status and roles is so significant: the texts, their advice, and their promoters are not content to postulate ideas; they also want to shape the way women live. The authority of the texts is invoked to build and to further the social agendas.

The dual nature of the literature discussed in this chapter leads to a third observation. Many of these writings not only convey material on what constitutes a “good woman,” as well as exhortations to develop into one, but some of the texts themselves act as instructional material. They are part of a quasi-curriculum (or some might say, a social program) for advising women on how to lead good lives as women. In fact, all the texts I am dealing with here function as artifacts of different socio-historical measures designed to produce “good women,” and thus they offer clues as to their historically distinctive content, pedagogical methods, and goals for women in their particular situation. The literary artifacts

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5 The case is more complicated with feminist historical reconstructions, as I will explain below. Here there are certain readings “against the text,” so that some recoveries of “good women” in history are not thought of as positive role models for later women. Instead they serve as “antitypes,” women whose demeanor and actions are to be spurned, and turned upside down, resulting in a new idea of a “good woman,” but one still based on the original ideal.

6 Of course, this points again to the problem of interpreting the relationship between literary text and historical context, which was delineated in the methodological section of my introduction. In my project, I attempt to bear in mind the conclusion of the historian Gabrielle M. Spiegel: “All texts occupy determinate social spaces, both as products of the social world of authors and as textual agents at work in that world, with which they entertain
communicate more than their stated content; they also function as historical evidence for their own time and place. Thus, by comparing the texts, the historian can uncover any similarities in content, style and purpose, and by also highlighting their distinctions, can provide some evidence about the “social logic” of the cultures that produced the texts.\(^7\)

In this chapter, I outline the “search for the good woman” in three interrelated textual spheres of influence: (1) philosophical-religious writings from the Roman world; (2) recent biblical historical-critical scholarship on the Pastoral Letters; and (3) documents from a few modern Christian groups. For each sphere, I discuss the descriptions of the “good woman” to be found there, some of the assumptions about how such a woman could be formed, and illustrate how the texts—both primary and secondary—function as evidence of their *Sitz im Leben*.

I begin with primary source material essential to my study of women’s moral formation in the New Testament Pastoral Letters.\(^8\) Here I present the ideas of several Greek and Roman philosophers on the “good woman” because they comprise some of the earliest Western authors on the topic.\(^9\) The letters and discourses ascribed to Pythagorean women fall often complex and contestatory relations. In that sense, texts both mirror and generate social realities, are constituted by and constitute the social and discursive formations which they may sustain, resist, contest, or seek to transform, depending on the case at hand,” “The Social Logic of the Text,” in *Speculum*, 65.1 (Jan 1990), 77 (emphasis original).

\(^7\) According to Spiegel, this methodological approach begins “by remembering that texts represent situated uses of language. . . . The advantage of this approach to literary history in terms of the social logic of the text is that it permits us to examine language with the tools of the social historian, to see it within a local or regional social context of human relations, systems of communication, and networks of power that can account for its particular semantic inflections and thus aid in the recovery of its full meaning as cultural history seeks to understand it,” “Social Logic,” 77.

\(^8\) In the New Testament, the letters 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are called the “Pastorals,” because they are addressed to two “pastors” of Christian churches. These three short letters are attributed to the apostle Paul but most scholars consider them to be pseudonymous based on the differences in their language, style and theology when compared to the authentic letters by Paul. The best conjectures for the dates of the Pastorals range from 95 to 125 CE; the earliest manuscript containing a portion of the letter to Titus is *P32*, a papyrus fragment dated ca. 200 CE.

\(^9\) Since for reasons of space, I cannot provide a detailed analysis of each philosopher’s thinking about women’s morality, I refer the reader to other histories of women and ancient philosophy: Derksen, *Dialogues*; Lorenne M.G. Clark and Lynda Lange, *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato
within this category, and will, of course, be analyzed more completely in subsequent chapters. A survey of these primary sources helps to contextualize the Pastorals, and establishes the content, purpose, and methods of forming “good women” common to their social world. I then consider, through a brief literary comparison, one section of the Pastoral Letters that correlates with the philosophical writings, in order to suggest the kinds of similarities and differences that point to that author’s distinctive perceptions of the development of “good women” within early Christian communities.

Next I focus on an assemblage of secondary literature from biblical historical-critical scholarship, and modern Christian uses of the advice given in the Pastorals. Here my goal is to situate my research within previous scholarship on moral instruction for women in the Pastorals. Historical biblical scholars, trained in “scientific” methods, often claim a certain objectivity for their interpretations; nevertheless, they necessarily bring their own subjective understandings of the “good woman” into their writings, as I will show in describing their conclusions.

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10 I discuss the Pythagorean documents more below; the assumed dates for these texts range from 2nd century BCE to 2nd century CE, although the earliest complete manuscripts come from the 15th century. One letter is found in P. Hauniensis 13, dated to the 3rd century CE.

11 Although the philosophical writings are dated prior to or contemporaneous with the Christian texts, I will not be arguing for any genealogical dependence in any direction. Rather, I believe that in the 1st century CE many social expectations for women were so pervasive as to reach diverse geographic regions and different levels of society; this will become evident in my gathering and investigation of the literature.

12 I have limited my summaries to significant and representative interpreters of the Pastorals, although I am unable to touch on all the nuances even of these readings. Nonetheless, the selected scholarly assessments of women in the Pastorals both illustrate the contours of the historical and theoretical “search,” and establish the foundation for my own investigation of these texts and their context.
Within the secondary literature on the Pastorals, we happen upon an historical development in our own time. A divide exists within the field of biblical scholarship on the subject of women in early Christian literature and in the history of early Christianity: there are scholars who explicitly affirm a feminist aim or consciousness in their interpretations, and those who do not. For instance, there is no doubt that many researchers, writing before the early 1980’s, did not take into account the emergence of feminist studies in any field. Still others may not find it helpful to express their personal feminist commitments in their scholarship. Yet following the leading work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, it has become important for biblical scholars to consider the presence and interpretations of women throughout early Christianity.

The Pastorals’ instructions for women pose a complicated problem for some contemporary feminists because of how these letters have been used, that is their “history of effects,” their *Wirkungsgeschichte*. In the course of Western history, interpretations of the Pastorals have made substantial contributions to the “search for the good woman.” In essence, Western civilization has been shaped by such early Christian literature, which was in its turn based in part on ethical-philosophical concepts of “good women.” Therefore, in a

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13 My discussion of interpretations of the Pastorals then, is not intended to impugn anyone’s feminist honor, but in order to draw attention to the scholarly “battle over the Pastorals.” The battle-image is drawn from Dennis Ronald McDonald’s *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983). McDonald postulates a conflict over Paul’s teachings between the author of the Pastorals and McDonald’s reconstructed Christian women storytellers from Asia Minor, who orally passed on portions of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

14 New York: Crossroad, 1983. Since then feminist biblical scholarship has developed a range of approaches to and readings of both canonical and non-canonical Christian literature, as well as significant discussions about the possibility of recovering the “voices” of “actual women” from history. I will discuss feminist biblical scholarship in more detail below.

15 Ulrich Luz, the master of investigating the history of effects (sometimes called “reception history”) of the Gospel of Matthew, defines this approach to biblical texts as “the history of application, repeatedly bringing new senses of the old texts to the fore. These new senses gave new answers to new needs in new situations” (*Studies in Matthew*, trans. Rosemary Selle [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 167).
third section I also discuss the contemporary Christian debate about New Testament advice regarding women, using documents from two modern church bodies that have dealt with the Pastorals’ instructions. These employ the Pastorals as divinely stamped proof that Christian women ought to fulfill the traditional roles of wife, mother, and home-manager. At the same time, the Pastorals are summoned as authoritative evidence that precludes the ordination of women as priests or ministers in churches. Other Christian churches interpret the scriptures quite differently, leading to nearly opposite conclusions. The perduring conflicts among Christians over women’s moral character and their concomitant functions in family, church, and society, continues to jeopardize many attempts at ecumenical cooperation and alliances between denominations, and fuels the culture wars over the place of women.

To summarize, this chapter first provides some ancient literary-historical contextualization for the “search for the good woman” observed in the Pastoral Letters. It then leaps nearly two millennia in order to examine the reception of these texts in the dual arenas of biblical scholarship and modern Christian church interpretation. There I show that, although often with very dissimilar purposes in mind, scholars, churches, and interested lay readers as well are still looking for “good women,” especially for good women in the New Testament and early Christian communities.

Ancient Philosophical Texts

Central to the origins of classical Western philosophy is the belief that a person could, and indeed should learn to “love wisdom/knowledge,” and that such an approach would enable the learner to live a good life.16 From the sixth century BCE on, then, various

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16 The Greek words make the project plain: *philosophia* (φιλοσοφία, lit. “love of wisdom”) and the verb *philosophein* (φιλοσοφεῖν, lit. “to love wisdom”). Although some translate *philosophein* as “to study”
philosophical movements reflected on the meaning of life and death, the possibility of human freedom, the wise use of rationality and passions, the potential for moral growth, and the existence of god.\textsuperscript{17} By means of such intellectual deliberation, different paradigms were developed for pursuing a virtuous life. For example, the four cardinal virtues—justice, wisdom/prudence, courage, and moderation—were conceived as standards by which to measure one’s ethical behavior.\textsuperscript{18} And regular self-examination was often the first practice urged for neophytes. This is clearly prescribed in the Pythagorean \textit{Golden Verses}:

\begin{quote}
philosophy,” this is a somewhat misleading choice, because it conjures up modern university studies in philosophy. Pierre Hadot remarks on this distinction between modern and ancient concepts of philosophy: “It certainly seems that the way one can come to have an idea of philosophy is by studying philosophies. Yet the history of “philosophy” is not the same as the history of philosophies, if what we understand by “philosophies” are theoretical discourses and philosophers’ systems. In addition to this history, however, there is room for the study of philosophical modes of life,” in \textit{What Is Ancient Philosophy?}, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 1. Hadot’s volume provides an extensive discussion of ancient philosophy as a way of life.
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\textsuperscript{17} As one instance, Elizabeth Asmis explains the thinking of the Stoic Epictetus: Freedom “belongs only to the wise person, but it is the goal of all human beings. Epictetus emphasizes it more than any other type of moral achievement. He calls it the ‘greatest good.’ It consists in living exactly as one wishes or chooses. The free person is completely autonomous, for his only concern is with his own rational capacity, over which he has perfect control. Having inner freedom, he is free of any constraint from outside: his own body and things external to the body, such as acquisitions, fame, and other people, do not interfere in any way with his well-being,” “Choice in Epictetus’ Philosophy,” in \textit{Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy} (eds. Margaret M. Mitchell and Adela Yarbro Collins [Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001]), 385. For philosophical issues that seem to have a particular bearing on early Christianity, see Hans-Josef Kluck, \textit{The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions}, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), especially ch.5, where he summarizes: “... philosophy served educated circles as a guideline for a religiously based conduct of life. If one speaks of a conversion experience in the classical period outside the Jewish/Christian sphere, what is meant is the adoption of one particular philosophical world-view with all its consequences for existential praxis” (334). Also, cf. Helmut Koester, \textit{History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., Introduction to the New Testament, vol. 1 (New York: de Gruyter, 1995), 338-47.

\textsuperscript{18} The Greek word for “virtue” is ὀρθότης, which connotes “goodness, “excellence,” “moral virtue,” and “merit” (LSJ, 238b-c). The four virtues I cited (in Greek, δικαιοσύνη, θρόπης, ἀνδρεία, σωφροσύνη) come down to us from Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Vitae Philosophorum} 3.80 (3\textsuperscript{rd} century CE). There are some inconsistencies in the names of the four virtues. The tragedian Aeschylus (5\textsuperscript{th} century BCE) describes “the seer, Oecles’ son” as “a moderate, just, good, pious man,” ὁ μάντις, ὢν Οἰκλέως λέγω, σοφρόνος δίκαιος ἀγάθος εὐσεβὴς ἀνήρ, \textit{Septem Contra Thebes} 609-10. Plato comments that “with respect to the moderate man, as we have recounted, being just and brave and holy, is a perfectly good man, and the good man acts well and rightly in whatever he does, and the man who acts well is blessed and happy,” τὸν σωφρόνα, ἀσερ δηλόθημεν, δίκαιον ὄντα καὶ ἀνδρεῖον καὶ ὀσίον ἀγάθον ἄνδρα εἶναι τέλεός τὸν ὑπὸ ἀγάθον ἐὰν τε καὶ καλῶς πράττειν ἡ ἀνωτάτη, τὸν δ’ ἐὰν πράττοντα μακάριον τε καὶ εὐδαιμονέα ἐναι, \textit{Gorg.}507c. Moderation (σωφροσύνη) and justice (δικαιοσύνη) seem to be the more stable terms, with the other two of four varying between courage, wisdom/prudence, good, reverent, and holy (the latter two are virtually synonymous, in any case). To some extent, I have relied here on the research (but not the conclusions) of Stephen Charles Mott, “Greek Ethics and Christian Conversion: The Philonic Background of Titus II 10-14 and III 3-7,” \textit{Novum Testamentum} XX, 22–
Do not welcome sleep upon your soft eyes before you have reviewed each day’s deeds three times: “Where have I transgressed? What have I accomplished? What duty have I neglected?” Beginning from the first one go through them in detail, and then, if you have brought about worthless things, reprimand yourself, but if you have achieved good things, be glad. Work hard at this, meditate on this, you should passionately desire this; this will put you in the footsteps of divine Virtue.  

