



THE ELOQUENCE OF MARY ASTELL

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

By 1697 Mary Astell had by no means given up hope that her proposed Protestant monastery for women might eventually be founded, but she was becoming impatient. Above all, she wanted women to get started on their education without more delay.¹ In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II*, therefore, she gives instructions about how the ladies might embark upon the project of educating themselves until such time as the institution she has proposed might be established. Tracking her progress as a rhetorician, I shall discuss in this chapter questions of audience and purpose and the philosophical grounding she provides for the instruction she gives before outlining the specific suggestions she makes in this second part of her proposal.

In spite of its title, which suggests that it is a mere continuation of Part I, Part II is in fact quite dissimilar from it, constituting another stage in Astell's progress from *sermo* to *contentio*. Part I is a simple proposal for a specific course of action. It is a relatively short work, addressed to ladies (that is, upper-class women), and although it also takes into account the interests of the gentlemen who might be expected to contribute financially, the arguments are almost exclusively directed to a female audience. Again in Part II, Astell uses the genre of the letter with its direct address to the audience, but it is a work of a very different kind. In the first place, it is more than twice as long – 114 pages as opposed to 42 (in the latest edition of 1997). It is also rather more formal: it does not address the ladies in the second person, except in the introduction. The most commonly used pronoun is the inclusive “we.” But above all, the purpose is radically different. Part I falls into the category of deliberative discourse: fundamentally, it is persuasion. