Mary Astell

1666–1731

Mary Astell was born in 1666 in Newcastle, England. Her upper-middle-class family possessed a comfortable income from her father's position as an official in the local coal industry. The entire family, including Mary, was staunchly Royalist and Anglican. Mary's uncle Ralph Astell, an Anglican clergyman suspended from his post for alcoholism, tutored her brother Peter, and Mary, a precocious student, was included in these lessons. Although she did not learn Latin and Greek, Mary read some classics in translation and also studied history, philosophy, mathematics, theology, and probably French.

When Mary was thirteen, her family situation suddenly changed. Her uncle and father died within a year of each other, and the family finances were found to be unsound. What little money remained was dedicated to furthering Peter's education, while Mary lived with her mother and aunt in reduced circumstances. No dowry could be provided for Mary, and she never married. Rhetoric scholar Christine Mason Sutherland has suggested that Mary, pious and learned, might have made a very successful career for herself in the Anglican Church—if only she had been male.[1] Without this recourse, Astell went to London in 1688 to try her fortunes as a writer and educator after her mother and aunt had also died.

Astell had expected help from relatives in London, but they soon abandoned her. Desperate, she appealed to the notably charitable archbishop of Canterbury, William Sancroft, and he introduced her to his well-educated and devout aristocratic female friends and to a London bookseller, Rich Wilkin, who would promote her work. She settled in Chelsea, then a suburb of London and home to several girls' schools. From the archbishop's circle, Astell gained a patron, Lady Elizabeth Hastings, and also became acquainted with other female intellectual leaders such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Lady Catherine Jones. Astell's new friends respected her learning and intelligence and encouraged her to publish her views.

Astell's first book was *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest* (1694), published anonymously but with the author's gender identified ("A Lover of her Sex"). What Astell proposed was the foundation of a women's college or, as she called it, a "Protestant Nunnery," where young women could receive a serious secular education as well as instruction in Anglican Christianity. The institution would be governed by the inmates collectively, without a supervisory hierarchy either male or female. Women might leave this institution to marry and thus benefit their families with their piety and learning, or they might stay on, helping to educate the younger women and finding charitable activities to perform for the larger community. Astell now knew firsthand how desperate the financial situation of an unemployable young woman could be without male supporters and protectors, no matter what her social class, and how empty the

[1]Christine Mason Sutherland, "Mary Astell: Reclaiming Rhetorica in the Seventeenth Century," in *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), p. 95.

lives of aristocratic women could be without intellectual pursuits to engage them, even if they faced no financial worries. Better education for women could enable them all to use their time to serve God whatever their circumstances and to support themselves through teaching if that became necessary.

Astell's book was an immediate success and had four subsequent printings by 1701. Clearly it met a felt need for new ideas concerning the education of women, since the convents where some had been educated had been disbanded long ago by Henry VIII, and the custom of providing private tutors at least for women of the upper classes had fallen out of favor with the accession of the Stuarts. Astell was not the first seventeenth-century woman to advocate improved education for women; Bathsua Makin had published *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* in 1673, but her proposal was not as extensive as Astell's and claimed only to better fit women for marriage. Astell's *Proposal* established her reputation for wisdom and eloquence well beyond her immediate circle (it is said that Samuel Richardson admired it tremendously and used its ideas in conceiving his heroine Clarissa), and it even attracted an aristocratic sponsor, probably Princess Anne, who contemplated donating £10,000 to establish the school Astell proposed. This donor was eventually discouraged by Gilbert Burnet, bishop of Salisbury, who thought that the nunnery idea sounded a bit too "popish." Even though Protestant women's institutions had been tried before, most notably at Little Giddings in the 1630s, they were always suspected of having Roman Catholic leanings, which were dangerous in a century of violent religious opinions (James II had been deposed in 1688 after he converted to Roman Catholicism).

To argue further for her proposal, in 1697 Astell published *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II, Wherein a Method Is Offer'd for the Improvement of Their Minds* (excerpted here), which detailed the curriculum for the college. Although Astell recommended that women study virtually every subject that men studied except for classical languages, she did not advocate extensive reading. She wanted her program to be within the reach of every woman—she frequently deprecated any compliments that identified her as "exceptional"—and the heart of her educational scheme was to be a method of thinking that could be applied in any area. Having developed one's rational powers, one could then read as extensively (or not) as one wished. Among the readings in French, Astell recommended René Descartes, from whom she derived her intellectual method (see below), and educational reformer and salon intellectual Madeleine de Scudéry (see p. 761). This book, too, attracted wide notice, though not a donor, even though it was dedicated to Princess Anne.

Between 1694 and 1709 Astell published nine books. Along with the two devoted to women's education, she published five on religious issues, one on politics, and her best known work after the two volumes of *Serious Proposal* - *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), which indicted abusive husbands. She became a well-known figure in the intellectual controversies of the day. In addition to defending the Anglican Church against dissenters, Astell was a political conservative who attacked philosopher John Locke's arguments that reason endows individuals with the right to overthrow tyrants (a hot issue in a century in which two English kings had been forcibly removed from the throne, and one executed). She found these argu-

ments too individualistic, devoid of the community feeling that should bind Christians together. Her proof that such thinkers would really not keep their fellow beings' best interests at heart was that they always refused, however illogically, to extend their arguments to domestic tyranny and to address the rights of women. Astell felt that the best protection for women lay in a hierarchical social order in which all relationships were infused with a spirit of Christian love.

These books won much praise for Astell, as well as a pension from Anne when she became queen. But they also made her the butt of satire from misogynists of the day, both on the stage and in print; for example, Jonathan Swift lampooned the *Serious Proposal* in *The Tatler* in 1709, supposedly depicting Astell in a ridiculous bluestocking figure, "Madonella."[2] Eventually, too, after the Hanover line took the throne upon Anne's death, Astell was in disfavor for her continued support of the Stuarts. These pressures may have contributed to her decision to publish no new works after 1709, although she did continue to bring out revised editions of earlier works.

Astell also had a new and consuming interest to draw her away from writing: In 1709 she became the headmistress of a girls' charity school in Chelsea. The charity school movement was spreading rapidly in England at this time. Supported largely by private benefactions, these schools gave poor children rudimentary literacy and numeracy, inculcated high-church Anglicanism and Tory political views, and trained children for jobs as skilled laborers or house servants. Women were especially active in the charity school movement, and Astell's school was no exception. It was supported entirely by donations from her aristocratic female friends; in fact, Astell specified in the charter of the school that it should always be directed by women. Although it had considerably more modest goals than her proposed women's college, this school educated several hundred girls before Astell retired from active teaching in 1724, and it continued in existence until 1862.

In her later years, Astell's health began to fail and she accepted the offer of a home with her friend Lady Catherine Jones. She continued to oversee the curriculum at the Chelsea school and to revise her publications. She died of breast cancer in 1731.

Although neglected in the decades immediately following her death, Astell's work has recently attracted scholarly attention, and has won for her the sobriquet of "first English feminist."[3] The title is somewhat misleading given that Astell, a political conservative, never questioned patriarchal hierarchies, whether in the Church, the state, or the family. She supported the aristocracy, from whom she benefited, and this is one of several ways in which her career parallels that of Christine de Pizan (see p. 540). Astell, however, trenchantly criticized the behavior of her contemporaries when it fell short of her Christian ideal. She also insisted that men and women were intellectually equal and were responsible only to God for how they conducted their lives. Women must, then, be as well educated as men so that they

[2]D. N. DeLuna, "Mary Astell: England's First Feminist Literary Critic," *Women's Studies* 22 (1993): p. 233.

[3]See, for example, Bridget Hill, ed., *The First English Feminist: Reflections on Marriage and Other Writings by Mary Astell* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986).

can discharge this responsibility to the fullest, albeit in more private venues than those open to men. Astell opposed women's preaching or speaking at the bar or political rostrum, but she advocated a wide sphere of action for women in education and community charitable work. She clearly presented a vision of women as a group who suffered because of their gender and who needed to band together to help each other.

Sutherland has argued that Astell was influenced by several powerful intellectual currents of her day. Perhaps the earliest influence was the so-called Cambridge Platonism, which her uncle Ralph Astell had imbibed as a student and passed on to her. This view of Christianity emphasized that humans had inborn conceptions of the true and the good that naturally attracted them to these qualities when they were encountered in the world. Additionally, innate human reason could identify and explore religious truths. But there was a point of Divine mystery past which human powers could not go. Ultimately the essential truths of religion had to be accepted on faith. Piety, therefore, could not securely survive if nourished by the individual's mental powers alone. It needed the support of religious institutions and rituals, and might wither amid the individualistic practices of the more austere Protestant sects. This may be why Astell always firmly clung to high Anglicanism.