Such philosophical methods were communicated via challenging dialogues, lectures (and eventually, written literature), by tutoring individuals, small groups, and occasionally the public, and often through the formation of communities or schools, where philosophical disciples resided in order to adopt that particular practice.  

Pierre Hadot summarizes this early understanding of being trained in philosophy: “The philosophical school thus corresponds, above all, to the choice of a certain way of life and existential option which demands from the individual a total change of lifestyle, a conversion of one’s entire being, and ultimately a certain desire to be and to live in a certain way.”  

Philosophy is portrayed as a way of life in Plato’s rendition of Socrates’ self-defense, “The god appointed me, as I supposed and understood, that I must live by doing philosophy [φιλοσοφεῖν] and by closely examining myself and others.” Further on, Socrates gives more details about his vocation. Should the Athenians threaten to kill him if he continued to teach, he says he would reply:

20 According to H. I. Marrou, the Pythagoreans established the first philosophical school for which there is evidence, and their communal life of study and worship “set the type” for others, in *A History of Education in Antiquity* (Trans. George Lamb; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956; trans. of *Histoire de l’Education dans l’Antiquité* [3rd ed, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1948]), 48. However, the Pythagorean communities were distinctive in that they adopted a vegetarian diet, simplicity in dress and adornment, and were (in)famous for allowing women to join. More details on Pythagoreanism will follow.  
22 τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ τάττοντος, ὡς ἐγὼ ὑφήν τε καὶ ὑπέλαβον, φιλοσοφοῦντα με δεῖν ζήν καὶ ξετάζοντα ἐμαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους, *Ap. 28E*. Socrates’ life is commonly dated c. 469-399 BCE; Plato’s c. 429-347 BCE.
Men of Athens, I salute you and love you, but I will obey the god rather than you, and while I breathe and am able, I will never cease doing philosophy and exhorting you and demonstrating to anyone of you that I meet, saying as I is my custom, “O most excellent of men, who are from Athens, from the greatest of cities and most well-known for wisdom and strength, are you not ashamed to be concerned about possessions, how there might be more glory and honor for you, while about prudence and truth and about your soul (that it might be better), you do not care or reflect upon?”

Clearly, Socrates’ interest is not limited to teaching philosophical subjects, but rather extends to challenging and urging his listeners to care about ethical living. Many classical philosophical texts, from various schools and movements, take up both Socrates’ dialogical teaching method as well as advancing the idea that “doing philosophy” means to live a virtuous life.

But what students does Socrates have in mind who will learn the practice of philosophy? Here his speech is clearly addressed to the “men of Athens,” and his terms

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23 ὁ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναίοι, ἀσπάζομαι μὲν καὶ φιλῶ, πεῖσομαι δὲ μᾶλλον τῷ θεῷ ἢ ὕμιν, καὶ ἔωσπερ ἄν εμπνεύσω καὶ οἶος τε ὦ, ὥστε μή πασύσωμαι φιλοσόφων καὶ ὕμιν παρακλησίμνονε τε καὶ ἐνδείκησιν ὁτὸ τὸ ἐν εἰσὶν ἐντυχεῖν ὑμῶν, λέγων οἰπερέπεθάθα, ὅτι ἐν ἀριστε ἄνδρον, Ἀθηναῖος ὑμῶν, πόλεως τῆς μεγίστης, καὶ ὑδακοματήτης εἰς σοφίαν καὶ εἰσθήν, χρημάτων μὲν δικαίωση ἐπιμελεύμενον ὅτι σοι ἔσται ὕμως πλείστα, καὶ δόξης καὶ τιμῆς, φρονησάμενος δὲ καὶ ἀλληλείας καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ὅπως ὑμῶν βελτίστη ἔσται σοι ἐπιμελή σωδε φροντίζεις, Ἀρ. 29D-E. His response continues: “And if anyone of you disagrees and says he does care, I will not dismiss him or depart, but I will question and scrutinize and cross-examine him, and if it seems to me that he does not possess virtue, though he says he does, I will reproach him, because he makes the most worthy things least, and the lower things greater. These things I will do to whomever I meet, both younger and older, both foreigner and citizen, but more to the citizens, who are more closely related to me. . . . For I go around doing nothing else than persuading you, both younger and older, not to care for bodies or possessions more dearly than for the soul . . . .” Ἀρ. 29D-30B. (καὶ ἐν τῇ ἤμων ἀμφισβητήσῃ καὶ ἂν ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, ὡς εὕρησιν ἀργῶν αὐτῶν ὑμῶν ἀπειμένοι, ἀλλ’ ἐρήμοις αὐτῶν καὶ ἐξετάσω καὶ ἐλέγξω, καὶ εἶναι μη δοκῇ κεκτήσαι ἄρετην, φανεὶ δὲ, ὑπειδικῶ τι τὰ πλείοντο ἄξια περὶ ἐλαχιστόν ποιεῖται, τὰ δὲ φαυλότερα περὶ πλεῖονος. ταῦτα καὶ νεωτέρω καὶ πρεσβυτέρω ὧν ἐν εἰσηγήμασιν ποιήσω, καὶ ἔναι καὶ ἀστεῖο, μᾶλλον δὲ τοὺς ἀστεῖος, ὡς μου ἐγγυτέρω ἑστε γένει. . . . ὥσπερ γὰρ ἀλλὸ πρᾶττων ἠγαθὸ περίερχομαι ἢ πεῖθαν ὑμῶν καὶ νεωτέρως καὶ πρεσβυτέρως ὑπὸ συμμάτων ἐπιμελεῖσθαι μὴ κρήμνων πρότερον μὴς ὑμῶν σφόδρα ἢ τῆς ψυχῆς . . .).

24 P. Hadot views the thinking of philosophical topics as one part of the philosophical life: “This existential option, in turn, implies a certain vision of the world, and the task of philosophical discourse will therefore be to reveal and rationally justify this existential option, and it leads back to it, insofar as—by means of its logical and persuasive force, and the action it tries to exert upon the interlocutor—it incites both masters and disciples to live in genuine conformity with their initial choice. In other words, it is, in a way, the application of a certain ideal of life,” P. Hadot, What Is, 3.
“younger,” “older,” “foreigner,” and “citizens” are all in the masculine gender. Did he mean to include or exclude women as practitioners of his philosophical art? How do a woman’s nature and ethical capacities compare to those of men? Is there a different philosophical way of life for women, and if so, what does it look like?

Questions like these surface repeatedly in ancient philosophical literature, and are based on the assumption that a central characteristic of humankind is that it consists of two sexes. As the modern philosopher L.D. Derksen states:

I am prepared to admit that the philosophical dialogue on women was never an extensive part of philosophical systems but, almost without exception, philosophers did speak about women. As such, this fact need not be at all surprising. For many philosophers, a view of women was part and parcel of a view on human nature and society. If we ask the question “What is man?” we must consider the nature and significance of the male-female distinction.

The perceived biological difference between female and male entered philosophical discourse very early on, and has continued to appear throughout the history of Western philosophy. This is because, as Derksen notes:

If we want to consider the nature of the social, political and ethical, we need to concern ourselves with questions surrounding the spheres of the public and private, the home, family and state, the roles which people are to have in

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25 The Greek “men” here is the adult male, ἄνδρες, not the more inclusive ἀνδρόποι, which although masculine for language purposes may be translated “people,” or “human beings.” The other terms are similarly marked as masculine in gender. Here the emphasis on (male) “citizens” seems to exclude slaves of either sex from the philosophical life. The legal status of various persons varied throughout Greek and Roman history; see Peter Garnsey and Richard P. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), and Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; repr. 1996).

26 In medical as well as philosophical texts, there was significant speculation about male-female biological differences, especially in human reproduction, and how these “natural” differences might lead to differences in rationality and morality. See especially Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, and for example, the physician Galen (131-201 CE) who adopted many of Aristotle’s ideas for his works (e.g., *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*).

society. Even questions which do not at first glance seem to concern the male-female distinction, such as: what is the nature and scope of reason and emotions? the ultimate nature of reality itself? are connected to male and female by some philosophers. The masculine and the feminine have been used as allegorical or symbolical representations of human capacities and aspects of reality.

Thus, the topic of woman—her nature, roles, and virtue—becomes the object of ancient philosophical inquiry among the mostly male authors. The image of the “philosophizing woman,” that is, a woman who aspired to do philosophy as Socrates did, makes an occasional appearance on the scene as an exceptional figure—most often as a relative of one of the men, as unusually apt student (in spite of her female sex), or as the presumed author of a small number of texts written for other women like herself. What follows is a survey of ancient philosophical ideas about the “good woman” and about a few philosophizing women.

28 *Dialogues*, ix.
29 Note here that I am referring to “woman” as a topos of philosophical writing; the “real women” who inhabited the “real world” of these philosophers did not all correspond with the representations devised by these thinkers. In the Roman world, there were many subtle status distinctions between: slave women (working in household or field), women who owned slaves, freed women, freeborn (but not citizen) women, women from elite families in the provinces, Jewish, Egyptian, and “Eastern” women, women who worked in family businesses, women who had control over their own real estate and agricultural production, wealthy women patrons of cities, temples, and collegia (associations). Roman society encouraged “competitive” hierarchical social interactions, and this social system is not fully acknowledged in the philosophical texts. See again, Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire; Saller, Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*; Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 1990.
30 The texts I refer to here are the subject of my overall investigation: the literature ascribed to Pythagorean women. Attempts to construct a history of women in ancient philosophy are hampered by the scant evidence as well as the ideological nature of available sources. In Mary Ellen Waithe’s four volume series, *A History of Women Philosophers*, the first volume of which deals with the Greek and Roman periods (dated 600 BCE to 500 CE), she and her collaborators gathered references to individual women in texts by men, along with the few letters and discourses ascribed to women philosophers. Many of the names of ancient women philosophers came from Gilles Ménage’s *Historia Mulierum Philosopharum* first published in the 17th century in France (*The History of Women Philosophers*, English trans. Beatrice H. Zedler. [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984]). Ménage’s sources are somewhat sketchy and complicated to locate. It seems strange to me that Pierre Hadot does not address these questions in his depiction of ancient philosophy. In that volume’s index there is only one listing for “women” and philosophy, which refers to a short paragraph on women in the Epicurean school. Hadot states: “Women, who in exceptional cases had already been admitted to Plato’s school, were now part of the community,” *What Is*, 125.
Socrates and Plato

Although Socrates, through the writings of Plato, shows somewhat inconsistent thinking about women and their capacity for ethical living, he nonetheless recognizes the social reality of sex distinctions in his discussion of the role of manager (or guardian or philosopher-ruler) of the ideal city-state. In the *Republic*, he rejects the idea that capacity for leadership is reserved for men only:

> “Then there is, my friend, no pursuit of the managers of a city that belongs to a woman because she is a woman or to a man because he is a man. But the natural capacities are distributed likewise in both creatures, and women participate in all pursuits according to nature and men in all, but in all women are weaker than men.”

Socrates’ meritocracy would allow some equality of function in that specially-gifted women (alongside similarly-gifted men) could govern a city; his reference to women’s “weakness” is usually understood to be one of lesser biological strength. That Socrates argues for leadership selection based on merit rather than sex shows, of course, that societal expectations for men and women were already gendered, and that philosophers were taking up the topic of the nature of woman *qua* woman, and in contradistinction to man.

Elsewhere Plato clearly portrays women as being “naturally” inferior to men:

> “Human nature being twofold, the better sort was that which should thereafter be called ‘man.’”

In the *Laws*, he states regarding musical expression that that which is “magnificent

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31 *Rep.* 455d-e. Οὐδὲν ἂρα ἔστιν, ὡς φίλε, ἐπιτήδευμα τῶν πόλιν διοικῶντων γυναικὸς διότι γυνὴ, οὐδ’ ἀνδρὸς διότι ἄνηρ, ἀλλ’ ὀμοίως διεξάγεται αἱ φύσεις ἐν ἀμφοῖν τοῖν ἔξοιν, καὶ πάντων μεν μετέχει γυνὴ ἐπιτήδευμάτων κατὰ φύσιν, πάντων δὲ ἄνηρ, ἐπὶ παίσι δὲ ἀσθενεστέρον γυνῆ ἀνδρός. Women are then recognized as having different natural skills and interests (in medicine, music, athletics, war, philosophy, passions), leading Socrates to his point: “It is also true that one woman may be a guardian, and another not. And is this not like what we decided for men who are naturally guardians?” “Yes, this is.” “So the same nature for guardianship of a city can belong to both a woman and a man, except the one is weaker, and the other is stronger.” “So it appears.” *Rep.* 455e-456a. Εστιν ἂρα καὶ φυλακὴ γυνῆ, ἡ δ’ οὐ, ἡ οὖ τοιοῦτον καὶ τῶν ἀνδρῶν τῶν φυλακικῶν φύσιν ἐξελεξάμεθα; Τοιοῦτον μὲν οὖν. Καὶ γυναίκος ἂρα καὶ ἀνδρός ἡ αὐτὴ φύσις εἰς φυλακὴν πόλεως, πλὴν όσα ἀσθενεστέρα, ἡ δὲ ἰσχυροτέρα ἔστιν. Φαίνεται.

