

**At the Margins of the History of Philosophy:  
Appeals to Reason by Sor Juana and Avellaneda**

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In this essay I focus on two prominent female thinkers from Latin American intellectual history in order to broaden the understanding of the history of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> This is not meant to detract from the field as currently understood, but simply to expand on the habitual ways through which we approach it. My starting point is unusual: it is located at least three levels removed from the conventional site of discussion, hence the image of starting from the periphery. The first peripheral level is that of looking at female rather than male authors; the second is looking at Hispanic/Latina women rather than Anglo-European women; the third is looking at women writers who were not philosophers per se. Actually, had she had the opportunity, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648/51-1695) might have been a brilliant philosopher, in addition to her other gifts as a prominent writer. It was certainly Sor Juana's vocation, as expressed in the piece we shall examine, to pursue a rigorous intellectual life. By contrast, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-73) was by choice a poet, playwright, and cultural critic. The argument she offered on behalf of women's rights and opportunities shows an *educated* though not a technical or academic use of reasoning and argumentation.

Despite the epistemic differences between them, some similarities suggest comparisons. In terms of access to higher education, both women were basically self-taught. The times and places in which they lived did not allow women access to a university environment. Each made use of whatever books she could find, whether in her family's library collection, in the convent (in Sor Juana's case), or in society at large. This led them to become acquainted with a vast amount of classical and Biblical sources, enabling them to use religious and classical allusions in their argumentation. Another important biographical feature is that, in addition to pursuing their own intellectual interests, they used the learning they acquired to support the cause of education and the pursuit of knowledge for women. Both were brilliant writers who acted on the awareness that gender should not be a barrier to a life of knowledge and that the world would be a much better place if women and girls received the best education possible.

### Preliminary Considerations

I will offer an interpretative reading of two texts: Sor Juana's *The Answer* (*La Respuesta*) and Avellaneda's "La Mujer" (Woman). *The Answer* was written in 1691 in colonial Mexico and published posthumously in Spain in 1700.<sup>2</sup> "La Mujer" was published by Avellaneda in colonial Cuba in 1860 in a journal she edited while visiting the island. Subsequently it was published in Spain in other venues as well as in Avellaneda's collected works.<sup>3</sup> In what follows I will refer to Sor Juana by the prefix "Sor" (meaning "Sister") before her first name. In the case of Avellaneda, I follow the Latin American practice of using the more distinct surname of the author if the first surname is too common. Bibliographically, she is listed under Gómez Avellaneda). I also drop the feminine pronoun "La" before Avellaneda, referring to her in a gender-neutral manner as generally done in English.

Interpreting texts from outside our own times is not an easy matter. The concepts we analyze are articulated in relation to the historical, epistemological, and political possibilities that characterize the social environment in which thinking takes place. Something similar occurs with feminism and feminist interpretations of texts: at different points in time and place there are epistemic and political conditions that either enable or disable certain perspectives and arguments. Here I acknowledge that I will offer a contemporary feminist reading of these texts. Two questions motivating my inquiry are: What concepts of reason were accessible to Sor Juana in 17<sup>th</sup> century Mexico and to Avellaneda in mid-nineteenth century Cuba and Spain in order to articulate and develop their arguments? How did each of them navigate the complex relationship between being female and framing an argument on behalf of women's right to knowledge and to equal recognition in society?

In what follows I will deal separately with each author. Rather than draw a final conclusion, I will let the admittedly rough sketches of their argumentation I have presented speak for themselves.

### The Case of Sor Juana's *The Answer*

Celebrated in her time for her poetry and other literary works, Sor Juana is best known in philosophy for *La Respuesta* (*The Answer*), an epistolary text in which she defends her God-given and natural right to exercise her intellectual capacities to the fullest, despite the social conditions limiting her on account of her gender. The original title given to this work is *Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (*The Poet's Answer to the Most Illustrious Sister Filotea de la Cruz*). However, Sor Filotea de la Cruz was not another religious sister like Sor Juana. "Filotea" (from the Greek, lover of God) was none other but Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, the bishop of Puebla, who adopted the pseudonym to reprimand Sor Juana publicly for writing on intellectual subjects.<sup>4</sup> *The Answer* contains Sor Juana's response to his reprimand. She defends herself brilliantly using all of the erudition, rhetorical, and

logical tools at her disposal. She does state, however, that this will be her single defense; if it is not accepted, she will be silent. The text survived Sor Juana's subsequent silence and reached her friends in Spain. It was published posthumously in Madrid in the third volume of her collected writings in 1700.