Especially helpful to Astell were the arguments of Descartes that extensive classical learning, from which women had been largely excluded, was not necessary to a vibrant intellectual life: All people were innately capable of reason, the key mental activity (a view which had arisen earlier in the thinking of Ramus; see p. 674). Astell probably knew François Poulain de la Barre's *De l'egalité des deux sexes* (1673; English edition, *The Woman as Good as the Man*, 1677), which applied Descartes's ideas to women, but Astell added a Christian justification for women's equality and exhorted them directly to better themselves. She was also influenced by *L'Art de penser* (1662; English edition, *The Art of Thinking*, 1674), the logic text of the Port Royalists Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, and *De l'art de parler* (1675; English edition, *The Art of Speaking*, 1676), the rhetoric text of Bernard Lamy, an Oratorian monk. Themselves influenced by Ramus and Descartes, these thinkers assigned invention to the province of logic and focused rhetoric on style. Astell cites both these works in *A Serious Proposal, Part II.* She agrees with Lamy that rhetorical ability is mainly a natural endowment and that one should strive for clarity to accommodate one's audience, while also arousing their interest with a few unusual expressions. Also showing Lamy's influence is Astell's view that one needs little stylistic ornament because people are naturally attracted to truth if they can see it clearly. But Astell goes much further than Lamy in insisting that Christian piety is an aid to rhetoric because it induces the proper charitable attitude toward one's audience and also the proper virtuous behavior in the rhetor's life to inspire confidence. Here Astell seems closer to Augustine, one of Lamy's frequently cited sources, than to Lamy himself.

The theory of rhetoric that Astell developed initially shows the influence of sources that tend to restrict rhetoric's domain and to view it negatively. In *A Serious Proposal, Part II,* she devotes less than half as much space to rhetoric as she does to

nature as a key concept, a god-term

logic. She asserts that nature is the best teacher of eloquence. Rules help only a little, and only if they have been derived from nature. Although this view might seem to downplay the importance of rhetoric, it also supports the idea that women can be rhetors if, after all, the primary requirements for eloquence are innate rather than acquired via schooling, to which women may not have access.

the effects (rather than "the accuracy") of this definition of rhetoric

In Astell's scheme, invention or the "Method of Thinking" belongs to logic, not rhetoric, a diminution that can be traced back through the Port Royalists to Ramus. Astell does not discuss memory under the domain of rhetoric either. One reason might be that her sources, following Ramus, place memory, too, under logic: If one's content is logical, it will be easy to remember. Or possibly Astell is imagining that women will use rhetoric in situations where memory is not needed, either in written texts or in face-to-face conversations that do not offer the opportunity for long speeches that would need to be memorized.

Astell does give some attention to arrangement (though she does not use that term), even though Ramist rhetoricians would relegate this, too, to logic. She briefly mentions delivery, calling it "Pronunciation" and claiming that women have an advantage over men here, in that their voices are naturally more pleasing and better suited to the mostly private occasions on which Astell imagines women will speak.

Most of Astell's discussion of rhetoric is devoted to style, but this is not for her a matter of cataloging figures and tropes. First, women's language must be correct, but Astell believes that one can pick up the grammar and spelling of one's native language mostly from reading good books. Above all, one's style should be clear. Obscurity, verbosity, and pretentiousness are to be avoided; unusual words are to be used only when they aid clarity and prevent the aforementioned faults. For Astell, women's rhetoric should focus on the art of conversation, as both Sutherland and Renaissance scholar Jane Donawerth have argued. This is women's proper rhetorical sphere, different from but in no way inferior to the public sphere in which men use oratory. Astell also advances the position, unusual for her day, that a woman should write as she speaks—print does not call for an inflated style, and again, clarity should be the primary consideration. Astell argues, however, that it is appropriate to attract the audience's attention with an unusually striking expression here and there, to arouse admiration for the way the woman rhetor uses language.

how does this reflect not only her gender but the history of rhetoric (which is also itself gendered)

The guiding principle for the woman rhetor should be to accommodate her audience. Astell derives this principle from Christianity, and she argues that Christian piety actually conduces to eloquence by encouraging a proper attitude toward audiences. An idea unique to Astell is that Christianity helps extirpate vices that lead to bad style: For example, vanity or the desire to deceive can lead to an obscure or verbose style that would confuse the audience. Moreover, Christianity adjures love and charity toward one's readers or interlocutors. The rhetor should not seek to humiliate or triumph over her audience. Rather her goal should be to get them to see the truth, and Astell notes that progress to truth is often impeded for people who do not want to admit that they were wrong. Don't wring such an admission from them, she advises, or make them feel that they are submitting by agreeing with you, and you will move them to truth more quickly. Astell goes well beyond her sources in arguing

for a nondisputatious model of communication; Sutherland suggests that this model evokes the twentieth-century ethic of caring that bespeaks women's values, as feminists have argued.[4]

Ethos is a crucial consideration of this approach. Audiences must believe that the speaker has their best interests at heart. Astell suggests that the woman rhetor can best gain this favorable *ethos* by leading a life that demonstrates her sincere commitment to Christianity, advice which Astell certainly tried to follow herself. Her biographer Ruth Perry testifies that Astell's writings are filled with a genuine love of women and concern for their welfare, both in personal terms, since she was a devoted friend, and in terms of the whole sex. She helped give European women a consciousness of themselves as a distinct group, defined by gender, that needed to unite to improve their situation. In this sense, Mary Astell truly was one of the first feminists.

Selected Bibliography

Modern editions of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II* have appeared, one from the Source Book Press (1970), and another edited by Patricia Springborg (1997; our excerpt is taken from this edition). Springborg has also edited a collection of other work, *Astell: Political Writings* (1996). See also Bridget Hill's, *The First English Feminist: Reflections on Marriage and Other Writings by Mary Astell* (1986), a good collection that does not include *A Serious Proposal*.

The standard biography is Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell* (1986). Perry summarizes Astell's thinking in all her areas of interest. Margaret L. King relates her to earlier figures such as Christine de Pizan in *Women of the Renaissance* (1991). Hilda L. Smith places her in the history of feminism in *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (1982). A good short introduction that focuses on Astell's contributions to rhetoric is Christine Mason Sutherland's "Mary Astell: Reclaiming Rhetorica in the Seventeenth Century" (in *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford, 1995). Sutherland also helpfully discusses the difficulties inherent in reading Astell through a twentieth-century feminist lens in "Women in the History of Rhetoric: The Past and the Future" (in *The Changing Tradition: Women in the History of Rhetoric*, ed. Christine Mason Sutherland and Rebecca Sutcliffe, 1999).

Jane Donawerth discusses Astell's commitment to a conversational model of rhetoric and helpfully relates her to other women rhetoricians of the period, in "Conversation and the Boundaries of Public Discourse in Rhetorical Theory by Renaissance Women" (*Rhetorica* 16.2 [spring 1998]: 181–99). D. N. DeLuna locates Astell in her contemporary context of misogynist satire and the ladies' conduct books that combated it in "Mary Astell: England's First Feminist Literary Critic" (*Women's Studies* 22.2 (1993): 231–42). Christine Mason Sutherland gives more information on sources of Astell's thought in "Outside the Rhetorical Tradition: Mary Astell's Advice to Women in Seventeenth-Century England" (*Rhetorica* 9.2 [spring 1991]: 147–63). For more on Astell's political and social thought, see Ruth Perry, "Mary Astell and the Feminist Critique of Possessive Individualism" (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23.4 [1990]: 444–57).