32 *Timaeus* 42e.
and brave” is masculine, while the feminine is “decorous and moderate.” For philosopher Julia Annas, his variable opinions on male and female is logical:

... when Plato stops believing that the ideal state can be realized, he also stops thinking that women should do the same jobs as men, even in a greatly improved state. ... Although women are still educated and forced into public to some extent, this is merely so that they can be controlled, since their potential for virtue is less than man’s ...

In any case, what looks like inconsistency in Socrates'/Plato’s thinking on the nature of woman ought not obscure the foundational concept that human beings come in two sexes, and that that biological fact is somewhat determinative of both moral virtue and social function.

Aristotle

Writing a little later than Plato, the great classifier Aristotle cites a “table of opposites” developed by some in the Pythagorean school as principles or elements (ἄρχη) for philosophical thinking about the origin and structure of the universe. The series listed ten pairs of items that can be placed in two columns:

33 τὸ δὲ μεγαλοπρεπὲς ὁμία καὶ τὸ πρὸς τὴν ἀνδρείαν ἐκεῖνον ἀρρενωτὴν φατέν έἰναι, τὸ δὲ πρὸς τὸ κόσμιον καὶ σωφρόν, μᾶλλον ἄποκλινον θηλυγενέστερον ὡς ὁ παραβολός ἐν τῷ τῷ νόμῳ καὶ λόγῳ. Laws 7.802e. Note that here Plato has used adjectives of two of the four cardinal virtues, with brave (ἀνδρείαν) being masculine, and moderate (σωφρόν) being feminine. Lynda Lange begins her essay “Plato appears to be inconsistent in his treatment of women. He developed in the Republic the idea that males and females should be educated equally for the highest functions, while at the same time he believed that women were ultimately not as good as men. A further difficulty with Plato’s views on women occurs as a result of his apparent about-face on the question in the Laws. Numerous attempts have been made to resolved these difficulties,” Sexism of Social and Political Theory, 3. Cf. also, Maja Pellikaan-Engel, “Socrates’ Blind Spots,” in Against Patriarchal Thinking, Proceedings of the VIth Symposium of the International Association of Women Philosophers (IAPh) 1992 (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1992), 5-11.
34 “Plato’s Republic and Feminism,” in Feminism and Ancient Philosophy, 12. She cites Laws 780d-781b, where Plato talks about rules for women at public meals. Women are said to be “weak” (ἀσθενὲς), “more secretive” (λαθραίοτερον), “trickier” (ἐπικλυπτότερον), and “by nature worse in virtue than men,” ἡ θηλεία ἤμιν φύσις ἐστι πρὸς ἀρετὴν χειρών τῆς τῶν ἀρρενῶν (781a-b).
35 The word for this “table” in Greek is συστοιχία, which means a column or series of correlated things or ideas. It is not laid out in the Greek text in what we might think of as a “table.”
36 Aristotle lived 384-322 BCE; Pythagoras is dated to the 6th century BCE; Pythagorean groups/movements seem to have existed for some time after his death. The history of Pythagorean texts is quite complex, but there was a strong resurgence of interest in Pythagoreanism during the Hellenistic and Roman eras.
The presumption is that the right-hand column is inferior to the left-hand one, and indeed it is hard to read as neutral the series’ association of “female” with left, dark, and evil, and “male” with right, light and good. Again, this literary “table” functions as early philosophical evidence that male and female were thought to be distinguished from, and in this perception, even opposite to each other, and that women were thought to be in some ways inferior in nature to men.

While Aristotle plans to go beyond the statement of opposites in investigating the cosmos, he nonetheless builds his own philosophy on such principles. Reflecting on the sexual duality found in human nature confirmed for him that human society is correctly

37 *Metaphysics* I.986a. “Others of this group say there are ten principles, which are stated according to a series: limit and boundless, . . . [etc.].” ἐτεροὶ δὲ τῶν αὐτῶν τούτων τὰς ἀρχὰς δίκαι λέγουσιν εἶναι τὰς κατὰ συστοιχίαν λεγομένας, θέσας καὶ ἄπειρον, περιτόν καὶ ἄρτιον, ἐν καὶ πλήθος, δεξίον καὶ ἀριστερόν, ἀρρεν καὶ θῆλυ, ἡμέριον καὶ κινούμενον, ἐνθεύ καὶ καμπύλων, φῶς καὶ σκότος, ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν, τετράγωνον καὶ ἑτερομεξῆς.

38 For instance, see Kathleen C. Cook, “Sexual Inequality in Aristotle’s Theories of Reproduction and Inheritance,” in *Feminism and Ancient Philosophy*, 53-57. Derksen asks: “why would anyone want to make the male-female distinction into a fundamental category of reality and place the female on the negative, irrational side? One can speculate that perhaps men think women are less rational then [sic] they are because men and women think differently; or that perhaps at that time there was already a difference in the amount of formal, theoretical, education which men and women had; or perhaps that it is simply the desire of men to see themselves as superior to women, with superiority linked to rationality and intelligence,” *Dialogues*, 3. Sabina Lovibond brings the “table” into conversation with Plato in “An Ancient Theory of Gender: Plato and the Pythagorean Table” (in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night* [New York: Routledge, 1994], 88-101.

39 *Meta*. 986b. “From both these schools [of Pythagoras and Alcmaeon of Croton], then, we can learn this much, that the opposites are the principles of things; and [we can learn] how many of these there are and which ones they are. But how it is possible to bring together these principles with the causes we have named has not been clearly articulated by them . . .” παρὰ μὲν οὖν τῶν ἄμφων ἀμφοῖν τοσοῦτον ἔστι λαξεύειν, ὅτι ταναντία ἀρχαὶ τῶν ὑπότων τὸ δ ὅσοι παρὰ τῶν ἑτέρων, καὶ τίνες αὐτοὶ εἰσίν. πῶς μέντοι πρὸς τὰς εἰρήμενας σιτίας ἐνδέχεται συνάγειν, σαφῶς μὲν οὐ διήρθεται παρ’ ἐκείνων.
structured around the sexual binary. For example, in his description of the household as the basic component of the state, he names three relationships as the “first and smallest parts of the household: master and slave, husband and wife, and father and children.” Although making no distinctions between male and female *slaves*, or male and female *children*, Aristotle must, of course, take up the topic of sex difference in discussing the married couple. He gives the male householder the responsibility of:

ruling over the wife and children (as over free people, yet not the same manner of rule, but as republican governance over the wife, and as monarchical governance over the children); for the male is by nature more capable of command than the female . . . . The male always has this approach toward the female . . . .”

Here Aristotle identifies sexual difference (“by nature”) as a rationale for gendered roles in the family and society.

Thus, if women are that different from free men, he must then consider their capacity to demonstrate the virtues: “And is it necessary for a woman to be moderate and brave and just? . . . And indeed, in general, one must consider this concerning the nature of the ruled and the ruler: whether virtue is the same or different?” A little later on, Aristotle answers his questions:

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40 As Kathleen Cook summarizes, “[Aristotle] is seen to be relying in some way on views of the inferiority of females in deriving certain of his theoretical conclusions, and it will not be possible to maintain that he arrived at these conclusions solely on the basis of philosophical or scientific considerations and ‘value free’ premises,” “Sexual Inequality,” 53.
41 *Pol.* 1253b. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἐλαχίστοις πρῶτον ἔκαστον ἐπηρέαν, πρῶτα δὲ καὶ ἐλάχιστα μέρη οἰκίας διασποράς καὶ δούλος, καὶ πόσις καὶ ἀλοχος, καὶ πατέρι καὶ τέκνα. Throughout his discussion of the household, Aristotle considers slaves and children as well, sometimes comparing women’s role and abilities with these two groups. I provide only a brief summary here for illustrative purposes. For further discussion of Aristotle and many other philosophical texts on these household relationships, see David Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in I Peter*, SBL Monograph Series (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981); also, Derksen, *Dialogues*, ch.3.
42 *Pol.* 1259a-b. καὶ γὰρ γυναικὸς ἀρχεῖ καὶ τέκνων, ὡς ἐλευθέρων μὲν ἀμφότεροι, οὐ τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον τῆς ἀρχῆς, ἀλλὰ γυναικῶς μὲν πολιτικῶς τέκνων ἐν βασιλικῶς, τὸ τε γὰρ ἄρρεν φύσει τοῦ θῆλεος ἵψευον κατέρθη, . . . τὸ δ’ ἄρρεν ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ τούτων ἔχει τὸν τρόπον.
43 *Pol.* 1.1259b. καὶ δὲι τὴν γυναῖκα ἐναὶ σῳφρονα καὶ ἀνδρείαν καὶ δικαίαν . . . καθόλου δὴ τούτ’ ἐστιν ἐπισκεπτέον περὶ ἀρχομένου φύσει καὶ ἀρχοντος, πότερον ἢ αὐτή ἀρετὴ ἢ ἔτέρα.
All must participate in [the ethical virtues], but not in the same way, but as far as each has a particular employment. . . . So that it is apparent that there is an ethical virtue for all who have been mentioned, and that the moderation of a woman is not the same as for a man, neither bravery or justice, as Socrates supposed, but there is the courage of ruler and [courage of] subordinate, and it is likewise with the other [virtues].

Thus, Aristotle concludes, women can and must exhibit moral virtue, but in a different manner than men do, because of their subordinated position in social relationships.

Xenophon

For a more complete description of the roles of a “good woman” within the household, we may turn to the *Oeconomicus* by Xenophon, another student of Socrates, but who had more of a view toward practicalities. The work’s title relates its contents, that is, the duties of household governance (or “estate management,” or “domestic economy”), and the text remained useful from the late Roman Republic into the Renaissance. It professes to be an account of Socrates’ conversation with a student Critobulus, wherein they cover managing agricultural property (including slaves), farming techniques, and most relevant to our topic, the responsibilities of husband and wife in the management of the estate.

Socrates begins by invoking his own wife Aspasia as an example of such a good wife:

*I will introduce Aspasia to you. Being more knowledgeable than I am, she will show you all these things. I think that a woman who is a good domestic*
partner [κοινωνόν ἁγαθὴν οἴκου] is an excellent counterpart to her man with respect to their wealth. For on the whole, possessions come into the house through the activities of the man, but they are mostly expended through the supplies of the woman. And if these things are handled well the estate increases, but if done poorly the estate decreases.47

Here we see an indication of Socrates’ opinion that household activities are gendered at least some extent, with the man responsible for the accumulation of goods and the woman responsible for their dispensation. He follows up with a remembered conversation with a prosperous farmer named Ischomachus, who taught his young wife everything she needed to know in order to perform her domestic duties well. Ischomachus describes a more or less separate but equal work situation between spouses based on biological distinctions:

Since both these indoor and outdoor tasks requires work and carefulness, and it seems god prepared, it appears to me, the nature of the woman for indoor tasks and concerns, and the nature of the man for outdoor tasks and concerns. For he equipped the man’s body and soul to be better able to endure cold and heat and travel and battles; thus, he assigned the outdoor tasks to him. But the body of the woman being less capable of these things, it seems to me the god naturally assigned to her the indoor tasks.48

The assignment of tasks based on “nature” (that is one’s sex) is not an inferior or evil thing within the logic of the *Oeconomicus*, since it is “good” (here, καλός, also meaning “beautiful,” “honorable,” and “noble”) for the woman to remain indoors as opposed to living outside, while it is “a disgrace” (αίσχος) for the man to stay indoors rather than attending to

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47 *Oec.* 3.14-15. συστήσαμε δὲ σοί ἐγώ καὶ Ἀσπασίαν, ἡ ἐπιστημονέστερον ἐμώ σοι ταύτα πάντα ἐπιδείξει, νομίζω δὲ γυναῖκα κοινωνον ἁγαθὴν οἴκου σύσσω πάνω ἀντίρροπον εἶναι τῷ ἄνδρι ἐπὶ τὸ ἁγαθὸν. ἔρχεται μὲν γὰρ εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν διὰ τῶν τοῦ ἄνδρος πράξεων τὰ κτήματα ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ, διαπαντᾶται δὲ διὰ τῶν τῆς γυναικὸς ταμιευμάτων τὰ πλείστα· καὶ εὐ μὲν τούτων γιγνομένων αὐξονται οἱ οἴκοι, κακῶς δὲ τούτων πραττομένων οἱ οἴκοι μείονται.

48 *Oec.* 7.22-23. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀμφότερα ταύτα καὶ ἔργαν καὶ ἐπιμελείας δεῖται τὰ τέ ἐνδον καὶ τὰ ἔξω, καὶ τὴν φύσιν, φανᾶται, εὐθὺς παρακεύεσαν ὁ θεὸς, ὡς ἐμὸ δοκεῖ, τὴν μὲν τῆς γυναικὸς ἐπὶ τὰ ἐνδον ἔργα καὶ ἐπιμέλημα, τὴν δὲ τοῦ ἄνδρος ἐπὶ τὰ ἔξω. ρίγη μὲν γὰρ καὶ βάλτη καὶ ὀδοιπορίας καὶ στρατεύσει τοῦ ἄνδρος τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν μᾶλλον δινοῦσαι καρτερεῖν κατεσκεύασεν· ὡστε τὰ ἔξω ἐπεταξὲν αὐτῶ ἔργα· τὴ δὲ γυναικὴ ἦττον τὸ σῶμα δυνατὸν πρὸς ταύτα φύσας τὰ ἐνδον ἔργα αὐτή, φανὰν ἐφι, προσταταί τοις δοκεῖ ὁ θεὸς.
the outdoor tasks. In fact, it is a religious duty to behave in accordance with one’s natural sex, since otherwise one would be neglecting one’s duty (ἀτοκτών) toward the gods.