Of special interest in analyzing this text are the questions: What concepts of reason could Sor Juana deploy to defend herself against the suppression of her pursuit of knowledge, including the added suppression that she endured on account of being a woman? What was her view of the relation of reason to faith?

In the very first paragraph, Sor Juana invokes the name of Thomas Aquinas, the greatly respected 13<sup>th</sup> century scholastic philosopher and Catholic saint (39). Before ending this paragraph she describes herself as "a rational being" (*ente de razón*), thereby making an analogy between herself and the notable philosopher (38, 39). Juana thereby transgresses her conventionally assigned submissive role by identifying herself above all and in the first place as a rational being, fully capable of contesting the bishop's reasoning. In her argument she also sustained the claim that it was God who gave her the gift of reasoning, so she appealed to a higher cosmological order of which she and the bishop were only a part.

As to the metaphysical outlook on the mind/body question sustaining Sor Juana's position, I would reconstruct it as follows. In a famous poem Sor Juana wrote in an earlier period to her friend the Vicereine María Luisa, Marquise de la Laguna, she indicated that souls "ignore" sex.<sup>5</sup> (Here I think that if the soul, which is thought to be immaterial, can transcend sex or gender, Sor Juana would have held that so could reason, or at least the capacity to reason.) This suggests that when she states explicitly in *The Answer* that she is a rational being, she holds that at the level of a rational being there is no distinction between male and female. She takes the restrictions she endured on account of her gender very seriously, so she is fully aware that the social category of gender creates an impediment to her pursuit of knowledge unlike what happens to her male counterparts. As she sees it, then, gender denotes a social condition where the laws of social convention apply but which require modification so that women and girls can engage in their God-given rational capabilities.

Despite the invocation of St. Thomas Aquinas at the beginning of *The Answer* to Sister Filotea, from the type of reasoning pursued in *The Answer* the closest philosophical framework she seems to follow is a Jesuit reading of Aristotle that appears to have been prevalent in Mexico at the time. If this is the case, the conceptual framework informing Sor Juana is not an earlier form of Scholasticism but more likely an early modern reconfiguration of Aristotle and Aquinas by way of more recent Jesuit philosophers who were influential in Mexico in this period, such as Francisco Suárez (1548-1617) (see also Restrepo, 37, 45-47). Sor Juana cites a Mexican theologian and professor of philosophy and Holy Scripture at the University of Mexico, Juan Díaz de Arce (d. 1653), who reportedly was influenced by

Suárez. The other two relatively recent philosophers whom she cites are the German-born Athanasius Kircher (1602-80) and the Spanish Baltasar Gracián (1601-58), both Jesuits. A Stanford University website specializing in Kircher's correspondence describes him as a refugee from wartime Germany who moved to Italy and the author of over thirty books "ranging from optics to music, from Egyptology to magnetism."<sup>6</sup> Sor Juana was known to have owned several books by Kircher and in the *Answer* she makes allusions to theories of music and to the science of magnetism (59). The other contemporary Jesuit thinker whom she cites is Gracián, a moralist who is still read today for his words of guidance in view of society's conventional norms (67).

Why not Descartes, one might ask? After all, the rational view of the mind, the interest in natural science and mathematics, logic, and reasoning were all there, present in Sor Juana's essay. Here it is essential to recall that since the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Roman Catholic Church maintained an *Index of Prohibited Books* (1557-1966).<sup>7</sup> Given that Descartes' works had been placed on the *Index* it would not have been prudent for Sor Juana to cite them, even if she had known about them. Rather, Aristotle, Aquinas, and some of the more liberal Jesuits close to her time seem to provide the conceptual background for her philosophical outlook, the basic nature of which was a "Christianized Aristotelianism" (if we may borrow the characterization given by the Stanford University website to the work of Jesuits like Kircher).