[4]Sutherland, in *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, pp. 113–15.

this use of the word "serious"

From *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II*

The Introduction Containing a farther Perswasive to the Ladies To endeavour the Improvement of their Minds

Did the Author of the former Essay towards th' Improvement of the Ladies consult her own Reputation only, she wou'd not hazard it once more, by treating on so nice a Subject in a Curious and Censorious Age, but content herself with the favourable reception which the good natur'd part of the World were pleased to afford to her first Essay.[1] It is not unusual she knows for Writers to mind no more than their own Credit, to be pleas'd if they can make a handsom florish, get a Name amongst the Authors, come off with but a little Censure and some Commendations. Or if there are a few generous Souls who are got above the Hope or Fear of vulgar breath, who don't much regard that Applause which is dispenc'd more commonly by Fancy or Passion than by Judgment; they rest satisfied however in a good Intention, and comfort themselves that they've endeavour'd the Reformation of the Age, let those look to't who will not follow their Advices. But give her leave to profess, that as she is very indifferent what the Critics say, if the Ladies receive any Advantage by her attempts to serve them, so it will give her the greatest uneasiness if having prov'd that they are capable of the best things, she can't perswade to a pursuit of them. It were more to her satisfaction to find her Project condemn'd as foolish and impertinent, than to find it receiv'd with some Approbation, and yet no body endeavouring to put it in Practice. Since the former wou'd only reproach her own Understanding, but the latter is a shame to Mankind, as being a plain sign that 'tho they discern and commend what is Good, they have not the Vertue and Courage to Act accordingly.

And can you Ladies deny her so cheap a Reward for all the Good will she bears you, as the Pleasure of seeing you Wise and Happy? Can you envy her the Joy of assisting you at *Your* Triumphs? for if ever she contend for Laurels it shall be only to lay them at the Ladies feet. Why won't you begin to think, and no longer dream away your Time in a wretched incogitancy?[2] Why does not a generous Emulation fire your hearts and inspire you with Noble and Becoming Resentments? The Men of Equity are so just as to confess the errors which the Proud and Inconsiderate had imbib'd to your prejudice, and that if you allow them the preference in Ingenuity, it is not because you *must* but because you *will*. Can you be in Love with servitude and folly? Can you dote on a mean, ignorant and ignoble Life? An Ingenious Woman is no Prodigy to be star'd on, for you have it in your power to inform the World, that you can every one of you be so, if you please your selves. It is not enough to wish and to would it, or t'afford a faint Encomium upon what you pretend is beyond your Power; Imitation is the heartiest Praise you can give, and is a Debt which Justice requires to be paid to every worthy Action. What Sentiments were fit to be rais'd in you to day ought to remain to morrow, and the best Commendation you can bestow on a Book is immediately to put it in Practice; otherwise you become self-condemn'd, your Judgment reproaches your Actions, and you live a contradiction to your selves. If you *approve*, Why don't you *follow?* And if you *Wish*, Why shou'd you not *Endeavour?* especially since that wou'd reduce your Wishes to Act, and make you of Well-wishers to Vertue and Good sense, become glorious Examples of them.

And pray what is't that hinders you? The singularity of the Matter? Are you afraid of being out of the ordinary way and therefore admir'd and gaz'd at? Admiration does not use to be uneasy to our Sex; a great many Vanities might be spar'd if we consulted only our own conveniency and not other peoples Eyes and Sentiments: And

Edited by Patricia Springborg.

[1]Clearly the reception of the first part of *A Serious Proposal* was not entirely good natured. [P.S.]

[2]Want of thought or reflection (*OED*). [P.S.]

why shou'd that which usually recommends a trifling Dress, deter us from a real Ornament? Is't not as fine to be first in this as well as any other Fashion? Singularity is indeed to be avoided except in matters of importance, in such a case Why shou'd not we assert our Liberty, and not suffer every Trifler to impose a Yoke of Impertinent Customs on us? She who forsakes the Path to which Reason directs is much to blame, but she shall never do any thing Praise-worthy and excellent who is not got above unjust Censures, and too steady and well resolv'd to be sham'd from her Duty by the empty Laughter of such as have nothing but airy Noise and Confidence to recommend them. Firmness and strength of Mind will carry us thro all these little persecutions, which may create us some uneasiness for a while, but will afterwards end in our Glory and Triumph.

Is it the difficulty of attaining the Bravery of the Mind, the Labour and Cost that keeps you from making a purchase of it? Certainly they who spare neither Money nor Pains t'obtain a gay outside and make a splendid appearance, who can get over so many difficulties, rack their brains, lay out their time and thoughts in contriving, stretch their Relations Purses in procuring, nay and rob the very Poor, to whom the Overplus of a full Estate, after the owners Necessaries and decent Conveniences according to her Quality are supplied, is certainly due, they who can surmount so many difficulties, cannot have the face to pretend any here. Labour is sweet when there's hope of success, and the thing labour'd after is Beautiful and Desireable: And if Wisdom be not so I know not what is; if it is not worth while to procure such a temper of mind as will make us happy in all Conditions, there's nothing worth our Thoughts and Care, 'tis best to fold our hands with *Solomon's* Sluggard and sleep away the remainder of a useless wretched Life.[3] And that success will not be wanting to our Endeavours if we heartily use them, was design'd to be evinc'd in the former Essay, and I hope I have not lost my Point, but that the Theory is sufficiently establish'd; and were there but a General Attempt, the Practice wou'd be so visible that I suppose there wou'd remain no more place to dispute it. But this is your Province Ladies: For tho I desire your improvement never so passionately, tho I shou'd have prov'd it feasible with the clearest Demonstration, and most proper for you to set about; yet if you *will* believe it impossible, and upon that or any other prejudice forbear t'attempt it, I'me like to go without my Wishes; my Arguments what ever they may be in themselves, are weak and impertinent to you, because you make them useless and defeat them of the End they aim at. But I hope better things of you; I dare say you understand your own interest too well to neglect it so grossly and have a greater share of sense, whatever some Men affirm, than to be content to be kept any longer under their Tyranny in Ignorance and Folly, since it is in your Power to regain your Freedom, if you please but t'endeavour it. I'me unwilling to believe there are any among you who are obstinately bent against what is praise-worthy in themselves, and Envy or Detract from it in others; who won't allow any of their Sex a capacity to write Sense, because they want it, or exert their Spleen where they ought to shew their Kindness or Generous Emulation; who sicken at their Neighbours Vertues, or think anothers Praises a lessening of their Character; or meanly satisfie ill-nature by a dull Malicious Jest at what deserves to be approv'd and imitated. No Ladies, Your Souls are certainly of a better Make and Nobler temper, your Industry is never exerted to pull down others but to rise above them, the only Resentment that arises at your Neighbours Commendations is a harmless blush for your own Idleness in letting them so far outstrip you, and a generous Resolution to repair your former neglects by future diligence; One need not fear offending you by commending an other Lady in your Presence, or that it shou'd be thought an affront or defect in good breeding to give them their lawful Eulogies: You have too just a Sentiment of your own Merit to envy or detract from others, for no Body's addicted to these little Vices but they who are diffident of their own

[3]Probably a reference to Solomon's exhortations against idleness in Proverbs 6: 9; "How long wilt thou sleepe, O sluggard?" [P.S.]

here is an important distinction to and in the rhetorical tradition

worth; You know very well 'tis infinitely better to *be* good than to *seem* so,[4] and that true Vertue has Beauty enough in her self t'attract our hearts and engage us in her service, tho she were neglected and despis'd by all the World. 'Tis this therefore you endeavour after, 'tis the approbation of GOD and your own Consciences you mainly esteem, which you find most ascertain'd by an humble Charity, and that you never merit Praise so much, because you never make so great a progress in what is truly praise-worthy, as when your own defects are often in your eyes t'excite you to watch against and amend them, and other peoples Vertues continually represented before you in their brightest lustre, to the end you may aspire to equal or surpass them.