Comparing his wife to a queen bee presiding over an active hive, Ischomachus details the many tasks that are necessary for that female insect who controls a large colony. Just as the other bees loyally follow the queen bee when she deserts the hive for another, so the members of the wife’s household will honor her, and even more so, the older and wiser she becomes. As a philosopher of estate management, Ischomachus reminds her that “the beautiful and good things of life increase for people, not on account of the bloom of youth, but on account of the virtues.” In other words, the whole household will benefit from the wife’s excellence in domestic economy.

Pythagorean Writings

As mentioned above, according to Aristotle, some members of the Pythagorean philosophical movement already considered “male” and “female” to be essential categories for describing the structure of the cosmos. Some later Pythagoreans seem to have carried this theoretical idea into the “real” world in literature that, like the Oeconomicus, addresses morality within household relationships. While much scholarly debate surrounds the dates, 

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49 Oec. 7.30-31. καὶ καλὰ δὲ ἔλειναι ὁ νόμος ἀποδείκνυσιν α καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἔφυεν ἐκάτερον μᾶλλον δύνασθαι. τῇ μὲν γὰρ γυναικὶ κάλλιου ἐνδον μὲνειν ἢ δυραυλεῖν, τῷ δὲ ἀνδρὶ αἰσχρὸν ἐνδον μὲνειν ἢ τῶν ἔξω ἐπιμελεῖσθαι.

50 Oec. 7.31. εἰ δὲ τις παρ’ ἄ στατω ἐθάνει, ἵσως τι καὶ ἀτακτῶν τοὺς θεοῦς οὐ λήθει.


52 Oec. 7.42. καὶ μὴ δὴ σε φοβεῖσθαι μὴ προιόντος τῆς ἡλικίας ἀτιμοτέρα ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ γένη, ἀλλὰ πιστεύειν ὅτι πρεβατέρα γυνομενή διὰ ὁν καὶ ἐμοὶ κοινῶν καὶ παιδίον οἴκου φύλαξ ἀμείώτως γίγνη, τοσοῦτοι καὶ τιμιωτέρα ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ἔστε.

53 Oec. 7.43. τὰ γὰρ καλὰ τε κάγαθα, ἐγὼ ἐφην, οὐ διὰ τὰς ὃραιότητας, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὰς ἀρετὰς εἰς τὸν βίον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐπαύξεται.
provenances, and “authenticity” of the texts ascribed to Pythagoreans, legends about Pythagoras, his family, and other Pythagoreans as well as writings preserving their philosophical ideals increased in popularity in the late Hellenistic and Roman imperial worlds.54 What is significant for this chapter is that their “household ethics” texts themselves are very often gendered; that is, not only do the topics covered fall into the categories “masculine” and “feminine,” but the named authors, and often the recipients and/or audience are male or female corresponding to the subject matter.55 Giving advice about the character and roles of women is typically undertaken by Pythagorean women, while Pythagorean men discuss the responsibilities of virtuous men.

Under the names of five women (Melissa, Myia, Periktione, Phintys, and Theano) there are twelve extant texts—nine letters and three discourses—the dates for which fall somewhere between the late-2nd century BCE and the early-2nd century CE.56 Nine of these

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54 CENTER FOR GENDER STUDIES NOTE: The texts dated to these centuries are variably called “Pseudopythagorean” (to indicate their probable pseudonymous authorship) or “Neopythagorean” (to distinguish them from the early Pythagorean movement). Classical philologist Holger Thesleff compiled and published an introduction to and a later critical edition of the Pseudopythagorean writings (An Introduction to the Pythagorean Writings of the Hellenistic Period, Acta Academiae Aboensis, Humaniora 24/3 (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi, 1961); The Pythagorean Texts of the Hellenistic Period, Acta Academiae Aboensis, Ser. A, Humaniora 30/1 (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi, 1965). His Introduction offers brief summaries of the texts and an extended discussion of their language, dates, and origins, while the second volume provides the texts and variants, some explanation of their Doric and Ionic characteristics, and references to secondary research. Thesleff lists in alphabetical order texts and fragments (and sometimes only titles) by or concerning sixty-one “Pythagoreans.” The transmission history of these texts is complicated, but some were already collected into a “Corpus Pythagoricum,” possibly before the 1st century BCE, and later used by Stobaeus (Thesleff, Introduction, 117–122). Thesleff’s collection, then, is a modern compilation of Greek texts from Stobaeus and other sources. Although previous scholarship accepted a “late date” from the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE for all of the texts, Thesleff argues that some of the writings are earlier, possibly the mid-3rd century BCE. In a later published discussion with Walter Burkert, Thesleff agrees to a “compromise” dating of the late 2nd BCE, in “On the Problem of the Doric Pseudo-Pythagorica: An Alternative Theory of Date and Purpose,” in Pseudoepigrapha I: Pseudopythagorica, Lettres de Platon, Littérature pseudéphigraphique juive, Entretiens sur l’antique classique 18 (Geneva: Foundation Hardt, 1972), esp. 82–84.

55 In this chapter, I focus on the general approach to gendered virtue that is characteristic of the Pythagorean texts. In chapters 3–6 I will analyze this literature in much more detail.

56 CENTER FOR GENDER STUDIES NOTE: FYI, see Attachment #1 of Pythagorean women’s texts and titles. If you’re interested, see also Attachment #2 for my translation of one of the women’s letters. Using Thesleff’s collection, these twelve extant texts by women range from five to one hundred lines; women authors are found in titles for eight otherwise unknown texts, and a few very short miscellaneous quotes and other pieces. Most of the writings are attributed to Theano: seven letters, four titles, a dedication, five lines of a text
texts specifically address social expectations for women in their roles as wife, mother, and mistress of slaves and household. When the Pythagorean women’s writings are read as a group, this commonality of topics is quite pronounced: the twelve texts deal more often with women’s household roles and moral behavior than with any other topic.\(^{\text{57}}\) Two letters, one by Theano and the one by Myia, concern mothers and childrearing. Another letter by Theano instructs the female recipient on managing household slaves. Instructions on marriage, specifically how one can live with an unfaithful husband, are the subject of two more of Theano’s letters.\(^{\text{58}}\) Three texts—Melissa’s letter, Phintys’ discourse, and one discourse by Periktione—address more generally how to be a good woman, which is defined explicitly through proper household relationships, adornment, religious observances, and the development of virtues appropriate to women. In sum, all five women Pythagorean authors have something to say about the roles of women in family, household and even society.\(^{\text{59}}\)

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\(^{\text{57}}\) Not only are nine of the twelve texts concerned with women’s behavior, but also their combined length (at 423 lines) far exceeds that of the four texts not referring to female-specific behavior (45 lines). I do not include the writings for which there are titles only, although some of the titles are also suggestive of texts that may have been written for or about women, e.g., Arignote’s “Concerning the Rites of Bacchus,” (Βακχικό), and her “Initiates of Dionysus,” Τελετείς Διονυσοῦ (Thesleff, *Pythagorean Texts*, 51, 4–5). Also Theano’s “Advice for Women,” Παρανεσείς γυναικείαι (Thesleff, *Pythagorean Texts*, 195.6) might have provided extremely interesting reading for my project.

\(^{\text{58}}\) Theano’s letters thus cover the three major roles women held in households: as wives, mothers, and managers of the household and its slaves. As we saw previously, these three roles parallel the male roles in the three pairs of relationships defined by Aristotle as essential to well-ordered households: husband-wife, father-child, master-slave (Pol., I 1253b.1-14), and carried along in other philosophical writings, as well as in the NT (see again, Balch, *Let Wives*). In all, there are nine extant letters ascribed to Pythagorean women. Among 55 named male authors, there are only four letters: Lysis to Hipparchios, Pythagoras to Anaximenes, Pythagoras to Hieron, and Telages to Philolaos. None of these deals with household topoi. Why the letter form is used more often by the women Pythagoreans is an interesting, but possibly unanswerable question.

\(^{\text{59}}\) Of course, this preponderance of literary attention does not necessarily mean that women Pythagoreans wrote more about “women’s topics” than about general philosophical ones, although they may have done. At least two other explanations are possible. If the texts were indeed written by women, and if these women also wrote on a wider range of philosophical topics than the extant texts indicate, then it is equally consistent with the evidence that the women-specific texts might have been preserved more often in the later sources because they covered topics considered more appropriate for women to advise, write, or read about. Or, if men wrote these texts, the female pseudonyms again suggest an expectation that women usually instructed other women on these issues. In
There are also other Pythagorean texts written by (or ascribed to) men that address household ethics.\textsuperscript{60} What justification is there for separating the texts according to the sex of their “authors”? One reason is the preponderance of attention devoted to the household in the women’s texts, as noted above; a rough survey of the content of all the men’s texts reveals much less interest in this topic.\textsuperscript{61} Secondly, those writings by men regarding household ethics are more interested in men’s household roles, and almost never address the wife-mother-household manager roles of women, or women’s moral character. The men’s texts might deal with how a man can select an appropriate wife, or with marital “laws,” or they may lightly touch on the father’s role in childrearing.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} Some of these are referred to in Balch’s essay “Neopythagorean Moralists and the New Testament Household Codes,” in \textit{Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt} 2.26.1 (1992): 380-411. He cites material from Archytas, Bryson (for whom Thesleff includes only fragments in Greek of a text, \textit{Oeconomicus}, which is extant in full in Arabic and Latin), Callicratidas, Charondas, Damippus, Diotogenes, Eccelus, Hippodamus, Occelus, Pempelus, and Zaleucas, as well as from four women: Melissa, Perictione, Phintys, and Theano. (Oddly, he does not mention the letter by Myia.) He also includes selections from the biographies of Pythagoras by Iamblichus and Porphyry. Balch sketches some of the parallels between the \textit{Pseudopythagorica} and the New Testament on nine topics related to household ethics: house and city, gods, wives (under which he cites material from Callicratidas, on husbands governing wives; so why is this not under the following category?), husbands, children, fathers (note, not “mothers,” or “parents,” although he includes quotes from Pythagorean women on child-rearing), slaves, masters, and concord. Balch’s choices of topics, labels, and order of treatment could all be critiqued further, but, as he says, this “is intended as an initial attempt to collect the similar material in the two traditions, not as a detailed exegetical study.” (392).

\textsuperscript{61} Using statistics of extant texts, eleven men out of fifty-five male authors in Thesleff’s collection (or 20\%)

write about the household, and although I have not counted the number of lines devoted to each topic as I have for the women authors, they clearly devote much less space proportionately to the topic. (My assessment does not include the biographies of Pythagoras by Iamblichus and Porphyry.) Male Pythagoreans discourse about a variety of “philosophical” topics, including Pythagorean “specialties” like the mysteries of numbers, asceticism, and the harmonic order of the universe. For my preliminary conclusions about the texts by men, I have relied upon Thesleff’s conspectus \textit{(Introduction, 8–24)} and Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie’s translation of many of the texts in Thesleff’s collection \textit{(The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings Which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy,} compiled and translated by Guthrie, additional translations by Thomas Taylor and Arthur Fairbanks, Jr., intro. and ed. by David R. Fideler, [Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes, 1987]).

\textsuperscript{62} Among male authors, Callicratidas and Occelus give advice to men on how to choose a good wife, and how to behave with her. Occelus also discusses the father’s role in training children. Pempelus writes about honoring one’s parents, and male authors discuss the connection between the well-ordered household and the city, among them: Callicratidas, Occelus, Hippodamus, Diotogenes, and Eccelus. About women, Charondas has one “law” on the necessity for wifely fidelity, alongside one for husbands (62, 30–34). In a short fragment, Zaleucas has a similar law regarding the behavior of a chaste wife (228, 24–229, 4). Callicratidas depicts the three relationships that are the basis of the household this way: the husband is the governor, the wife is the governed, and their
There is only one “Pythagorean” text in which a man addresses women and their roles directly and in detail. Iamblichus’ *Vita Pythagorica* reports a speech by Pythagoras himself in which he supposedly gave instructions about proper sacrifices for women, and about a wife’s relationship to her husband (among other things, that sex with her husband did not make her ritually unclean). But in the other Pythagorean writings, no male writer attempts to imitate the example of his founder in giving philosophical advice to women. Instead, that responsibility is allocated to the letters and discourses by female Pythagoreans.

The Pythagorean literature from the Hellenistic and Roman eras thus extends the ancient moral philosophical discussion of the topic of “woman,” that is to say, her virtuous behavior exhibited through proper social roles. This is accomplished by the unusual strategy of the production of texts that are ascribed to female authors, writing on “feminine” subjects like household relationships that are thought to be of special interest to female audiences. The literary gendering of virtue and of the philosophical life has reached a well-defined position within this Pythagorean text collection.

*Other Philosophical Texts*

Certainly some ancient philosophers thought that men and women could become good, or live virtuously in similar ways. Socrates already suggested this in postulating that some women naturally exercised administrative (and athletic and artistic) skills equal to those

64 The strategy is unusual in that we have no other extant texts attributed to women philosophers that are as early as these.
of some men. The Pythagoreans were renowned for their women philosophers, seventeen of whom are listed in Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* at the very end of his text (36.267). Among the Stoics, the Roman Musonius Rufus supplied two discourses that explicitly consider questions about philosophical living for women: “That women too should study philosophy,” and “Should daughters receive the same education as sons?” Although Rufus basically answers both questions in the affirmative, he also affirms some gendering of philosophical activities.