In this view (at least for Sor Juana), reason and faith could be harmonized, and the natural world revealed the marvels of the divine order created by God. She defended all her secular studies on the view that they were preliminary to the study of theology, in which all learning culminated according to the views of the time. In order to avoid being targeted by the Inquisition, she made clear that (1) she was too ignorant to enter into the knowledge of theology and (2) if she made an error in a secular matter, it would be easy to correct without it touching on matters of faith and doctrine.<sup>8</sup> Insofar as she was transgressing gender standards in her quest for knowledge, she cited numerous precedents in both secular and religious history, from female philosophers such as Hypatia in ancient Greek times to religious figures like St. Catherine and St. Teresa, who were known to have been great writers.

In developing her case, Sor Juana claims that since the age of three she was an avid pursuer of learning. She states that as a young woman she would have dressed as a boy in order to attend the university, but her mother would not allow her (49). She mentions that at one point in her life she was forbidden by a religious authority to read any secular books but even so her quest for knowledge could not be stopped. She overcame that obstacle by using the natural world as an experimental field to keep her mind active. In an often cited, playfully crafted passage she writes:

Well, and what shall I tell you, my Lady (meaning the bishop), of the secrets of nature that I have learned while cooking? I observe that an egg becomes solid and cooks in butter or oil, and on the contrary that it dissolves in sugar syrup. Or again, to ensure that sugar flow freely one need only add the slightest bit of water that has held quince or some other [sour] fruit.... I shall not weary you with such inanities, which I relate simply to give you a full account of my nature, and I believe this will make you laugh. But, in truth, my Lady, what can we women know, save philosophies of the kitchen? ... I often say, when I make these little observations, ‘Had Aristotle cooked, he would have written a great deal more.’ And so to go on with the mode of my cogitations [*cogitaciones*, in the plural, notice the same root as the *cogito*]: I declare that all this is so continual in me that I have no need of books.... (75)

Here she is enjoying the narrative she constructed of herself as an unstoppable thinker.

As we reach the conclusion of *The Answer*, the specter of silence resurfaces. At the outset Juana stated, à propos of her defense, that:

I had nearly resolved to leave the matter in silence; yet although silence explains much by the emphasis of leaving all unexplained, because it is a negative thing, one must name the silence, so that what it signifies may be understood. Failing that, silence will say nothing, for that is its proper function, to say nothing. (43)

As she nears the end of her defense, she tells the bishop: “Unless your instructions intervene, I shall never in my own defense take up the pen again” (97). She signs off showing that she knows he is the putative Sor Filotea who issued the warning: “In addressing you, my sister, as a nun of the veil, I have forgotten the distance between myself and your most distinguished person, which should not occur were I to see you unveiled...” (103).

She apologizes for any unintended lack of respect and ends with a gesture of submission to his judgment. There is an element of sad resignation as we get to the end. Her fate was tragic. Juana renounced her books as well as her musical and scientific instruments, donating all her belongings to the poor. She divested herself of everything that made her stand out as one of the most creative spirits of her age. But she did not do it without leaving us this text (and all her other work of poetry and plays before that) that speaks to the courage of a woman who sought to exercise her mind to its fullest capacity at a time and place when male domination in religious and secular matters could rule supreme in the colonized world.

**Avellaneda: A Writer Claimed by Both Cuba and Spain**

If Sor Juana began her defense by transgressing all gender norms and defining herself as a rational being, Avellaneda begins at the other end, at the site of gender conventions. She also begins by appealing to the most powerful religious image of woman available in her time, Mary, the suffering mother of Jesus, at the foot of the cross. This is quite a contrast with Sor Juana, who invoked the philosopher and theologian St. Thomas Aquinas. Another important difference is that, writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a socio-cultural framework allowing Avellaneda to address the topic of “woman” in terms of a *collective* social subject deserving equal opportunities in society. This option was not available in Sor Juana’s time. Juana appealed to metaphysical equality at the level of souls or minds, but there was still a considerable gap to cross between bodies and minds, particularly the bodies and minds of women. Taking the more usual route to society’s perception of women’s identities, Avellaneda focuses not on reason but on the emotions. She develops her argument within the backdrop of Romantic Idealism, prevalent in Spain at that time. Instead of the concepts of reason and of the correspondence between the divine law and the natural law that inspired Sor Juana, Avellaneda found solace in a metaphysical outlook ordered by the affinities among the notions of the good, the true, and the beautiful. She believed in the redemptive power of love – a major Cristian theme—and she pushed this theme as far as she could in order to uphold and exalt the status of women in society and culture.