I suppose then that you're fill'd with a laudable Ambition to brighten and enlarge your Souls, that the Beauty of your Bodies is but a secondary care, your Dress grows unconcerning, and your Glass is ne're consulted but in such little intervals of time as hang loose between those hours that are destin'd to nobler Employments, you now begin to throw off your old Prejudices and smile on 'em as antiquated Garbs; false Reasoning won't down with you, and glittering Nonsense tho address'd to your selves in the specious appearance of Respect and Kindness, has lost its *haut goust;*[5] Wisdom is thought as better recommendation that Wit, and Piety than a *Bon-mien;*[6] you esteem a Man only as he is an admirer of Vertue, and not barely for that he is yours; Books are now become the finest Ornaments of your Closets and Contemplation the most agreeable Entertainment of your leisure hours; your Friendships are not cemented by Intrigues nor spent in vain Diversions, but in the search of Knowledge, and acquisition of Vertuous Habits, a mutual Love to which was the Origin of 'em; nor are any Friends so acceptable as those who tell you faithfully of your faults and take the properest method to amend 'em. How much better are you entertain'd now your Conversations are pertinent and ingenious, and that Wisdom never fails to make one in your Visits? Solitude is no more insupportable; you've conquered that silly dread of being afraid to be alone, since Innocence is the safest Guard, and no Company can be so desirable as GOD's and his holy Angels conversing with an upright mind; your Devotion is a Rational service, not the repetition of a Set of good words at a certain season; you read and you delight in it, because it informs your Judgments, and furnishes Materials for your thoughts to work on; and you love your Religion and make it your Choice because you understand it; the only Conquest you now design and lay out your care to obtain is over Vice and Prophaness; you study to engage men in the love of true Piety and Goodness, and no farther to be Lovers of your selves than as you are the most amiable and illustrious examples of 'em; you find your Wit has lost nothing of its salt and agreeableness by being employ'd about its proper business, the exposing Folly; your Raillery[7] is not a whit less pleasant for being more Charitable, and you can render Vice as ridiculous as you please, without exposing those unhappy Persons who're guilty of it; your Humour abates not of its innocent gaity now that it is more upon the Guard, for you know very well that true Joy is a sedate and solid thing, a tranquility of mind, not a boisterous and empty flash: Instead of Creditors your doors are fill'd with indigent Petitioners who don't so often go without your Bounty as the other us'd to do without their just demands; nor are you unjust to some under colour of being Charitable to others, and when you give Liberally, give no more than what is lawfully your own. You disdain the base ungenerous Practice of pretending Kindness where you really mean none; and of making a poor Country Lady less instructed in the formalities of the Town than your selves, pay sufficiently for your seeming Civility and kind Entertainment by becoming the Subject of your mirth and diversion as soon as she is gone; but one may now pretty securely relie on your Sincerity, for

[4]Astell appeals to the Socratic dictum, "Be what you wish to appear." [P.S.]

[5]A 17th-century form of *bon gout*, "high flavour" (*OED*). [P.S.]

[6]"*Mien*," the English poetic form of French "*mine*," expression, aspect of countenance, look, appearance (*OED*), so "good appearance." [P.S.]

[7]Mockery. [P.S.]

when this lower sort of Treachery is abhorr'd, there can certainly be no place for that more abominable one of betraying and seducing unwary Innocence. I do not question Ladies but that this is the Practice of the greatest number of you, and would be of all the rest were it not for some little discouragments they meet with, which really are not so great as their own modesty and diffidence of themselves represent 'em. They think they've been bred up in Idleness and Impertinence, and study will be irksome to them, who have never employ'd their mind to any good purpose, and now when they wou'd they want the method of doing it; they know not how to look into their Souls, or if they do, they find so many disorders to be rectified, so many wants to be supplied, that frighted with the difficulty of the work they lay aside the thoughts of undertaking it. They have been barbarously us'd, their Education and greatest Concerns neglected, and Guardians were busied in managing their Fortunes and regulating their Mien; who so their Purse was full and their outside plausible[8] matter'd not much the poverty and narrowness of their minds, have taught them perhaps to repeat their Catechism and a few good Sentences, to read a Chapter and *say* their Prayers, tho perhaps with as little Understanding as a Parrot, and fancied that this was Charm enough to secure them against the temptations of the present world and to waft them to a better; and so thro want of use and by misapplying their Thoughts to trifles and impertinences, they've perhaps almost lost those excellent Capacities which probably were afforded them by nature for the highest things. For such as these I've a world to Kindness and Compassion, I regret their misfortune as much as they can themselves, and suppose they're willing to repair it and very desirous to inform themselves were't not for the shame of confessing their ignorance. But let me intreat them to consider that there's no Ignorance so shameful, no Folly so absurd as that which refuses Instruction, be it upon what account it may. All good Persons will pity not upbraid[9] their former unhappiness, as not being their own but other Peoples fault; whereas they themselves are responsible if they continue it, since that's an Evidence that they are silly and despicable, not because they *cou'd* not, but because they *wou'd* not be better Informed. But where is the shame of being taught? for who is there that does not need it? Alas, Human Knowledge is at best defective, and always progressive, so that she who knows the most has only this advantage, that she has made a little more speed than her Neighbours. And what's the Natural Inference from hence? Not to give out, but to double our diligence; perhaps we may outstrip 'em, as the Penitent often does him who needs no Repentance. The worst that can be is the perishing in a glorious attempt, and tho we shou'd happen to prove successless, 'tis yet worth our while to've had such a noble design. But there's no fear of ill success if we are not wanting to our selves, an honest and laborious mind may perform all things. Indeed an affected Ignorance, a humorous delicacy and niceness which will not speculate a notion for fear of spoiling a look, nor think a serious thought lest she shou'd damp the gaity of her humour; she who is so top full of her outward excellencies, so careful that every look, every motion, every thing about her shou'd appear in Form, as she employs her Thoughts to a very pitiful use, so is she almost past hopes of recovery, at least so long as she continues this humour, and does not grow a little less concern'd for her Body that she may attend her Mind. Our directions are thrown away upon such a temper, 'tis to no purpose to harp to an Ass, or to chant forth our Charms in the Ears of a deaf Adder;[10] but I hope there are none so utterly lost in folly and impertinence: If there are, we can only afford them our Pity for our Advice will do no good.

As for those who are desirous to improve and only want to be assisted and put into the best method of doing it, somewhat was attempted in order to do them that service in the former Essay, in which they may please to remember that hav-

[8]Deserving of applause or approval (obsolete) (*OED*). Astell invariably uses the word in this sense. [P.S.]

[9]Allege as a ground for censure (rare); reproach (*OED*). [P.S.]

[10]Possibly a reference to Psalm 58: 4–5, which exclaims of the wicked that "Their poison is like the poyson of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her eare: which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." [P.S.]

is it bad that I want to call this boring and call it day

ing so mov'd that groundless prejudice against an ingenious Education of the Women, which is founded upon supposition of the impossibility or uselessness of it, and having assign'd the reasons why they are so little improv'd, since they are so capable of improvement, and since tis so necessary that others as well as themselves shou'd endeavour it; which reasons are chiefly Ill-nurture, Custom, loss of time, the want of Retirement, or of knowing how to use it, so that by the disuse of our Faculties we seem to have lost them if we ever had any are sunk into an Animal life wholly taken up with sensible objects; either have no Ideas of the most necessary things or very *false* ones; and run into all those mischiefs which are the natural Consequences of such mismanagements; we then proceeded to propose a Remedy for these Evils, which we affirm'd cou'd hardly be rectified but by erecting a Seminary where Ladies might be duly Educated, and we hope our Proposition was such that all impartial Readers are convinc'd it wou'd answer the Design, that is, tend very much to the real advantage and improvement of the Ladies. In order to which it was in general propos'd to acquaint them with Judicious Authors, give them opportunity of Retirement and Recollection and put them in a way of Ingenious Conversation, whereby they might enlarge their prospect, rectify their false Ideas, form in their Minds adequate conceptions of the End and Dignity of their Natures, not only have the Name and common Principles of Religion floating in their Heads and sometimes running out at their Mouths, but understand the design and meaning of it, and have a just apprehension, a lively sentiment of its Beauties and Excellencies; know wherein the Nature of a true Christian consists; and not only feel Passions, but be able to direct and regulate their Motions; have a true Notion of the Nothingness of Material things and of the reality and substantialness of immaterial, and consequently contemn this present World as it deserves, fixing all their Hopes upon and exerting all their Endeavours to obtain the Glories of the next. But because this was only propos'd in general, and the particular method of effecting it left to the Discretion of those who shou'd Govern and Manage the Seminary, without which we are still of Opinion that the Interest of the Ladies can't be duly serv'd [yet][11] in the mean time till that can be erected and that nothing in our power may be wanting to do them service, we shall attempt to lay down in this second part some more minute Directions, and such as we hope if attended to may be of use to them. . . .

the need for a program of action in order for education to happen

CHAPTER III

[IV. A Natural Logic]

. . . Now what can be more provoking than the Idea we have of a Designing Person? of one who thinks his own Intellectuals so strong and ours so weak, that he can make us swallow any thing, and lead us where he pleases? such an one seems to have an Intention to reduce us to the vilest Slavery,[12] the Captivation of our Understandings, which we justly reckon to be the highest Insolence. And since every one puts in for a share of Sense, and thinks he has no reason to complain of the distribution of it, whoever supposes that another has an over-weaning Opinion of his own, must needs think that he undervalues his Neighbours Understanding, and will certainly repay him in his own Coin, and deny him those advantages he seems to arrogate.[13]

The most we can say for our selves when the weakness of our Arguments comes to be discover'd, is that we were mistaken thro Rashness or Ignorance, which tho more pardonable than the former, are no recommending Qualities. If we argue falsly and know not that we do so, we shall be more pittied than when we do, but either way disappointed. And if we have added Rash Censures of those who are not of our Mind, Pride or

[11] "Yet" should be deleted according to Errata list (1697 edn), p. 298. [P.S.]