In a letter of *Advice to the Bride and Groom*, the Neo-Platonist Plutarch famously wrote to a philosophizing couple. He opens his letter by saying that it is derived from the “main points you have often heard while being educated in philosophy.” Although Plutarch thinks of philosophy as a boon to married life, because it makes both partners “gentle and amenable to each other,” he nonetheless addresses more of his advice to the woman than to the man. Perhaps the disparity suggests the importance of the role of wife for a woman, and/or that a woman needed more instruction, since she is somehow morally inferior. I will

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65 Compared with his count of 218 Pythagorean men. The only names on Iamblichus’ list that match writings in the group of texts I am working with are Theano, Myia, and perhaps Phintys (if her name is the same as “Phyltya”).


67 ὁν ὅνο πολλὰς ἐν καθρῶμα παραρμαμένοι χεραλάσι, *Advice*, 138C. Plutarch’s dates are 46 – 125 CE.

68 Φιλοσοφία δὲ πολλῶν λόγων καὶ καλῶν ἐνώνων, οὕτως ἢττον ἀξίων σφεδής ὁ γαμήλιος ἄττιν ὑποτεύκτος, ὡς κατάδουσα τούτο ἐπί βίου κοινωνίας συνυόντος εἰς τούτο πράσσως τε παρέχαι καὶ χειροθέτης ἀλλήλων.

69 Notes Pomeroy, “Of the forty-eight chapters in the Advice, nine are addressed to both bride and groom, eleven to the groom, and twenty-eight, or more than half the total, to the bride alone. Like Xenophon, Plutarch finds less to criticize and fewer potential problems in the husband’s behavior,” *Plutarch’s “Advice to the Bride and Groom” and “A Consolation to His Wife”: English Translations, Commentary, Interpretive Essays, and Bibliography*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 40.
analyze Plutarch’s letter more completely in comparison with Pythagorean women’s writings on marriage.

The Cynic philosopher Crates rejected standard gender roles for female Cynic philosophers. In a letter to his wife Hipparchia, who was also a Cynic, he says,

I am sending to you the tunic, which you wove and sent to me, because it is forbidden for those who undergo patient endurance to wear such things, so I would have you stop this work, accomplished with much eagerness, in order that you might appear to the people to be someone who is a ‘husband-lover’. If I had married you for these reasons, then you would do well, and this [eagerness] would be shown off to me through this. But [I married] on account of philosophy, which you yourself also yearned for, so be glad to dismiss these pursuits, and try to be of more benefit for human life. For you learned these things from both me and Diogenes.’’

Here Crates appears to give the strongest renunciation of a gender-differentiated philosophical way of life, and yet, since it is couched in the typical Cynic disdain for social conventions, we cannot be sure what he thought about the philosophical capacity of most women. In another letter to Hipparchia, he once again criticizes her for making him a tunic, and maintains she ought to leave the wool-spinning to “the other women, who did not yearn for any of the things you do.” It seems that even Crates recognizes that a female philosopher is a remarkable individual.

From this survey of philosophical material two conclusions are certain. First, it is a basic supposition in almost all extant Western philosophical literature that the biological

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70 Cynic Epistle, #30. Ἐπεμψά σοι τὴν ἔξωμίδα, ἣν ὑφηναιμένη μοι ἔπεμψας, ὅτι ἀπαγορεύεται τοῖς καρτερίας χρωμένοις τοιαύτα ἀμπεχεῖσθαι, καὶ ινα σε τούτου τοῦ ἔργου ἀποτάσσαιμι, εἰς ὁ πολλὴ σπουδὴ ἐξηλθείς, ἵνα τὶς δόξης φιλανδρός τοῖς πολλοῖς εἶναι. ἔγγο δὲ εἰ μὲν διὰ τούτα σε ἡγόμην, εὖ γε ποιεῖς καὶ αὐτῇ διὰ τούτων ἐπιδεικνυμένη μοι: εἰ δέ διὰ φιλοσοφίαν, ἡς καὶ αὐτὴ ὀρέχθης, τὰ τοιαύτα σπουδασματὰ ἐξ χαίρειν, πειρῶ δὲ εἰς τὰ κρείττα τῶν ἀνθρώπων τοῦ βίου ωφελεῖν. ταῦτα γὰρ ἐμαθὲς καὶ παρ᾿ ἐμοὶ καὶ παρὰ Διόγενει. This is the entire letter. The word “husband-loving” is φιλανδρὸς, which appears in Titus 2:5 as well.

sexual distinction between female and male leads to differing definitions of moral behavior for women and men. And second, the principal accepted arena for a woman to demonstrate her virtue was in her household roles as wife, mother, and household manager.

A third inference appears to emerge from the evidence: that “philosophizing” women—in texts and in “real” life—were considered to be the exception rather than the rule. Richard Hawley notes this “exceptionality” in his insightful essay “The Problem of Women Philosophers in Ancient Greece,” where he shows that “the theories of the male philosophers accommodate the possibility of female philosophers, while the number of actual cases of women who philosophized is remarkably small.” Examining the available data, Hawley finds:

However she may have been considered as a possibility in philosophic argument, in practice the women philosopher had to be prepared to submit to male scrutiny and often criticism. She was always an oddity. Special lists were compiled of them, separate from men. Interest in their stories lay more in their sexual histories or in how they became this unusual phenomenon (e.g. Hipparchia) than in their intellectual achievement. . . . [T]he dominant, traditional association of woman and passion, nature, the sensual was hard to escape.

Hawley’s conclusions lead to a great deal of skepticism about the use of philosophical literature for historical reconstruction. Suffice it to say here, that very early on philosophical writers believed that ideal moral behavior for women, as distinct from that for men, was a topic worthy of description and prescription. A similar impulse is maintained within the New Testament Pastoral Letters, the subject of the next section.

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73 “Problem of Women,” 70-71.
74 Hawley, “Problem of Women,” 83.
The Pastoral Letters

The New Testament Pastoral Letters have much in common in vocabulary, literary character, and subject matter with ancient philosophical texts addressing ethics and morality. While these pseudonymous letters are thoroughly awash in Jewish/Christian theology, they still give advice about the purpose of life, about seeking virtues and avoiding vices, the proper approach to the passions and to possessions, how to manage and how to behave as an suitable member of a Roman household.

Specifically, the Pastoral Letters participate in the on-going philosophical search for “a good woman.” These Greek documents from the Roman Empire reflect, reinforce, and adapt the social expectations for women’s morality found in philosophical-religious texts of that time. In their domestic roles as faithful wives, loving mothers, and good household managers, through simple dress and adornment, by quiet speech, modest demeanor, and proper devotion to deities, “good” women were believed to substantiate not only their own honor, but also that of their husbands, family, and entire household. In addition, the Pastorals both seek to persuade women in their audiences to abide by these standards of decency, and the letters position themselves to function as instructional material for the Christian communities. When read as a group, the Pastorals’ teachings regarding women confirm the author’s serious concern about female goodness, and his co-optation of cultural

75 It is a philosophical strategy in and of itself to use the letter genre, and also to ascribe letters to the great teachers in philosophical movements. Lewis R. Donelson provides important parallels between the Pastorals and other philosophical letters (Pseudopigraph and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1986]). Other scholars who have discussed the philosophical contexts of the Pastorals include: Benjamin Fiore, The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986); Robert J. Karris, “The Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles,” JBL 92. 4, 1973; Margaret M. Mitchell, “Reading to Virtue,” in Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Bible and Culture: Essays in Honor of Hans Dieter Betz, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 110–121; Stephen Charles Mott, “Greek Ethics and Christian Conversion: The Philonic Background of Titus II 10-14 and III 3-7,” Novum Testamentum XX, 22–48.

76 CENTER FOR GENDER STUDIES NOTE: See Attachment #3 for all the verses in these letters that speak directly to the behavior of women. The amount of space given over to this topic is unusually large for NT texts.

77 And in some cases, the honor of their churches or their cities.
gender-stereotypes serves to bolster his argument that there are certain gendered essentials (biological/creation-based?) to which Christian women must also conform.

One chapter from the letter to Titus is especially interesting for its moral instruction to members of the Christian community, and serves to illustrate the author’s grave concern about women’s behavior. Here “Paul,” the revered apostle, commands Titus, his younger subordinate, what to teach in the churches on the island of Crete:78

But you [Titus] declare what things are appropriate for the healthy teaching:

Older men79 ought to be sober, august, moderate, healthy in faith, in love, in patient endurance.

Older women likewise ought to be reverent in demeanor, not slanderers nor having been enslaved to much wine, teachers of good things, so that they might instruct young women in moderation: to be loving of husbands, loving of children, moderate, pure, good houseworkers,80 in orderly subjection to their own husbands, so that the word of God might not be blasphemed.

Younger men likewise urge to be moderate, offering yourself in everything as a model for good works, in your teaching [offer yourself as having] integrity, dignity, healthy speech that cannot be condemned, so that the opponent might be put to shame, having nothing base to say about us.

Slaves ought to be submissive to their own masters in everything, to be acceptable, not back-talkers, not robbers, but demonstrating all good faith, so that they might adorn the teaching of our savior God in everything.

For the grace of the savior God appeared to all people, training us so that by denying impiety and worldly desires, we might live moderately and justly and piously in the present age, awaiting the blessed hope and appearance of the glory of the mighty God and our savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself on our behalf so that he might redeem us from every lawlessness and cleanse for himself a people of his own, zealous for good works.

Declare these things and exhort and reprove with all command. Let no one look down on you.81

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78 Most scholars assume that not only is “Paul” a pseudonym, but that Titus and the situation with the churches on Crete are also fictitious. I discuss the function of pseudepigraphic literature like this in a later chapter.

79 Older men/older women here is based on the adjective “older” (πρεσβύτας/πρεσβύτιδας) in masculine or feminine forms. Young women is νεός (this is not a comparative form, but functions comparatively in the text because of the “older women”), while younger men is νεωτέρος.

80 οἰκουργοῦσα ἁγαθός might also be translated separately as “working at home, good.”

81 CENTER FOR GENDER STUDIES NOTE: For ease of reading, I have underlined here the five groups of people which are specifically addressed. One literary note: this chapter is set off by a subtle but definite inclusio. In verse 1, “Paul” opens with a command to “Declare what things are fitting for the healthy [sound] teaching,” λάλει ἄ πρέπει τῇ υπαινούσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ. The chapter ends with “Declare these things and exhort and reprove with all command,” Ταύτα λάλει καὶ παρακάλει καὶ ἔλεγχε μετὰ πάσης ἐπιταγῆς. For the entire Greek text see Attachment #4.
While there are many analytical comments that could be made about this chapter of the letter, I will limit myself to some general comments, and then concentrate on the instructions regarding women. First, although this letter does not use the verb *philosophein* or the noun *philosophia*, it does evoke philosophical education in other vocabulary, e.g., “teaching,” “good,” “moderate,” “training,” “justly,” “piously.” Second, the background of moral formation is suggested by the use of the older women as examples for the younger ones, and of Titus as a model for the younger women. Third, the author has organized his instructions with an eye toward household roles (except there are no instructions for masters of slaves), and perceives virtuous living to be interconnected with proper behavior in the household, reflecting the philosophical concern over household ethics. Within early Christianity, social relationships within the household overlapped in multiple ways, since groups met in homes for worship, teaching, and meals. Whole households may have converted if the head of household did so, and church leaders seem to be drawn from heads of households as well. A small sign of Christian household-house church connections may be found in the apostle Paul’s consistent use of the term “brothers and sisters” for Christian believers. The author of the Pastorals confirms the overlay of household onto Christian community: he has written his letter “in order that you might know how one should live in the household of God, which is the assembly of the living God.” In summary, while the text asserts strong, peculiarly Christian, theological justifications for the process of learning how to live well, it nonetheless adapts the philosophical concern for virtuous living within the social context of the household to fit Christian interests.

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83 1 Tim. 4:15: ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι, ἣτις ἔστιν ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ξάνθος
Turning briefly to the advice for women in Titus 2, we find in the compositional arrangement, that the author has framed the advice for women between that for older men and younger men. “Titus” is first directed to instruct the older men, and then the older women (but NOT the young women), and then the younger men, to whom he has a special relationship since he seems to be younger himself. Instead of Titus, the younger women have a different group of teachers and that is the “older women”; they are the “good teachers” (καλοδιδασκάλους) for the younger women.84 We can speculate that the older women are the good teachers for three reasons: (1) because they are women (and not men); (2) because they know the specific expectations for women’s moral behavior; and (3) because the older women teach in part by acting as moral examples for the younger women. In any case, the idea is that instruction for younger women would be sex-segregated.