Born in the province of Camaguey, Cuba, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda was the daughter of a criolla Cuban mother and a Spanish father. Her father died when she was nine years old; subsequently her mother married another Spaniard in Cuba. In 1836 the family moved to Spain, where Avellaneda resided for most of her adult life. The exception was a period of about five years (late 1859 to 1864) spent in Cuba.<sup>9</sup> During those years, among many other literary activities, Avellaneda founded and directed *El Album cubano de lo bueno y lo bello* (The Cuban Album of the good and the beautiful), a journal dedicated to publishing primarily works by women, the first of its kind in Cuba. It is here that her important essay, “La Mujer,” appeared in four installments in 1860.

Professionally, Avellaneda was a prolific and highly recognized writer throughout her life, best known for numerous theatrical works, novels, and poetry. She received many honors both in Spain and in Cuba, but was denied admission to Spain’s Real Academia in 1854 solely on the basis of gender. Of special interest today is her early novel *Sab* (1841) where she addresses the injustice of slavery in colonial Cuba by focusing on the suffering endured by a slave of noble character. Avellaneda died in Madrid in 1852.

### “La Mujer”: A Writer’s Plea for Gender Equity

Avellaneda’s rhetorical point of departure reflects some conventional views on women’s subordination to men. However, as the essay develops she performs an axiological shift by means of which the apparent inferiority and weaknesses attributed to women are re-signified, emerging as strengths. Step by step she destabilizes women’s perceived weaknesses, displacing the masculinist gaze that subordinates women and re-creating women’s social and intellectual identities as strong cultural and moral subjects.

Avellaneda framed her argument within the general parameters of a romantic idealist Enlightenment aesthetics, which she upheld alongside the belief in a God of mercy and love. She also modified this framework to adapt it to ordinary, daily experience. In the Preface to the *Album cubano de lo bueno y lo bello* where her four-part essay “La Mujer” appeared, she appeals to ideals of beauty, love, and nobility of spirit in order to argue on behalf of women’s rights. In keeping with the romantic idealist spirit, she defines “the good” (*lo bueno*) as “everything that the moral law shows as true, just, and convenient to reason.”<sup>10</sup> She locates *lo bueno* (the good) in the moral realm governed by human liberty, by which she means the freedom to deliberate and make choices (BB 53). She then draws an analogy between the good and the beautiful, indicating that: “The *beautiful*, then, is in the intellectual [world] what the good is in the moral world: it is the harmony resulting from the observance of eternal laws” (BB 54).<sup>11</sup>

One interesting aspect of her conceptual framework is that she defines *lo malo* (the bad) as “nothing but” freedom’s resistance to the good. By this she means that “the bad” occurs insofar as human beings use their freedom to oppose the good (BB 53).<sup>12</sup> In this view, the focus is on the good unless it is shown that there is a deliberate act or intention to oppose it.

This means that rather than seeing good versus bad, or good versus evil, as structured by a binary relationship of hierarchical ordering and mutual exclusion, Avellaneda sees the bad as a type of action that fails to achieve a harmonious relationship with the good. In this view of the moral world, there is room for redemption and forgiveness especially if it is shown that the agent’s intention for his or her failing act was good, or if the agent had little or no opportunity to act otherwise. From this perspective the education of women and their abilities to excel in all areas of culture would count as a moral priority for society insofar as without it women are far more vulnerable to being abused and deprived of the means to protect their personal security and moral integrity. As she will go on to argue in her essay, limiting women’s participation in culture also hurts humanity as a whole insofar as women’s leadership, she claims, leads to a more civilized world.

### The Argument of “La Mujer”

The essay is divided topically into four parts. These cover women’s strengths considering the spheres of religion, moral courage and patriotism, public administration, and high culture (science, literature, the arts).