[12] Astell introduces the rhetoric of slavery, for which *Reflections upon Marriage* (1700) and the 1706 Preface are so famous. [P.S.]

[13] Astell's argument against Locke as an opportunist takes a new twist. Locke, assistant to the Earl of Shaftesbury in the 1670' and '80's, during the period of his commercial involvement in the slave-owning American colonies, had argued strongly against slavery in the second of the *Two Treatises of Government*, bk 2, §149; (Laslett edn, 1988, p. 367). But Astell convicts him of impugning the capacity of human understanding in the *Essay*, in order to enslave people to his opinions. [P.S.]

Boy, for something with no supposed inventional capacity you all sure are very afraid of it | nailed it!

sense loses much of its efficacy by being ill express'd, and an ill stile is nothing else but the neglect of some of these, or over doing others of 'em.

Obscurity, one of the greatest faults in Writing, does commonly proceed from a want of Meditation, for when we pretend to teach others what we do not understand our selves, no wonder that we do it at a sorry rate. Tis true, Obscurity is sometimes design'd, to conceal an erroneous opinion which an Author dares not openly own, or which if it be discover'd he has a mind to evade. And sometimes even an honest and good Writer who studies to avoid may insensibly fall into it, by reason that his Ideas being become familiar to himself by frequent Meditation, a long train of 'em are readily excited in his mind, by a word or two which he's us'd to annex to them; but it is not so with his Readers who are perhaps strangers to his Meditations, and yet ought to have the very same Idea rais'd in theirs that was in the Authors mind, or else they cannot understand him. If therefore we desire to be intelligible to every body, our Expressions must be more plain and explicit than they needed to be if we writ only for our selves, or for those to whom frequent Discourse has made our Ideas familiar.

Not that it is necessary to express at length all the Process our Mind goes thro in resolving a Question, this wou'd spin out our Discourse to an unprofitable tediousness, the Operations of the Mind being much more speedy than those of the Tongue or Pen. But we shou'd fold up our Thoughts so closely and neatly, expressing them in such signficant tho few words, as that the Readers Mind may easily open and enlarge them. And if this can be done with facility we are Perspicuous[18] as well as Strong, if with difficulty or not at all, we're then perplext and Obscure Writers.

Scarce any thing conduces more to Clearness, the great Beauty of writing, than Exactness of Method; nor perhaps to Persuasion, for by putting every thing in its proper place with due Order and Connexion, the Readers Mind is gently led where the Writer wou'd have it. Such a Stile is Easy without Softness; Copious as that signifies the omission of nothing necessary, yet not Wordy and Tedious; nor stuft with Nauseous Repetitions, which they who do not Think before they Write and dispose their Matter duly, can scarce avoid. The Method of Thinking has been already shewn, and the same is to be observ'd in Writing, which if it be what it ought, is nothing else but the communicating to others the result of our frequent and deep Meditations, in such a manner as we judge most effectual to convince them of those Truths which we believe. Always remembring that the most natural Order is ever best that we must first prepare their minds by removing those Prejudices and Passions which are in our way, and then propose our Reasons with all the Clearness and Force, with all the Tenderness and Good-Nature we can.

And since the Clearness and Connexion as well as the Emphasis and Beauty of a Discourse depends in the great measure on a right use of the Particles, whoever wou'd Write well ought to inform themselves nicely in their Proprieties. a[n][19] And, a The, a But, a For, Etc. do very much perplex the Sense when they are misplac'd, and make the Reader take it many times quite otherwise than the Writer meant it. But this is not a place to say all that this Subject deserves; they who wou'd have much in a little, may consult an Ingenious Author who has touch'd upon't [*Lock of Hum. Und. B. 3, Ch. 7],[20] and from thence take hints to observe how these little words are applied in good Authors, and how themselves may best use them to express the several Postures of their own Minds.

In a word, I know not a more compendious way to good Speaking and Writing, than to chuse out the most excellent in either as a Model on which to form our selves. Or rather to imitate the Perfections of all, and avoid their mistakes; for few are so perfect as to be without fault, and few so bad as to have nothing good in them. A true Judgment distinguishes, and neither rejects the

the old "model" chestnut

[18]Clearly understood, lucid (*OED*). [P.S.]

[19]an, as per Errata list, p. 298. [P.S.]

[20]Astell's marginal note is to Locke's *Essay Concern Human nderstanding*, bk. 3, ch. 7, "Of Particles" edn), pp. 265–6, in which he discusses the uses of th and indefinite article , conjunctions, etc. This is cussed at length in Lamy's *Art of Speaking*, Pt 2. [P.S.]

Good for the sake of the Bad, nor admits the Bad because of the Good that is mingled with it. No sort of Style but has its excellency and is liable to defect: If care be not taken the Sublime which subdues us with Nobleness of Thought and Grandeur of Expression, will fly out of sight and by being Empty and Bombast become contemptible. The Plain and Simple will grow Dull and Object; the Severe dry and Rugged, the Florid vain and impertinent. The Strong instead of rousing the Mind will distract and intangle it by being Obscure; even the Easy and Perspicuous if it be too diffuse, or over delicate tires us instead of pleasing. Good Sense is the principal thing without which all our polishing is of little Worth, and yet if Ornament be wholly neglected very few will regard us. Studied and artificial periods[21] are not natural enough to please, they shew too much solicitude about what does not deserve it, and a loose and careless Style declares too much contempt of the Public. Neither Reason nor Wit entertain us if they are driven beyond a certain pitch, and Pleasure it self is offensive if it be not judiciously dispene'd.

Every Author almost has some beauty or blemish remarkable in his Style from whence it takes its name; and every Reader has a peculiar tast of Books as well as Meats. One wou'd have the Subject exhausted, another is not pleas'd if somewhat be not left to enlarge on in his own Meditations. This affects a Grave that a Florid Style; One is for Easiness, a second for Plainness, a third for Strength, and a fourth for Politeness. And perhaps the great secret of Writing is the mixing all these in so just a proportion that every one may tast what he likes without being disgusted by its contrary. And may find at once that by the Solidity of the Reason, the purity and propriety of Expression, and insinuating agreeableness of Address, his Understanding is Enlightned, his Affections subdued and his Will duly regulated.

This is indeed the true End of Writing, and it wou'd not be hard for every one to judge how well they had answer'd it, wou'd they but lay aside Self-Love,[22] so much of it at least, as makes them partial to their own Productions. Did we consider our own with the same Severity, or but Indifferency that we do anothers Writing, we might pass a due Censure on it, might discern what Thought was Crude or ill exprest, what Reasoning weak, what passages superfluous, where we were flat and dull, where extravagant and vain, and by Criticizing on our selves does greater kindness to the World than we can in making our Remarques on others. Nor shou'd we be at a loss, if we were Impartial, in finding out Methods to Inform, Persuade and Please; for Human Nature is for the most part much alike in all, and that which has a good effect on us, will generally speaking have the same on others. So that to guess what success we are like to have, we need only suppose our selves in the place of those we Address to, and consider how such a Discourse wou'd operate on us, if we had their Infirmities and Thoughts about us.

And if we do so I believe we shall find, there's nothing more improper than Pride and Positiveness, nor any thing more prevalent than an innocent compliance with their weakness: Such as pretends not to dictate to their Ignorance, but only to explain and illustrate what they did or might have known before if they had consider'd it, and supposes that their Minds being employ'd about some other things was the reason why they did not discern it as well as we. For Human Nature is not willing to own its Ignorance; Truth is so very attractive, there's such a natural agreement between our Minds and it, that we care not to be thought so dull as not to be able to find out by our selves such obvious matters. We shou'd therefore be careful that nothing pass from us which upbraids our Neighbours Ignorance, but study to remove't without appearing to take notice of it, and permit 'em to fancy if they please, that we believe them as Wise and Good as we endeavour to make them. By this we gain their Affections which is the hardest part of our Work, excite their Industry and infuse a new Life into all Generous Tempers, who conclude there's

[21] Concluding sentences, perorations (archaic). [P.S.]