Virtuous behavior by all would reflect the idea of “moderation,” since some word form of sōphro- (σωφρο-) is used for each older and younger group.85 However, the instructional material goes into more detail for the younger women than for the other groupings; there are six separate adjectives and one participial phrase (“submitting to their own husbands,” echoed later in the command for slaves “to submit to their own masters”). Additionally, the teaching task of the older women involves “instructing the young women in moderation,” so that the verb acts as a heading for the rest of the concepts to be taught.86 In a

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84 Was Titus as a younger man open to the seduction of younger women? In another Pastoral Letter, Timothy is told to be careful about his behavior around younger women: “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters in all purity,” Πρεσβυτέροι μη ἐπιπλήξεις, ἀλλὰ παρακάλει ὡς πατέρα, νεανίτερος ὡς ἁδελφός, πρεσβυτέρας ὡς μητέρας, νεωτέρας ὡς ἁδελφής ἐν πάσῃ ἁγνείᾳ, 1 Tim. 5:1-2.
85 This stem may be translated by “temperance,” “moderation,” “self-control.” The root of “σωφρον” words is σως, meaning to be “safe and sound,” “alive and well,” “sound, whole, safe,” LSJ. It is thus related to the verb σῴζω (σώζω) to save, to heal.
86 The verb is σωφρονεῖν. With the -ιω ending, this verb indicates action, while the verb σωφρονεῖν (see Titus 2:6) indicates a condition or activity, Smyth, Greek Grammar, §866.
later chapter, I will consider the singular position held by the virtue of moderation with respect to women.87

The Pastoral letters not only reflected and adapted philosophical theory and customs for the Christian communities of their day, including, of special interest to this project, inscribing certain ideals for the moral character of women. Upon their successful inclusion into the Christian New Testament, the Pastorals also acquired the authority of divinely sanctioned scripture influencing centuries of church regulation of women’s activities and the moral-ethical practices of household and individuals. The next part of this chapter examines some of the effects of the Pastorals’ teaching on good women through scholarly and popular readings produced during the last fifty years.

Biblical Scholarship

As Christian canonical texts, the Pastoral Letters have been subjected to a variety of analytical methods since the advent of modern biblical historical-criticism. Instead of a lengthy review of studies of the Pastorals, I focus here on important areas of research and conclusions that have served as a basis for more recent discussions of the “good woman.”

Historical-critical biblical scholarship arose in 18th century Europe among scholars attempting to provide non-dogmatic (i.e., non-church-prescribed, or even non-theological) interpretations of Christian scriptures.88 The aim was to move away from apologetics and into more “scientific” historical readings of these texts, especially readings that would accurately replicate their “original” authorial meanings; theoretically, one would then also be

87 See also Helen F. North, “The Mare, the Vixen, and the Bee.”
88 CENTER FOR GENDER STUDIES NOTE: Several areas of interest resulted: form-criticism, identifying the literary genre of a text or part of it; looking for parallels and even sources in non-Christian literature; the search for the historical Jesus; the documentary hypothesis (which posits four [or sometimes more] sources for the Pentateuch); and historical studies more generally, which tried to situate the biblical texts in their geographical, political, and religious contexts.
closer to the original audiences’ understandings of the texts. More recently, using reader-
response theories, anthropological and sociological models, and ideas from New Rhetoric
models, other biblical scholars in a post-modern world have questioned the supposed
objectivity of earlier historical-critical work as well as the value of reconstructing the original
authorial intentions and audience response.

However, there is no doubt that the Pastorals come out of a socio-historical setting
that can be described to some extent by examining the evidence—literary, archaeological,
epigraphic, etc.—that remains from that culture. Historical research on the Pastorals (as
with other early Christian literature) has revealed numerous ancient literary parallels, as I
have already indicated by situating these letters in the context of moral-philosophical texts.
Continuing to use as a case study the instructions for older and younger women in Titus 2,
we find that most historical-critical scholars cite and/or briefly comment on other literary
associations with the Pastorals’ teachings for women—feminine virtues, moral training,
propriety in clothing, jewelry, hairstyle, food and drink, speech and silence, and family roles
and tasks. It is the brevity of the comments that demonstrates a sort of lack of interest in the
instructions for women found in Titus 2. For most historical-critics there does not seem to be
much dispute about the description of the “good woman”: evidently, she is what the author
says she is.

89 Although it is difficult to ascertain the very specific provenance and occasion for the Pastorals, Frances
Young states with much common sense: “. . . it is unlikely these letters are without situation, and . . .
the problems in the churches must have been real enough to have provoked the writing of these letters,” The
Theology of the Pastoral Letters (New Testament Theology series; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1994), 19.

90 See, for example, the commentaries by Dibelius/Conzelmann, Quinn, Bassler, Johnson, and Young. Also,
Balch, Let Wives, and Osiek and Balch, Families. Often cited are: Plato, Republic, various passages in 451C-
461E; and Laws, various passages in 6.780E-781D, 7.804E-806C, 8.838A-839B; Xenophon, Oeconomicus 7;
Musonius Rufus, Or. III, That Women Too Should Study Philosophy; and Or. IV, Should Daughters Receive the
Same Education as Sons; Plutarch, Advice to the Bride and Groom. Dibelius/Conzelmann and Quinn seem to
focus on Jewish and other early Christian parallels over those in philosophical texts.
For example, some interpreters have concentrated on the author’s description of feminine virtues, as Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann note: “The regulation for young women corresponds to what is expected of the young widows in 1 Tim 5:14. ‘Love of husbands’ (φιλονυχία) and ‘love of children’ (φιλοτεκνία) are praised in the literature [that is, other ancient literature] and in the inscriptions as womanly virtues.”91 Here these two scholars pay little attention to the teaching “methods,” describing them simply as “reminding,” “advising,” and “admonishing.” Another short mention comes from Linda M. Maloney: “it is the duty of older women to teach younger women the domestic virtues, beginning with love for their husbands and children . . .”92 It is true that the genre of biblical “commentary” or the shorter length of an article may account for the cursory notice given to the moral instruction for women, but I think that other historical factors—such as a pre-feminist worldview?—from the scholars’ own times are also involved.

Some scholars seem to be influenced more overtly by their own theological or social perspective. For instance, Jerome D. Quinn waxes sentimental over the younger women: “There is to be a ready and reverent offering of self and of Christian service to ‘their own husbands; so that the message of God not be defamed.’”93 Using form critical methods, Quinn also sees in the list of virtues for younger women, fragments of a marriage liturgy wherein the bride is “singled out for special blessing and instruction.”94 Maybe the proposed ritual setting explains his tender comments.

At the other emotional extreme, Luke Timothy Johnson makes a decidedly strange comment about the terms “husband-loving” (φιλόνυχος) and “children-loving”

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94 Letter to Titus, 136.
(φιλοτέκνους): “What is surprising is that these are qualities that need to be taught. Is this a sign of the savageness and incivility of the native population, that responses ordinarily thought to be ‘natural’ should require teaching?”

Here Johnson shows that, although he recognizes the standard classical topic of moral formation of “good women,” he misunderstands its use in this context. As we shall see, the author of Titus certainly does not believe that the women in the “native population” of Crete are any more (or any less) in need of instruction than women in the rest of the Roman Empire.

Even given the lack of detail in Titus 2 about the precise educational setting for women’s learning, historical-critical scholars are interested in reconstructing the scene where this teaching might take place. For instance, Quinn asserts that the older women in Titus 2:3 are to teach “‘the message of God’ of v 5 . . . [which] involves the scriptures of Israel, which they teach to youngsters, whether boys or girls (cf. 1 Tim 2:15 with 2 Tim 1:5 and 3:14–15).” In this altogether curious assortment of verses, Quinn almost appears to be “proof-texting,” lining up one verse after another as if they speak to the same issue. However, there is no evidence in the Titus passage that the older women are to teach scripture, nor are they exhorted to instruct males of any age (not even boys). Younger women are the only specified learners, and the content of their learning is how to be a moderate woman.

L. T. Johnson imagines another specific setting:

The instructions to older women recognize their special role in the household in two ways. First, Paul emphasizes their responsibility to provide a model of dignity. . . . Second, Paul recognizes their authority to teach within the

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95 Letters to Paul’s Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus (The New Testament in Context Series; Valley Forge, Penn., Trinity Press International, 1996), 234. One questions why he thinks these responses are “natural”?

96 Johnson considers Paul to be the author of the PE, which necessitates that Johnson also take a more literal view of the recipients of the letters.

97 Quinn, Titus, 135.

98 Quinn does later cite Xenophon, Oec. 7:14 as one example of a (younger) daughter having been told by her (older) mother that her work was to practice moderation (σφενήν), Titus, 135.
In particular, the older women have the responsibility of being ‘good teachers’ of the younger women.\footnote{Letters, 234.}

Johnson understands the “household” in the letter to Titus to be only the “domestic” household, not the assembly (ἐκκλησία θεοῦ, 1 Tim 3:5) or the household of God (οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ, 1 Tim 3:15): “The larger life of the assembly is not in view here.”\footnote{Letters, 232.} But given the complex relationship between household and house-church in the early Christian movement, this distinction between household and house-church seems to me to be difficult to maintain.

Reference is made to the Pythagorean women’s texts in this description of the social setting by Jouette M. Bassler:

“training in the domestic skills mentioned here was the traditional provenance of older women (Lefkowitz and Fant, 1982). This was such an established procedure that some Neopythagorean treatises on the proper behavior of women—including instructions for a wife to “be full of love for her husband and children” and to “live for her husband according to law and in actuality, thinking no private thoughts of her own”—though probably written by men, were published pseudonymously under the names of women (Pomeroy 1975, 133–39).\footnote{1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 195.} It was this claim by Bassler that initiated my present study. In particular, I have been unable to locate her unspecified reference to Lefkowitz and Fant within that volume. The Pomeroy reference does indeed deal with Pythagorean writings, although Bassler does not note which text and seems not to have checked the primary sources. On the issue of male authors for the “women’s” texts, see my comments in a later chapter.

Here Bassler mixes the content of the teaching in Titus 2:3–5, first calling it “training in domestic skills,” but then switching to “proper behavior.” As I have noted, women’s moral character was thought to be demonstrated in their household roles, but Bassler does not elucidate this correlations, nor does she give any further substantiation for this “tradition” or “established procedure.”
Not surprisingly, considering her emphasis on the “sound teaching” prescribed by all the Pastorals, Frances Young correctly situates the Titus passage within an ancient educational context. Noting that a teacher’s exemplary behavior is essential for classical education, she shows how moral examples are supposed to operate in the hierarchical Roman household: just as “the head of the household is not just apex but example to all lower ranks, so there are hierarchical relationships among the women of the household, and women should both set an example to and teach the women lower down the hierarchy.” Young also notes the commonplace character of the content of the instruction in these letters, and mentions the role of written texts in classical education. However, she offers no detailed comparisons between the Pastorals and other moral-philosophical texts, and refers not at all to the Pseudopythagorean writings in her discussions of household ethics.

These biblical scholars have been selected to represent traditional historical-critical approaches to the Pastorals, and they confine their search for a “good woman” to pointing out parallels and depicting the original setting of the letters. With the exception of Young, they do not attempt to grapple with the meaning of the findings of their historical

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102 *Theology*, ch. 4 and throughout. Young is not the only interpreter who views the PE against an ancient educational background. Donelson also perceives the importance of instruction in the PE, and it is that insight that enables his coherent reading of these letters. Donelson places the author of the PE in a popular philosophical context: “The author of the Pastorals is best understood as a Greco-Roman ethicist, who may color the commonplace ethics of the Roman empire with a Christian hue but who also constructs an ethical system with warrants and forms of argumentation analogous to what we find in Epictetus, Seneca, and other contemporary ethicists” (*Pseudepigraphy*, 3–4). In addition, the pseudepigraphy of the PE also reflects an educational motivation on the part of the author: “The importance of teaching for the author of the Pastorals has already attracted our attention in the fiction that Paul’s teaching role is passed down and continued in the author’s church” (*Pseudepigraphy*, 188).

103 *Theology*, 90. More than the other cited interpreters, Young grapples with the implications of the “sacralization” of this Roman system of subordination within a social hierarchy, (147). She attempts to chart a course for modern Christian readers between taking the PE at face value and rejecting them entirely (ch.5).

104 *Theology*, 32–33, and elsewhere.

105 *Theology*, 79–81.

106 I would guess these lacks are due partly to the focus and constraints of the series (*New Testament Theology*) in which her book appears. This series was initiated in order to “bridge the gap between too brief an introduction and too full a commentary where theological discussion is lost among too many other concerns” (James D. G. Dunn, ed., *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters*, Editor’s Preface, x).
contextualizations for modern readers who themselves might want to learn how to become (or to find) a good woman. Ulrich Luz puts his finger on the issue at stake for historical-critics of the Pastorals, “As exegetes we deal with the historical original sense of our texts. But a text that is interpreted by historical-critical method cannot in its original sense determine the present of the church or society. This is why purely exegetical ascertainments of the original sense of our texts are always harmless.”¹⁰⁷ Most modern feminists would argue against Luz’s assumption that a “purely exegetical ascertainment” is even possible, and they would view with dismay the “harm” perpetrated on centuries of women by means of the Pastorals’ teaching.