Strategically, the argument’s point of departure is placed at the level of commonly held social opinions. This means that even though she disagrees with and will eventually undermine the gender conventions of her time, Avellaneda follows the route of developing her argument through the Enlightenment conceptions of consensus, harmony, and rational agreement. At the outset she states that everyone agrees that women are distinguished from men on account of their superiority to men with regard to the sphere of the affects and feeling (*sentimiento*) (LM 35). In a delightful display of wit she states that she concedes “without the least repugnance” the claim that men are physically stronger by nature, to which she adds that she will not even dispute (*aún*, yet) the intellectual superiority they attribute to themselves with so little modesty (meaning, with such arrogance) (LM 35).<sup>13</sup>

Let’s assume then that the conventional arguments against women’s equality are that (1) women are weaker to men physically; (2) they are inferior intellectually, and (3) they are excessively emotional and thereby deficiently virtuous or reasonable as well as incapable of governing themselves or others. She will concede (1) completely and (2) for the time being (*aún*). She will simply focus on (3) showing how it makes no sense. The form and strategy of the argument are especially interesting because the latter revolves around turning women’s alleged weakness with regard to the affects into a major strength. This requires a holistic premise regarding the ability of the affects to open the mind both intellectually and morally to the world around us, without which the best kinds of decisions cannot be made. Her argument performs an axiological shift by overturning the mind/body dualities, hierarchies, and binarisms that affect the conventional division of gender roles with the male standing for reason, the female for emotion, and the latter thereby subordinate to the former because of the devaluation of the affects.

Now the affects or the sphere of sentiment (*sentimiento*), associated in popular culture even in our own times with the heart (*corazón*), is not necessarily a villain in romantic idealist aesthetics, but rather the contrary. Sentiment, especially in the form of empathy, is seen as allowing a special harmony or link between the good and the beautiful. In the moral sphere, for example, the affects allow us to have feelings of empathy for those who are in pain or who suffer wrong done to them. The affects also allow for a type of emotional intelligence without which a good society, she would argue, cannot function. This claim is not as farfetched as it might seem. Popular culture even in our day imagines cruelty as a form of heartlessness, a form of intellectual and not just moral blindness.



Returning to Avellaneda's essay, in the first part she asks us to witness women's suffering, thereby arousing the reader's feeling of empathy. The theme is religion. Its singular emblem is Mary at the foot of the Cross, the image of the *mater dolorosa* (LM 30). Avellaneda is taking very conventional images here: women's maternity, the pain of losing a child, the pain of the mother seeing her son's suffering, and then she links this to the redemptive suffering of Christ on the Cross. But then she starts asking unconventional questions: Where were all the Apostles (the men) except for one, she asks? Her point is to direct our attention to women's reliability and moral strength.

In Part II of the essay Avellaneda moves on to inquire whether, as she puts it, women's delicate physique becomes an insurmountable obstacle to their intellectual and moral strength. This raises the core question: What is the status of the affects with regard to moral and intellectual reasoning? Although she is not a philosopher she raises a central question for moral philosophy, one still being debated today: the role of emotions in moral reasoning. Furthermore, it is clear that the question arises for her precisely because she takes a critical gender perspective, and it is due to the latter as well that she can help craft a method that will shed light on an answer.

How does she do this? She presents a hypothesis and invites the reader to see if it can be validated by empirical observation. With regard to whether the emotions help or hinder intellectual accomplishments, Avellaneda points out that while one may often find a genius gone astray due to violent passions, it is rare to find great intellectual power in circumstances lacking "energetic sensibility" (*enérgica sensibilidad*) (LM 40).

Her claim here is that if one observes the nature of the greatest inventors and heroes one will not generally find detached and cold-hearted men but rather those moved by lively enthusiasm (LM 40). For this to happen, the role of the affects is of the utmost importance. She states that while she agrees with Pascal that great thoughts are born from the heart (*que los grandes pensamientos nacen del corazón*)<sup>14</sup> she will go further to claim that humanity's "most glorious deeds ... have always been the work of sentiment; that the strongest heroes have always been the richest hearts" (LM 40).<sup>15</sup> Notice all the superlatives and generalizations in this sentence as she takes her claim to the rhetorical level of a universal truth. Despite the rhetoric she deploys her reasoning is not altogether careless. Aware that she cannot prove this categorically she takes an empirical approach suggesting that one may observe a majority of cases where her claim holds.