[22] Astell compares the negative form of self-love, *amour propre*, compared with the positive, *amour-de soi*, as discussed in the multi-volume *Moral Essays* of Pierre Nicole . . . [P.S.]

"Convince but not triumph" What would Latour say?

great hopes they may with a little pains attain what others think they Know already, and are asham'd to fall short of the good Opinion we have entertain'd of 'em.

And since many wou'd yeild to the Clear Light of Truth were't not for the shame of being overcome, we shou'd Convince but not Triumph, and rather Conceal our Conquest than Publish it. We doubly oblige our Neighbours when we reduce them into the Right Way, and keep it from being taken notice of that they were once in the Wrong, which is certainly a much greater satisfaction than that blaze of Glory which is quickly out, that noise of Applause which will soon be over. For the gaining of our Neighbour, at least the having honestly endeavour'd it, and the leading our own Vanity in Triumph are Real Goods and such as we shall always have the Comfort of. It is to be wish'd that such Propositions as are not attended with the Clearest Evidence were deliver'd only by way of Enquiry, since even the brightest Truth when Dogmatically dictated is apt to offend our Readers, and make them imagine their Liberty's impos'd on, so far is Positiveness from bringing any body over to our Sentiments. And besides, we're all of us liable to mistake, and few have Humility enough to confess themselves Deceiv'd in what they have confidently asserted, but think they're obliged in Honour to maintain an Opinion they've once been Zealous for, how desirous soever they may be to get rid on't, cou'd they do it handsomely. Now a Modest way of delivering our Sentiments assists us in this, and leaves us at liberty to take either side of the Question as Reason and Riper Considerations shall determine.

In short, as Thinking conformably to the Nature of Things is True Knowledge, so th' expressing our Thoughts in such a way, as more readily, and with the greatest Clearness and Life, excites in others the very same Idea that was in us, is the best Eloquence. For if our Idea be conformable to the Nature of the thing it represents, and in Relations duly stated, this is the most effectual way both to Inform and Perswade, since Truth being always amiable, cannot fail or attracting when she's plac'd in a Right Light, and those to whom we offer her, are made Able and Willing to discern her Beauties. If therefore we thoroughly understand our Subject and are Zealously affected with it, we shall neither want suitable word to explain, nor perswasive Methods to recommend it. the interest of others

And since Piety and Vertue should in spite of the mistaken Customs of the Age be the principal Theme of a Christians Conversation; that which those who bear that Sacred Name ought always to regard some way or other, even when it might be unseasonable to speak of it directly, the way to be good Orators is to be good Christians, the Practice of Religion will both instruct us in the Theory, and most powerfully inforce what we say of it. Did we truly relish the Delights of GOD'S Service, we cou'd neither refrain from talking of the Pleasure, nor be so ill-natur'd as not to strive to Communicate it; and were we duly warm'd with a Zeal for his Glory and concern for our Neighbours Soul, no Figures of Rhetoric, no Art of Perswasion wou'd be wanting to us. We shou'd diligently watch for Opportunities, and carefully improve them, accommodating our Discourse to the Understanding and Genius of all we cou'd hope to do good to.

Besides, by being True Christians we have Really that Love for others which all who desire to perswade must pretend to; we've that *Probity* and *Prudence*, that *Civility* and *Modesty* which the Masters of this Art say a good Orator must be endow'd with; and have pluck'd up those Vicious Inclinations from whence the most distastful faults of Writing proceed. For why do we chuse to be Obscure but because we intend to Deceive, or wou'd be thought to see much farther than our Neighbours? One sort of Vanity prompts us to be Rugged and Severe, and so possess'd with the imagin'd Worth and Solidity of our Discourse, that we think it beneath us to Polish it: Another disposes us to Elaborate and Affected ways of Writing, to Pompous and improper Ornaments; and why are we tediously Copious but that we fancy every Thought of ours is extraordinary? Contradiction is indeed for our advantage as tending to make us wiser, yet our Pride makes us impatient under it, because it seems to Lessen that Esteem and Deference we desire shou'd be paid us. Whence come those sharp Reflections,[23]

[23]Ditto. [P.S.]

those imagin'd strains of Wit, not to be endur'd amongst Christians, and which serve not to Convince but to Provoke, whence come they but from Ill-nature or Revenge, from a Contempt of others and a desire to set forth our own Wit? Did we write less for our selves we should sooner gain our Readers, who are many times disgusted at a well writ Discourse if it carries a tange of Ostentation: And were our Temper as Christian as it ought to be, our Zeal wou'd be spent on the most Weighty things, not on little differences of Opinions.

I have made no distinction in what has been said between Speaking and Writing, because tho they are talents which do not always meet, yet there is no material difference between 'em. They Write best per haps who do't with the gentile and easy air of Conversation; and they Talk best who mingle Solidity of Thought with th' agreableness of a ready Wit. As for *Pronunciation,* tho it takes more with some *Auditors* many times than Good Sense, there needs little be said of it here, since Women have no business with the Pulpit, the Bar or *St. Stephens Chapel;*[24] And Nature does for the most part furnish 'em with such a Musical Tone, Perswasive Air and winning Address as renders their Discourse sufficiently agreeable in Private Conversation. And as to spelling which they're said to be defective in, if they don't believe as they're usually told, that its fit for 'em to be so, and that to write exactly is too Pedantic, they may soon correct that fault, by Pronouncing their words aright and Spelling 'em accordingly. I know this Rule won't always hold because of an Imperfection in our Language which has been oft complain'd of but is not yet amended; But in this case a little Observation or recourse to Books will assist us; and if at any time we happen to mistake by Spelling as we Pronounce, the fault will be very Venial,[25] and Custom rather to blame than we.

I've said nothing of *Grammar* tho we can't Write properly if we transgress its Rules, supposing that Custom and the reading of English Books are sufficient to teach us the Grammar of our own Tongue, If we do but in any measure attend to them. And tho Women are generally accus'd of Writing false English, if I may speak my own Experience, their Mistakes are not so common as is pretended, nor are they the only Persons guilty. What they most commonly fail in is the Particles and Connexion, and that generally thro a Briskness of temper which make them forget, or Hast which will not suffer 'em to read over again what went before. And indeed, those who Speak true Grammar unless they're very Careless cannot write false, since they need only peruse what they've Writ, and consider whether they wou'd express 'emselves thus in Conversation.[26]

But for this and for Figures Etc. and indeed for all that relates to this Subject, I must refer you to an Ingenious Treatise [**Art of speaking*][27] which handles it fully, and to which I'me oblig'd in great measure for what little skill I have. Observing only, that whatever it is we Treat of, our Stile shou'd be such as may keep our Readers Attent, and induce them to go to the End. Now Attention is usually fixt by Admiration, which is excited by somewhat uncommon either in the Thought or way of Expression. We fall asleep over an Author who tells us in an ordinary manner no more than we knew before: He who wou'd Take[28] must be Sublime in his Sense, and must cloath it after a Noble way. His Thoughts must not be superficial, such as every one may fall into at the first glance, but the very Spirits and Essence of Thinking, the sum of many hours Meditation folded up in one handsome and comprehensive Period, whose Language is Intelli-

[24]St Stephen's Chapel, built by King Stephen, became the meeting place for the House of Commons from 1547, once it had moved venues from the chapter house of Westminster Abbey (*Encyclopaedia Britannica,* vol. 28, p. 551). Astell later uses St Stephen's Chapel to refer metonymically to the Houses of Parliament in *A Fair Way with the Dissenters* (1704), p. 21. Her remarks here may echo the famous epithet of Fénelon in *De l'Education des filles* (1687), (1933 edn, p. 18), that women "ought neither to govern the state, nor make war, nor enter into the sacred ministry." [P.S.]

[25]Worthy of forgiveness, pardonable (*OED*). [P.S.]

[26]*The Ladies Library* ch. 13 on "Ignorance" (1714 edn), pp. 438–534, reproduced from Astell's text with only minor changes, concludes at this point. [P.S.]

[27]Astell's marginal note to Lamy's *The Art of Speaking* (1696), a theory of rhetoric derived, as Lamy's title states, from the *Port Royal Logic*. [P.S.]