The problem with these Christian letters for historical-critical scholars is at least twofold: first, how to create historical reconstructions based on this type of instructional literature, in which the world behind the text is not only hidden to some extent, but also idealized, so that the relationship of text to actuality is quite complicated.¹⁰⁸ As Richard Hawley states about the philosophical literature: “Our evidence was never designed to relay the information we so earnestly desire of it and we cannot blame it accordingly.”¹⁰⁹ Second, because the Pastorals, and all the New Testament books, have contributed to the development of our own social structures, the task of today’s historical-critic is like that of a fish trying to describe the nature of the watery environment in which it lives. There is no objectivity or

¹⁰⁷ Studies in Matthew, 166-67; emphasis original.
¹⁰⁸ In her examination of occupations listed on Roman inscriptions, historian Sandra Joshel, Work, Identity and Legal Status at Rome, notes the limitations of literary evidence for reconstructing social realities of the ancient world: “The very existence of particular documents is not accidental, and they determine the narrative that can be constructed by historiographical canons” (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 11. She also advises more critical examination of legal and literary evidence “Taken apart, they can be seen as meanings themselves, as ways of thinking about the world from circumscribed points of view,” 14.
¹⁰⁹ “Problem of Women,” 83. He continues, “Nor might it be wholly fair to lay the blame on the predominantly Christian environment in which the manuscripts were transmitted. Of course it is possible that works by women writers were destroyed because they were by women, at a time when the Church was attempting to confirm its control of society. But many of our sources are, ironically, early Christian writers who preserve the memory of lost pagan ideas and lives,” 83.
purity in historical assessments of the meaning of these texts, and we must instead listen to and learn from a multiplicity of interpretive voices.

**Feminist biblical scholarship**

One benefit of feminist scholarship generally has been the highlighting of “neglected” texts by or about women, texts which were not inherently very “interesting,” or whose meaning was thought to be already as fully understood as was necessary. In addition, bringing different perspectives to well-known literature, historical events, and research methods, feminist scholars often ask innovative questions of the sources, which may lead to new understandings and/or a more complete picture of the historical situation. The historian Joan W. Scott commented on the “defamiliarizing” influence of women’s historical studies:

> Defamiliarized is exactly right—the meanings taken for granted, the terms by which historians had explained the past, the lists of so-called appropriate topics for historical research, were called into question and shown to be neither as comprehensive nor as objective as was previously believed. What was once unthinkable—that gender was a useful tool of historical analysis—has become thinkable.¹¹⁰

Such has been the effect of feminist scholarship on New Testament interpretation as well. Texts which received cursory attention or were thought to be accurately interpreted by historical-critical methods—like the Pastorals’ teaching on women—received new consideration. The process of using gender as a “tool for historical analysis” brought further insights into the rhetorical strategies and ideological worldview of the texts.

Feminist scholarship on women in early Christianity has generated its own internal debates about the historical situations surrounding the Pastoral Letters, and many of these interpreters remain suspicious of the Pastorals because of the letters’ patently hierarchical ethics and strong “sexist” admonitions regarding women’s character and behavior. To these

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readers, the Pastorals often represent canonical justification for Christian women’s lower status (vis-à-vis men), and the letters serve as signs of the “progressive patriarchalization” that they view as characterizing the course of institutionalization of the Christian communities throughout the years (and centuries) after Jesus.

In the late 20th century, it became more common to postulate that Christian communities and Christian families started out (via Jesus and/or Paul) with more “liberated,” or egalitarian social practices, that is, more liberated and more egalitarian than both their Jewish roots and their subsequent Christian branches. As one significant example, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza called the earliest form of the Jesus movement a “discipleship of equals,”111 easily distinguished from the restrictive and hierarchical forms of church governance that she found in the later books of the New Testament. In those texts, she says,

The writers . . . advocated the adoption of the Greco-Roman patriarchal order of the house with its injunctions to subordination and submission of the socially weaker party. . . . Christian writers apply this pattern of patriarchal submission also to their own communal self-understanding and life in the church as the household of God.112

So, over time, the “discipleship of equals” has been overthrown (or overcome) by promoters of the Hellenized Roman patriarchal order. Also, while Schüssler Fiorenza was careful not to hypothesize an “egalitarian” Jesus-movement in sharp distinction to a “patriarchal” Palestinian Jewish setting, she does term this proto-Christian group a “renewal movement” within Judaism, which implies that there is some challenge to the Jewish traditions of Jesus’ day.

111 In Memory of Her, 148-154. Earlier even than Schüssler Fiorenza, and coming close on the heels of the beginnings of modern American feminism was an article by Leonard Swidler, “Jesus Was a Feminist” (South East Asian Journal of Theology, 13.1 (1971) 102-110. At the time, this article title and thesis was as startling as the idea that the Jesus in the Gospels was a revolutionary or a Communist.
112 In Memory of Her, 245.
However, Kathleen Corley finds such reconstructions problematic: “In this view the Edenic time of the Jesus movement is followed by a Fall when the patriarchal Christian church eventually reverses an egalitarian ethic present at the time of Christian beginnings.” Along with Elizabeth Castelli, Corley labels such a concept the “myth of Christian origins,” and says that its proponents seek to provide “motivation for modern Christian inclusivity in Jesus’ movement and message.” And indeed, feminist biblical interpreters often advocate readings that will further modern political, theological, or ethical goals, a practice exemplified in Schüssler Fiorenza’s act of coining the phrase “discipleship of equals.”

How then do feminist biblical scholars handle texts that seemingly cannot be as easily reinterpreted for modern social and political purposes as the Gospels about Jesus? Clearly, under the terms of the “myth of Christian origins,” the Pastorals stand as evidence of a more sexist stage of Christian organization than is generally found in the earlier authentic Pauline letters, and in the four canonical gospels. For instance, in Schüssler Fiorenza’s analysis of the New Testament, she treats the Pastorals in a section titled “The Patriarchalization of Church and Ministry.” Joanna Dewey summarizes the Pastorals in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*: “Thus, [with respect to the subordination of women to men] the author of the

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114 Corley, *Women and Jesus*, 8. Elsewhere she says the myth is designed to “buttress modern Christian social engineering.” Corley is highly critical of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s conception of the “discipleship of equals.” Corley says that Schüssler Fiorenza’s “continued defense of this thesis in light of the identification of her reconstruction as an exercise in Christian mythmaking does nothing to respond to this critique . . . . She admits her reconstruction of a ‘discipleship of equals’ is merely ‘possible’ to imagine, yet asserts that a ‘possible’ reconstruction should be given equal weight to what is probable or plausible . . . . Some reconstructions are more probable than others, and not all projects define themselves as theological in intent, as hers does. Although it is possible that Jesus was a teacher of an egalitarianism that fostered a vision of social equality, it is unlikely,” 20.

115 *In Memory of Her*, 288-91.
Pastorals contradicts Paul and other early Christian understandings. The differences between early and later New Testament texts is reiterated by Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch:

For Paul himself and Matthew, Christology functions in social settings where some women are leaders, slaves are encouraged toward manumission, and all household members are treated equally; however, in the deutero-Pauline epistles [which includes the Pastorals], christological hymns and household codes begin to reassert hierarchical domestic relationships...

They also state: “the Pastorals reserve ecclesial office for males, which has had disastrous consequences for two millennia.” Obviously, the Pastoral Letters are evaluated much more negatively by these scholars than by the more “neutral” historical-critics.

Osiek and Balch demonstrate their feminist concerns in their discussion of the letter to Titus. They first appear to be affirming of the teaching-learning process in Titus 2:3-5:

Despite all the recent interest in women’s history, one aspect of women’s lives that is not frequently spoken of is the intergenerational family activity whereby women in traditional societies convey wisdom and practical knowledge from mother to daughter and surrogate mother to surrogate daughter. This instruction is spread over many years during which daughters are growing up in the household.

At this point the conveying of “wisdom and practical knowledge” sounds like a worthy cause, being an “intergenerational family activity.” However, Osiek and Balch soon give a different spin to the socializing education that occurs at home: “[In 1 Timothy 2:12] it is a question of public teaching in the assembly involving both sexes, while here, it is the private household, where mothers pass on to daughters what male society expects of them. It is ironic that, from the perspective of the modern interpreter, older women are usually the

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118 Families in the NT World, 185.
119 Families in the NT World, 167.
strongest enforcers of that message.” Here Osiek and Balch make explicit their modern discomfort with the gender-based expectations of women in the passage; they have provided not only an historical reconstruction of the teaching situation in Titus 2, but also passed judgment on the process (and the actors?) within the text. This is one example of a feminist “search for a good woman,” but one which turns the portrayal of women on its head; these older women are the antitypes of modern good women, this is the kind of womanly behavior to avoid at all costs. In theory, feminist scholars ought not to reject some of the specific terms for “good women” in the Pastorals; surely, loving one’s children is an excellent matter overall. It is the context and ideological character of the instructions that makes them so objectionable to a feminist vision, the “enclosing” of the young women within the physical structure of the text and then relegating them to the typically feminine pursuits.

The modern feminist historical “search for a good woman” is based on the idea that the past can be instructive, and maybe even inspiring for the present. Joan Scott describes the task of early women’s historians like this: “we wanted to tell edifying stories whose import went beyond their literal content to reveal some larger truth about human relationships—in our case, about gender and power.” One term for this use of historical knowledge is “a

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120 Families, 168. Here Osiek and Balch agree with L.T. Johnson on the private household as the setting for women’s education; yet what works against their reconstruction of Titus 2:3–5, is that the author of Titus does not identify mothers instructing daughters, but a more generic “older women-younger women” teaching process. Osiek and Balch’s “evidence” for the instructional process appears to come from their own personal experiences, and perhaps anthropological studies (“traditional societies”?). After outlining what kinds of things might be learned at home, they note the lack of historical evidence about family life in antiquity, and then suggest the Neopythagorean texts by women as a “possible documented precedent” of a female tradition of women educating women, 168. I fully agree with them that these writings will give excellent evidence for more plausible reconstructions.

121 Some textual evidence of historical women may sometimes be read as cautionary tales. Phyllis Trible recommends this attitude toward the stories of some victimized women found in the Hebrew Bible, calling them “texts of terror.” Trible’s approach “interprets stories of outrage on behalf of their female victims in order to recover a neglected history, to remember a past that the present embodies, and to pray that these terrors shall not come to pass again” (Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 3).

122 “Feminism’s History,” 10.
usable past,” which is a history that encourages women to fashion their lives based on “exemplary instances from the past, of women’s worthiness to engage in the same activities as men (wage-earning, education, citizenship, rulership).”123 Likewise, early feminist biblical scholarship, searching for a “usable” Christian and/or Jewish past, quickly latched onto and re-wrote the stories of exemplary women in the Bible; these women were certainly “good.”

But the task of finding a good woman became much more problematic when handling biblical traditions that contradicted modern feminist thinking, and in the New Testament the Pastorals’ teachings on women’s goodness ranked high on the scale of difficulty. The authority of these texts was and is frequently called upon by Christian believers of various convictions wrestling with what it means to be a “good woman” in contemporary culture. A feminist analysis of the Pastorals cannot ignore these teachings out of distaste or ignorance, but must engage in the best historical contextualization possible, in order to dialogue with those who draw upon these traditions and to offer different ways to appropriate their ideals for women.

Modern Church Texts

One feature of the Pastorals is that not only does their author seek to de-scribe and thus pre-scribe for the Christian communities of his own time the characteristics and roles of a good (Christian) woman, but his teachings have also been appealed to by later theologians and pastors for similar purposes. Two recent examples, out of the many available, will suffice to show that these texts are being used to influence Christian (and maybe large segments of the public’s) opinion and practice.124

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123 “Feminism’s History,” 18.
124 I plan to expand this section in a second draft, to demonstrate how other denominations and groups interpret the Pastorals.
In the year 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention, an association of around 42,000 Christian churches in the U.S. representing 16 million people, passed many referenda regarding appropriate gender roles for women. One declaration adopted by the organization states:

A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.125

Among the passages cited as Scriptural support for this belief are three from the Pastorals: 1 Tim 5:8-14; 2 Tim 1:3-5; and Titus 2:3-5. Another resolution passed by the SBC uses 1 Timothy 2:12-13ff in its prohibition of women serving as pastors of local churches.126

Official Roman Catholic documents on women’s roles in church and society apply a more complicated approach to Christian scriptures, one that is informed by centuries of Church law and tradition.127 However, the Roman Catholic Church ends up at approximately the same position on women’s roles as the Southern Baptists: women as women cannot serve as Catholic priests; instead they are specially suited to nurture families. Within the concise form of its catechism, the Church states: “Only a baptized man validly receives sacred ordination. The Lord Jesus chose men to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry.”128

Along with two Gospel passages (Mark 3:14-19 and Luke 6:12-16), a few verses in the

126 “Resolution on Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry,” June 1984, www.sbc.net/resolutions. See also “The Baptist Faith and Message,” VI: “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”
127 For instance, the most recent official document promulgated by the Roman Catholic church about women, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World,” written by then-Cardinal Ratzinger, expresses an understanding of “woman as person” in dense theological reflection on biblical texts. Echoing Pope John Paul II’s letter to women, 1995 (see next note), the letter emphasizes the distinct nature of “woman,” saying that she has a special “capacity for the other,” which is linked to “women’s capacity to give life” (“Letter,” III.13).
128 §1577.
Pastorals are cited to support this latter claim.¹²⁹ Then, in 1995, the late John Paul II wrote a papal letter to women, where he exalts “service” as the special “genius of women.” Drawing on the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus, he says: “Through obedience to the word of God, she accepted her lofty yet not easy vocation as wife and mother in the family of Nazareth. Putting herself at God’s service, she also put herself at the service of others: a service of love.”¹³⁰ Yet even Mary’s obedient service does not authorize her to take on the role of ordained priest of the church, a role reserved to men as “clearly attested to by the Gospel and by the church’s constant tradition.”¹³¹

In these documents, the Southern Baptist and Roman Catholic churches carry on the tradition of the Pastorals in the by now time-honored search for the “good woman.” They handle the canonical texts in a relatively uncritical fashion, that is, by lifting the specific instructions regarding women from the Pastorals without considering the letters’ historical context. Their unwritten assumptions appear to be: (1) that these ancient rhetorical texts can be interpreted without taking account of their specialized purposes; (2) that their literary form, style, and vocabulary can be easily understood apart from some knowledge of classical

¹²⁹ This is partly an argument from silence, since the passages cited (1 Tim 3:1-13; 2 Tim 1:6) instruct on the selection of men to fill the roles of elders and deacons in the church, but do not explicitly deny the positions to women. In fact, there is an interpretive difficulty with 1 Tim 3:11 which seems to be inserted into the discussion of male deacons. This verse states: “Women likewise ought to be dignified, not slanderers, temperate [in the use of alcoholic drinks], faithful in all things” (Γυναίκας ὡσάμετρας, σεμνάς, μὴ διαβόλους, νησφαλίους, πιστάς ἐν πάσιν.) The question is whether these women are wives of deacons or deacons themselves.