As for the claim itself, she knows that she cannot hold this as true by definition or as an absolute truth. Instead, just before she makes this last claim about the most glorious deeds having always been the work of sentiment she remarks "nos asalta la idea de que ..." (the idea assaults us that ...) (LM 40). Once "assaulted" by the idea that great intellect and courage owe their strength in great part to the affects, she is able to reverse perspectives and see the sphere of the sentiments (and with it, women's domain) as the core from which the noblest activities will emanate. In other words,

methodologically, she asks the reader to shift perspectives, saying basically: Take a closer look, and if you look at this differently from the usual way and follow my suggestions, here's what you will find...." Another universe opens in the way you will see and understand women, if only we reexamine the matter using our moral imagination and a gender perspective.

Avellaneda makes clear that when she defends the vital role of the emotions in human life she is not referring to a blind exercise of emotions but rather to emotions guided by careful reasoning. When she identifies women with the domain of the sentiments, she indicates that for this correlation to work properly in practice the domain of the sentiments must be aligned in the right way with the intelligence and moral spheres. In a key feminist observation, she finds that the way women are educated emotionally or, rather, the way they fail to be educated properly in the exercise and understanding of their emotions means that women are often damaged rather than helped by being so tightly drawn to the affects (LM 40). The point is not to throw out the value of the emotions because they can lead to error; rather it is to understand their value and importance in the way they enable and sustain what is good.

What had appeared to be women's greatest weakness conventionally can now be seen as a great strength in itself as well as the source and sustainer of other strengths (LM 41). A parallel result is to release women from being trapped in a disabling, conventional notion of love that keeps them subservient to men and limits their role in society. Instead, the notion of love is re-signified to show its potential for the creation of culture and the wellbeing of humanity, giving women a central and indispensable role in this endeavor. In the rest of the essay, she seeks facts and further arguments to validate her thesis.

Avellaneda turns to many heroines from the Bible and historical narratives to show women's great moral courage. She considers the counterargument that perhaps such women were courageous due to a burst of momentary enthusiasm and that their emotions would not have been strong enough to sustain long-term activities involving such courage. With examples from history she disproves the counterargument. She gives numerous examples of women whose wise leadership whether as queens or other leaders resulted in a high quality of life for their people. She argues that women have handled the toughest jobs in public administration, including the governance of nations and peoples. Lastly she turns to women's contributions in the spheres of science, the arts, and literature. There she argues that despite the lack of opportunities women who have been able to break through the barriers placed against them have repeatedly been shown to produce impressive achievements. Her cleverness and wit shine through this last part especially when she speaks of women in literature, a condition she herself knew all too well.

Avellaneda notes that it was not just the women of ancient times that were kept out of the "temple of profound knowledge" (*templo de los conocimientos profundos*) (LM47). In her day, too, and

despite some acceptance received in the literary and fine arts, women's presence is still disputed. The cause of this, she notes, is male exclusivism (*el exclusivismo varonil*). Using her wit she pokes fun at men's "bearded academies" (*academias barbudas*), "... those illustrious corporations of lettered people whose first and most important title is to have beards" (LM 48).<sup>16</sup> Such was her "answer" to the decision of the all-male Real Academia de la Lengua Española in 1854 to bar her from membership on account of being female.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting that an essay whose initial tone was almost that of a prayer, invoking the *mater dolorosa* image of Mary at the foot of the Cross, and whose development for the most part focuses on high ranking women from history and from Biblical accounts, should lead up to a boldly argued critique of male exclusivism in modern times. She concludes the essay by referring the reader to two recent books appearing in France on the topic of the emancipation of women: "They are by themselves two irrefutable arguments in favor of the intellectual equality of both sexes" (LM 50).<sup>18</sup>

A similar judgment could be made of her essay. The argument is not simply the speculative object of a scientific or literary inquiry. The argument unites subject and object in a performative dynamic stance (See also Schutte). Written by a subject who acknowledges the emotions that sustain and invigorate her intellectual and moral reasoning, the essay is simultaneously a proof of the argument contained in it. In this essay, emotion, reason, and moral aptitude unite exceptionally to present an aesthetically inspiring and intellectually provocative defense of women's rights to equal consideration with men in all the important spheres of life and culture.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I thank the FPA and its Diversity Committee for the invitation to present this paper at the 2016 Annual Conference in Melbourne, Florida.