[28]Be effective. [P.S.]

gible and Easy that the Readers may not lose the pleasure of the Kernel, by the pain they find in cracking the Shell. The most difficult Subject must be made easy by his way of handling it; tho his Matter may deserve a Meditation, yet his Expressions must be so Clear that he needs not be read twice to be Understood; *these* are to be Natural and Familiar, condiscending to the meanest Capacity, whilst his Thoughts are Great enough to entertain the highest. He Discourses always on a Useful Subject in a manner agreeable to it, and Pleases that he may Instruct; Nothing seems Studied in his whole Composition, yet every thing is Extraordinary, a Beautiful Harmony shining thro all its parts. No Sentence is Doubtful, no word Equivocal, his Arguments are Clear and his Images Lively; all the Ideas he excites in your Mind, as nearly resemble the thing they represent as Words can make them. Whilst th' exactness of his Method, and Force of his Reason Enlighten and Convince the Mind; the Vivacity of his Imagination and insinuating Address, gain the Affections and Conquer the Will. By the weight and closeness of the former you wou'd take him for an Angel, and the tender and affable sweetness of the last bespeaks him a Friend. He considers that as mere Florish and Rhetorick are good for nothing, so neither will bare Reason dull and heavily express'd perform any great matter, at least not on those who need it most, whose Palates being deprav'd their Medicines must be administred in a pleasing Vehicle. Since Mankind are averse to their Real Happiness, he does not only tell 'em their Duty but Interesses them in it; and thinking it not enough to run 'em down with the strength of Reason, he draws 'em over to a Voluntary Submission by th' attractives of his Eloquence. For he has a peculiar Turn and Air which animates every Period, so that the very same Truth which was dry and Unaffecting in a vulgar Authors words, Charms and Subdues you when cloath'd in his. He shews no more warmth than may convince his Readers that he's heartily persuaded of the Truths he offers them; and if it is necessary at any time to make use of Figures to give a more Lively Representation than plain Expressions cou'd, to describe his own Passions and excite the same in others upon a just occasion, in a word to awaken a Stupid and Clear the Mind of A Prejudic'd Reader, his Figures are duly chosen and discreetly us'd. For he knows that scarce any thing speaks a greater want of Judgment than the shewing concern where there needs none, or is a worse fault in Oratory than the polishing a Wrong or a Trifling Thought, the neatness of whose dress may strike with Admiration perhaps at first sight, but upon a review it will certainly appear Contemptible. And therefore as he does not abound in Superfluous Ornaments, so neither does he reject anything that can promote his End, which is not his own Reputation but the Glory of his GOD and his Neighbours Edification. He considers the narrowness of the Humane Mind, and says all that is necessary but no more; Understands it so well as to know what will move and Please, and has so much command of himself as to give over when he has done enough. Yet he can exhaust the most fruitful Subject without making the Reader weary; for when he enlarges it is in Things not Words, and he mingles Variety without Confusion. All the diverse excellencies of different Stiles meet in his to make up a perfect one, Strength and Ease, Solidity and Liveliness, the Sublime and the Plain. He's neither so Lofty as to fly out of Sight, nor so humble as to become Creeping and Contemptible. His Strength does not make him Rugged and Perplext nor his Smoothness Weak and Nice; tho every thing is Neat, there's not a grain of Affectation; he is gratefull to the Ear, but far remov'd from jingling Cadence. Brief when there is occasion without Dryness or Obscurity, and Florid enough to entertain th' Imagination without Distracting the Mind. There's not an Antiquated or Barbarous Word to be found in him, all is Decent, Just and Natural; no peculiar or Affected Phrases, whether Courtly or Clownish, Grave or Burlesque. For Plain and Significant Language is ever best, we have a mistaken Idea of Learning if we think to pretend to't by sending our Reader every minute to the Dictionary. Words out of the common way are only allowable when they express our Sense with greater Force than Ordinary ones cou'd, or when they are so significant as to ease us of Circumlocutions, a hard word which I cou'd not avoid without using half a dozen words.

After all, it may not be amiss to take notice

if you say so? this reminds me thinking of the Monty Python sketch about burning a witch."

that Ornaments are common to Falshood and Truth, but Clearness and strength of Reasoning are not. They who wou'd propagate Error usually disguise it in Equivocal Terms and Obscure Phrases; they strive to engage our Passions, rather than to Convince our Reason, and carry us away in the torrent of a warm Imagination. They endeavour to refute, or if they can't do that, to Ridicule the contrary opinion, and think this Sufficient to establish their own. Being much better skill'd in pulling down former Systems than in building new ones, for it requires no great skill to Object, and there are many Truths which we're very Certain of, and yet not able to answer every Impertinent Enquiry concerning 'em. Their greatest Art is in confounding things, in giving a probable Air to what they write, in pretending to Demonstration where the nature of the Truth does not require't, and in evading it where it does. An Immoral or Heretical Discourse therefore may be *Cunningly* but not *well* writ, for we can never plead for Error and Vice with true Eloquence. We may trick 'em up in a handsom Garb, adorn 'em with quaint Expressions, and give them such a plausible turn as may enable them to do very much Mischief; but this is only a fulsom Carcass, the substance and Life are not there if Vertue and Truth are wanting.

[VI. The Application and Use of our Knowlege]

For it is to little purpose to Think well and speak well, unless we *Live well*, this is our Great Affair and truest Excellency, the other are no further to be regarded than as they may assist us in this. She who does not draw this Inference from her Studies has Thought in vain, her notions are Erroneous and Mistaken. And all her Eloquence is but an empty noise, who employs it in any other design than in gaining Proselytes to Heaven. I am therefore far from designing to put Women on a vain pursuit after unnecessary and useless Learning, nor wou'd by any means persuade them to endeavour after Knowledge cou'd I be convinc'd that it is improper for 'em. Because I know every well that tho a thing be never so excellent in it self, it has but an ill grace if it be not suitable to the Person and Condition it is apply'd to. Fine Cloaths and Equipage do not become a Beggar, and a Mechanic who must work for daily bread for his Family, wou'd be wickedly Employ'd shou'd he suffer 'em to starve whilest he's solving Mathematical Problems. If therefore Women have another Duty incumbent on 'em, and such as is inconsistent with what we here advise, we do ill to take them from it: But to affirm this is to beg the Question, and is what I will never grant till it be better prov'd than as yet it appears to be. For if the Grand Business that Women as well as Men have to do in this World be to prepare for the next, ought not all their Care and Industry to Centre here? and since the matter is of Infinite Consequence is it equitable to deny 'em the use of any help? If therefore Knowledge were but any ways Instrumental, tho at the remotest distance, to the Salvation of our Souls, it were fit to apply our selves to it; and how much more when it is so necessary, that without it we can't do any thing that's Excellent, or Practise Vertue in the most Perfect manner. For unless we Understand our Duty and the Principles of Religion, we don't perform a Rational Service, it is but by Chance that we are Good or so much as Christians. We are their Property into whose hands we fall, and are led by those who with greatest Confidence impose their Opinions on us; Are as moveable as the different Circumstances that befall us; or if we happen to be Constant in our first way, it is not Reason but Obstinacy that makes us so. A great deal of Good will be omitted, and very much Evil, or Imperfection at least, stick to us, if we are not throughly acquainted with the Law of God and the secret springs and windings of our Hearts, which is scarce to be obtain'd without much Meditation and the helps that study affords.

And as when a rash young Traveller is about to run into dangerous places beset with Theives and full of Precipices,[29] if you have any hearty

[29]This complex passage alludes both to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 33), and possibly to the famous examples of the "highway-man" employed by Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1991 edn, ch. 14, p. 98) and Locke in the second *Treatise of Government* (1988 edn, §119, pp. 347–8; §176, p. 385; §182, p. 390, §186, p. 393; §202, p. 401; §207, pp. 403–4). If Astell already knows the provenance of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, which she clearly does by *Reflections upon Marriage* of 1700, then this strengthens my

concern for his safety, you'l not think it enough barely to shew him his way, or even to tell him of the Danger, especially if the entrance seems fair and inviting and treacherous Companions are upon the watch to decoy him into it: But you'l expose it in all its frightful Circumstances, endeavour to quicken his vigilance and excite his Passions, and all little enough for his Security. So it cannot be thought sufficient that Women shou'd but just know whats Commanded and what Forbid, without being inform'd of the Reasons why, since this is not like to secure them in their Duty. For we find a Natural Liberty within us which checks at an Injunction that has nothing but Authority to back it; And tho Religion is indeed supported by the Strongest Reasons, and inforc'd by the most powerful Motives, yet if we are not acquainted with 'em, tis all one to us as if it were not. But having spoke of this in the first part we shall not farther enlarge on it here.

Perhaps it will be objected that we've said *the great Truths of Religion carry a force and Evidence suited to the very Vulgar, and that GOD has not design'd All for Philosophers.*[30] And therefore if the way to the most necessary Knowledge be so very plain, and all Capacities are not fitted for higher attainments, what needs this ado about th' Improvement of our minds? the only thing necessary is to be good Christians, and we may be that without being Philosophers. Suppose we may: This will Justify such as want Time and Capacity, but can never excuse the Sloth and Stupidity of those who have both.

For unless we have very strange Notions of the Divine Wisdom we must needs allow that every one is placed in such a Station as they are fitted for. And if the necessity of the world requires that some Person shou'd Labour for others, it likewise requires that others shou'd Think for them. Our Powers and Faculties were not given us for nothing, and the only advantage one Woman has above another, is the being allotted to the more noble employment. Nobody is plac'd without their own fault, in such unhappy Circumstances as to be incapable of Salvation, but some are plac'd in such happy ones as to be capable of attaining much greater degrees of Happiness than others if they do not neglect them: And shou'd these last do no more than the very utmost that is expected from the former, I know not how they wou'd acquit themselves, or what account they cou'd give of their great Advantages. And therefore tho no body shall be condemn'd because they *Cou'd* not, yet we have reason to fear if our Case be such as that we *Might* but *Wou'd* not receive Instruction. She then who makes this Objection must not take it amiss if we Judge of her in other Cases according to what she Pleads in this: She must never set up for a Wit, or a censurer of her Neighbours, must not pretend to be a fine Lady or any thing extraordinary: but be content to herd amongst the Drudges of the World who eat Their Bread in the Sweat of their Brows, if she says she wants Leisure; or in a less acceptable rank amongst the Fools and Idiots, or but one degree above them, if she says she wants Capacity for this Employment. It is one thing to be content with Ignorance, or rather with a less degree of Knowledge, on account of the Station that GOD has plac'd us in, and Another to Chuse and Delight in't thro a Stupid Carelesness, a fear of Trouble, or an Inordinate pursuit of the Cares and Pleasures of this Mortal Life. This last only shews our Disesteem of our Souls, our Contempt of GOD and the Talents he has given us, and exposes us to all the dreadful consequences of such a neglect; to Punishments to which not only those who misemploy their Lord's Talent, but even they who don't employ it at all, are Obnoxious.

And indeed as unnecessary as it is thought for Women to have Knowledge, she who is truly good finds very great use of it, not only in the Conduct of her own Soul but in the management of her Family, in the Conversation of her Neighbours and in all the Concerns of Life. Education of Children is a most necessary Employment, perhaps the chief of those who have any; But

case for her importance as the first systematic critic of that work. . . . To the 3rd edn of *Reflections upon Marriage* in 1706, Astell had added a cautionary homily on the pitfalls of marriage, invoking the image of the highway-man to characterize the rogue government of husbands: "And if mere Power gives a Right to Rule, there can be no such thing as Usurpation; but a Highway-Man so long as he has strength to force, has also a Right to require our Obedience" (*Reflections upon Marriage* (1706 edn), p. x). [P.S.]

[30]The thesis of much of the devotional literature to which Astell refers. . . . [P.S.]

it is as Difficult as it is Excellent when well perform'd; and I question not but that the mistakes which are made in it, are a principal Cause of that Folly and Vice, which is so much complain'd of and so little mended. Now this, at least the foundation of it, on which in a great measure the success of all depends, shou'd be laid by the Mother, for Fathers find other Business, they will not be confin'd to such a laborious work, they have not such opportunities of observing a Childs Temper, nor are the greatest part of 'em like to do much good, since Precepts contradicted by Example seldom prove effectual. Neither are Strangers so proper for it, because hardly any thing besides Paternal Affection can sufficiently quicken the Care of performing, and sweeten the labour of such a task. But Tenderness alone will never discharge it well, she who wou'd do it to purpose must throughly understand Human nature, know how to manage different Tempers Prudently, be Mistress of her own, and able to bear with all the little humours and follies of Youth, neither Severity nor Lenity are to be always us'd, it wou'd ruin some to be treated in that manner which is fit for others. An Mildness makes some ungovernable and as there is a stupor in many from which nothing but Terrors can rouse them, so sharp Reproofs and Solemn Lectures serve to no purpose but to harden others, in faults from which they might be won by an agreeable Address and tender application. GOD Himself waits to be gracious and administers his Medicines in the most proper season, and Parents shou'd imitate him in this, for the want of observing it, and of accomodating their Methods to the several Dispositions they have to deal with, is perhaps the reason that many Pious Persons lose the fruit of their Pains and Care.

Nor will Knowledge lie dead upon their hands who have no Children to Instruct; the whole World is a single Lady's Family, her opportunities of doing good are not lessen'd but encreas'd by her being unconfin'd. Particular Obligations do not contract her Mind, but her Beneficence moves in the largest Sphere. And perhaps the Glory of Reforming this Prophane and Profligate Age is reserv'd for you Ladies, and that the natural and unprejudic'd Sentiments of your Minds being handsomly express'd, may carry a more strong conviction than the Elaborate Arguments of the Learned. Such as fence themselves against the Cannon they bring down, may lie open to an Ambuscade[31] from you. And whilst the strong arguings of the Schools like the Wind in the Fable,[32] seems but to harden these Sturdy Sinners, your Persuasions like the Suns mild and powerful rays, may oblige them to cast off that Cloak of Maliciousness in which they are so much intangled. And surely it is worth your while to fit your selves for this: Tis a Godlike thing to relieve even the Temporal wants of our Fellow Creatures, to keep a *Body* from perishing, but it, is much more Divine, to *Save a Soul from Death!* A Soul which in his estimate who best knows the value of it is worth more than all the World. They who are thus *wise shall shine as the brightness of the Firmament, and they who turn many to Righteousness as the Stars for ever;*[33] which is a Glory we may honestly Contend for, a Beauty we may lawfully Covet; O that we had but Ambition enough to aspire after it! O that we had but so much at least as we see daily thrown away on a poor transitory Earthly Diadem, which sets uneasy on his head who wears it, and which a longer arm may wrest from his Brows! But alas it was in our fore-fathers days that the Kingdom of Heav'n was took by violence; they thought nothing, and we think every thing too much to Do or Suffer to obtain it! Nor but that it is still as bright and glorious, as truly attractive, but we are dull and stupid we shut our eyes and won't behold its Charms. Were we but duly sensible of this we shou'd think no Posterity so desireable as the Offspring of our Minds, nor any state so great as the carrying a large Train of Followers with us to the Court of Heaven! So much Knowledge therefore as is necessary to engage and keep us firm in our Christian Course, to fit us to help others in theirs, to stir us up to pursue, and direct us in our endeavours after one of the brightest Crowns of Glory, does very well become us and more than this I do not contend for, being far

[31] Ambush (obsolete except as a formal military term) (*OED*). [P.S.]

[32] Possibly the book of Job which, extremely old and elemental, is full of wind, see esp. Job 8: 2, where the words "of thy mouth be like a strong wind." [P.S.]

[33] Daniel 12: 3. [P.S.]

from desiring that any one shou'd neglect her Necessary Affairs to amuse her self with nice Speculations. No, She who has a Family is discharging part of her Christian Calling whilst She's taking care for it's Support and Government, and wou'd be very much out, if she lock'd her self in her Study, when her Domesticks had need of her direction. But there are few of those to whom I write, who have not a good deal of time to spare, if you reckon whats thrown away on fantastic Impertinencies, and tis this I wou'd have better employ'd: Were not a Morning more advantageously spent at a Book than at a Looking Glass, and an Evening in Meditation than in Gaming? were not Pertinent and Ingenious Discourse more becoming in a visit, than Idle twattle and uncharitable Remarks? than a Nauseous repetition of a set of fine words which no body believes or cares for? And is not the fitting our selves to do Real Services to our Neighbours, a better expression of our Civility than the formal performance of a thousand ridiculous Ceremonies, which every one condemns and yet none has the Courage to break thro?

this actuall square nicely with Vico