¹³⁰ John Paul II views such women’s service as occurring specifically in the family: “Progress usually tends to be measured according to the criteria of science and technology. Nor from this point of view has the contribution of women been negligible. Even so, this is not the only measure of progress, nor in fact is it the principal one. Much more important is the social and ethical dimension, which deals with human relations and spiritual values. In this area, which often develops in an inconspicuous way beginning with the daily relationships between people, especially within the family, society certainly owes much to the “genius of women. “Letter to Women,” 1995, §9.

¹³¹ §11. In this letter, the Pope ignores the findings of Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1975, which investigated scriptural evidence on the question: can women be priests? Their conclusion answered the question with two further questions: “The masculine character of the hierarchical order which has structured the church since its beginning thus seems attested to by scripture in an undeniable way. Must we conclude that this rule must be valid forever in the church? . . . What is the normative value which should be accorded to the practice of the Christian communities of the first centuries?” IV.1.
philosophical conventions; and, perhaps most amazingly, (3) that the socio-historical situations of then and now are basically comparable.\(^\text{132}\) And, therefore, most importantly, what makes for a “good woman” in the NT letters makes for a “good woman” in later Christian declarations. By means of the historical fact of “good women” in early Christian communities, the Pastorals are utilized to provide proof-texts for Christian women’s character, appearance, and conduct in any time or place.

Summary

Such modern use of these ancient biblical texts illustrates again one unusual aspect of academic biblical studies when compared to other kinds of historical-literary studies: rather than being relegated to the distant past, the literature being examined is still considered authoritative scripture by contemporary Jewish and Christian congregations. It is often lamented by scholars that one of the unfinished tasks of historical-criticism of the Bible is to work out (and then to communicate in understandable language) how its findings contest, change, complicate, and/or correlate with the beliefs of present-day religious adherents.

The challenge for feminist biblical scholars may be particularly acute. Because the biblical texts emerged from patriarchal societies (from across the Mediterranean world), they all reflect, to varying degrees, a heightened valuation of males and masculine power. Of course, all males are not considered “better than” all females, and there are more subtle variations of hierarchical status related to noble-birth, education, wealth, and ethnicity even in antiquity. Nevertheless, biblical texts like the Pastorals remain products and reproductions of a patriarchal system, and they continue to carry the stamp of divine authority into the

\(^{132}\) I am aware that there are some biblical scholars (and scholarship) behind these succinct institutional statements, but that is not much in evidence in the tenets presented to and used by most laypeople, especially when they are accessed on the Southern Baptist Convention website.
modern era, even though their patriarchal ideology has become objectionable to some for a variety of social, political, and philosophical reasons. Such a complicated history between the scriptures and society indicates some of the real and persistent importance of biblical scholarship in general.

The Pastorals’ instructions for women—their ancient search to find and form good Christian women—play a considerable role in the modern cultural debate about the moral behavior of women. This cultural debate turns into an interpretive debate in the academy, between traditional historical-critical and feminist biblical scholars, and among those feminists as well. While the debate has some influence on the reading strategies of these scholars, it also affects the interpretations of the Pastorals made by Christians in parishes and denominations. Under these circumstances, how indeed can a good woman be found, and for whom, and for what purposes?

Feminists sometimes react ambivalently to the instructions for women in the Pastoral Letters, being torn between the historical interest in uncovering women within early Christianity, and then not feeling particularly satisfied with the fully hierarchical social system that is decreed by these letters. I suggest that better and more detailed historical contextualization of the Pastorals will offer some solutions to this “feminist dilemma” which I share. To that end, my dissertation examines the texts ascribed to Pythagorean women which are exceptionally appropriate literary-historical comparanda for the Pastorals.
Attachment #1

Authors and Titles of Texts by Pythagorean Women
And Characterizations of their Topics

These three discourse-style texts are found in Stobaeus’ anthology (dated 6th century CE):

Periktione, Concerning the harmonious woman
Periktione, Concerning wisdom
Phintys, Concerning a woman’s moderation

These two letters are found together in twenty-two renaissance manuscripts, and always in conjunction with the next set of three letters by Theano. Melissa’s letter and part of Theano’s letter to Euboule are also extant in a 3rd century papyrus document, provenance unknown.

Melissa, Letter to Kleara, advice to a bride
Myia, Letter to Phyllis, on caring for an infant

The next three letters are found together in over twenty-five Renaissance manuscripts. They appear most often with the letters by Melissa and Myia, but occasionally on their own.

Theano, Letter to Euboule, on caring for an infant
Theano, Letter to Nikostrate, dealing with an unfaithful husband
Theano, Letter to Kallisto, managing household slaves

These four letters are extant in one Renaissance manuscript.

Theano, Letter to Eurydike, dealing with an unfaithful husband
Theano, Letter to Eukleides, to a sick physician
Theano, Letter to Rhodope, about philosophical study
Theano, Letter to Timonides, to an unfaithful lover
Melissa’s Letter to Kleareta

Melissa to Kleareta [Greetings.]

It appears to me that of your own will⁠¹³³ you have most good attributes. For your earnest wishing to hear about a wife’s orderly behavior gives a good hope that you are going to grow old⁠¹³⁴ in accordance with virtue.

In fact, the temperate and married woman⁠¹³⁵ must be attached to her lawful husband, having adorned herself with a sense of modesty, and she must be dressed in clothing that is white and clean and simple, but not very expensive or excessive, for she ought to reject garments of purple cloth, and that which is shot through with purple and gold. For this stuff is useful to an extent for the hetairai in their eager pursuit of more men. But for the woman who is well pleasing to her one and only husband, her way of life/character becomes an adornment, and not her robes. For the married woman is to appear beautiful in form to her own husband, but not to the neighbors. You should have a blush on your face as a sign of modesty instead of rouge, and also you should have on goodness and best decorum and temperance instead of gold and emeralds, for the woman who strives for temperance must not be enthusiastic for the extravagance of clothing, but for the management of her household. And she should please her own husband by means of making his wishes complete, for the wishes of her husband ought to be an unwritten law for the orderly woman, toward which she must live. She must hold that, together with herself, her best and greatest orderly/disciplined behavior has been brought as her dowry-gift. For she must trust in the beauty and wealth of her “soul” rather than in [the beauty and wealth] of her appearance and possessions; for jealousy and sickness take away from the latter, but the former are at hand in good order even to death.

¹³³ or, “spontaneously,” “naturally.”
¹³⁴ lit: “turn gray.”
¹³⁵ Ἀθυρῆσαν may mean “free woman” or “married woman.”
Attachment #3

LIST OF PASSAGES IN THE PASTORALS
THAT SPECIFICALLY MENTION WOMEN
(in canonical order; my translation)

1 Timothy
2:9-11 Likewise also women by decorous bearing are to decorate themselves with shame and
moderation, not by hair-plaiting/weaving nor by gold or pearls or expensive clothing, but
what is fitting for women professing service to God, by means of good works. Let a woman
learn in silence in all submission. I do not permit a woman to teach nor to dominate a
man/husband, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not
deceived, but the woman (his wife) was thoroughly deceived in transgression. But she will be
saved through child-bearing, if they remain in faith and love and holiness with moderation.

3:2 Then it is necessary for the episkopos [usually translate “bishop”] to be
irreproachable, husband of one wife, sober, moderate, well-ordered, hospitable, apt at
teaching

3:11-12 Women likewise [to be] respectable, not slanderers, faithful in all things. Let
dacons be husbands of one wife, presiding well over children and their own household.

4:7 But stay away from the profane and old womanish myths/tales.

5:1 Do not rebuke the older men, but encourage as fathers, younger men as brothers,
5:2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters in all holiness.
5:3 Honor the widows who are really widows.
5:4 If some child or grandchild has a widow, let them learn first to show piety with
respect to their own house and to pay back in succession their parents, for this is pleasing
before God.
5:5 The real and solitary widow has hoped in God and continues at petitions and prayers
night and day,
5:6 But the spoiled/indulgent [widow] though living, has died.
5:7 and give these orders, so that they might be irreproachable.
5:8 If some one does not take thought for his own people and most of all for his own
household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
5:9 Let a widow be enrolled who is not less than 60 years old, wife of one husband,
5:10 who has given witness by good works, whether/if she reared children, if she took care
of strangers/guests, if she washed the feet of the saints, if she helped those afflicted, if she
attended to every good work.
5:11 Refuse the younger widows, for when they behave wantonly towards Christ, they
wish to marry,
5:12 obtaining judgment because they set aside their first pledge/assurance.
5:13 At the same time they learned to be idle going around from house to house, not only
idle but also tattlers and meddlesome, saying things that should not be said.
5:14 Therefore, I want younger widows to marry, to bear children, to rule over their house,
giving not one opportunity to the opponent on account of the reproach/abuse.
5:15 for already some have turned away after Satan.
5:16 If some female believer has widows, let her help them and let the assembly not be burdened, so that it might help the real widows.

2 Timothy
1:5 taking as a reminder the sincere faith in you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and in your mother Eunice, and I have been persuaded, that it also dwells in you.

3:6 For among these men are the one who penetrate into house and captivate little-women who have been heaped up with sins, who are led by various desires,
3:7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of truth.

Titus
2:3 Older women likewise [to be] reverent in demeanor, not slanderers nor having been enslaved to much wine, good teachers/teachers of good things,
2:4 so that they might instruct younger women in temperance: to be loving of husbands,
2:5 temperate, pure, working at home, good, in orderly subjection to their own husbands, so that the word of God might not be blasphemed.
Greek Text of the Letter to Titus, chapter 2


2. (1.) Σὺ δὲ λάλει ἃ πρέπει τῇ υγιαινοῦσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ. (2.) πρεσβύτας νηφαλίους εἶναι, σεμνοῦσ, σωφρόνας, υγιαινοῦτας τῇ πίστει, τῇ ἀγάπῃ, τῇ ὑπομονῇ. (3.) πρεσβυτίδας ὀσαύτως ἐν καταστήματι ἱεροπρεπεῖς, μὴ διαβόλους μηδὲ οὐνόματι δεδουλωμένας, καλοδιδασκάλους; (4.) ἵνα σωφρονίζωσιν τὰς νέας φιλάνδρους εἶναι, φιλοτέκνους, (5.) σωφρόνας, ἀγνᾶς, οἰκουργοῦσ, ἀγαθᾶς, ὑποτασσομένας τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, ἵνα μὴ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ βλασφημηται.

(6.) τοὺς νεωτέρους ὀσαύτως παρακάλεί σωφρονεῖν. (7.) περὶ πάντα σεαυτῶν παρεκμένους τύπου καλῶν ἔργων, ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ ἀφθορίαν, σεμνότητα, (8.) λόγου ὑγιῆ ἀκατάγνωστον, ἵνα ὁ ἐξ ἐναντίας ἐντραπῇ μηδὲν ἔχων λέγειν περὶ ἴμων φαύλου. (9.) δούλους ἰδίοις δεσπόταις ὑποτασσεῖσθαι ἐν πάσιν, εὐαρέστους εἶναι, μὴ ἀντιλέγοντας, (10.) μὴ νοσφιζομένους, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν εἰσποτάς ὑποτάσσεσθαι ἐν πάσιν, εὐαρέστους εἶναι, μὴ ἀντιλέγοντας, (10.) μὴ νοσφιζομένους, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν πίστιν ἐνδεικνυμένους ἁγαθήν, ἵνα τὴν διδασκαλίαν τὴν τοῦ σωτήρος ἴμων θεοῦ κοιμωσίν ἐν πάσιν. (11.) Ἐπεφάνη γὰρ ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ σωτήριος πάσιν ἀνθρώποις, (12.) παιδεύουσα ἡμᾶς ἵνα ἀρνησόμενοι τὴν ἀσέβειαν καὶ τὰς κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας σωφρόνως καὶ δικαιῶς καὶ εὐσεβῶς ζήσωμεν ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰώνι, (13.) προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτήρος ἴμων Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, (14.) ὁς ἔδωκεν ἐαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἴμων ἵνα λυτρώσηται ἴμως ἀπὸ πάσης ἀνομίας καὶ καθαρίσῃ ἐαυτῷ λαὸν περιούσιον, ζηλωτὴν καλῶν ἔργων. (15.) Ταῦτα λάλει καὶ παρακάλει καὶ ἔλεγχε μετὰ πάσης ἐπιταγῆς· μηδείς σου περιφρονεῖτα.