<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, there is an outstanding critical edition and translation of this text. It includes the text in Spanish and English, an Introduction, and extensive Annotations as well as a selection of poems by Sor Juana. I am indebted to the editors for the wealth of information on Juana's biography and on the history, rhetorical context, and scholarly aspects of this publication. See Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *The Answer/La Respuesta*, ed. and trans. Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell (New York: The Feminist Press of CUNY, 1994). References to Sor Juana's *The Answer* will be inserted parenthetically in the text. References to the editors' comments in the Introduction or Annotations will be placed in these notes.

<sup>3</sup> Here I am using Cuban publications, but the material has also been published in Spain. See Gómez de Avellaneda, "La Mujer" in *Obras [Bicentenario]: Ensayos, Artículos, Crítica Literaria e Impresiones de Viaje*, ed. Cira Romero (Playa, Matanzas, Cuba: Ediciones Matanzas, 2013) [hereafter cited as LM]. Translations of Avellaneda are my own.

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent account of the controversy between Sor Juana and the Bishop of Puebla, see Luis Fernando Restrepo, "Colonial Thought," in *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, ed. Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otávio Bueno (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell, "Introduction" in *The Answer/La Respuesta*, ed. and trans. Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell (New York: The Feminist Press of CUNY, 1994), 11.

<sup>6</sup> "Athanasius Kircher at Stanford." Kircher and Kircheriana, accessed November 1, 2017, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/kircher/cgi-bin/site>.

<sup>7</sup> "Modern History Sourcebook: Index librorum prohibitorum, 1557-1966 [Index of Prohibited Books]," Internet History Sourcebooks, Fordham University, accessed November 1, 2017. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/indexlibrorum.asp>.

<sup>8</sup> Arenal and Powell, "Introduction," 29-30.

<sup>9</sup> Avellaneda travelled to Cuba accompanying her second husband who had been assigned by the Spanish court to the tropical island due to his health. He died in Cuba in 1863.

<sup>10</sup> "[T]odo aquello que la ley moral muestra a la razón como verdadero, justo y conveniente." Gómez de Avellaneda, "Lo Bueno y lo Bello," *Obras [Bicentenario]: Ensayos, Artículos, Crítica Literaria e Impresiones de Viaje* ed. Cira Romero (Playa, Matanzas, Cuba: Ediciones Matanzas, 2013), 53 [hereafter cited as BB]. Translations from Spanish are my own.

<sup>11</sup> "*Lo bello*, pues, es en el mundo intelectual lo que *lo bueno* en el mundo moral: es la armonía que resulta de la observancia de leyes eternas" (BB 54).

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<sup>12</sup> “[N]o consistiendo lo malo sino en la resistencia que la libertad opone a aquella verdad, a aquella justicia y a aquella conveniencia” (BB 53). In Spanish *lo malo* may also mean “evil.” The soft tone of the context seems to favor “the bad.”

<sup>13</sup> “Concedemos sin la menor repugnancia que en la dualidad que constituye nuestra especie, el hombre recibió de la naturaleza la superioridad de fuerza física, y ni aún queremos disputarle la mayor potencia intelectual, que con poco modestia se adjudica” (LM 35).

<sup>14</sup> I have not been able to find the source of this reference in Pascal although some passages from the *Pensées* may have some affinity with its message. What we do know is that in her correspondence with Antonio Romero Ortiz dating approximately from the spring of 1853 Avellaneda referred to various sayings by Pascal, usually placing them within quotation marks, in the context of embellishing or expanding on matters she cared about deeply. Regarding the passage that she attributes to Pascal, unlike the others quoted in these set of letters it is not one that she places within quotes. This leaves room to speculate that while she associated the passage with Pascal, she may have been aware that she was paraphrasing it.

<sup>15</sup> “[L]os más gloriosos hechos ... de la humanidad han sido siempre obra del sentimiento; que los más fuertes héroes han sido en todo tiempo los más ricos corazones” (LM, 40).

<sup>16</sup> “[E]sas ilustres corporaciones de gentes de letras, cuyo primero y más importante título es el de *tener barbas*” (LM 48).

<sup>17</sup> No women were admitted until 1979.

<sup>18</sup> “[E]llos por sí mismos son dos argumentos irrefutables en favor de la igualdad intelectual de ambos sexos” (LM 50).

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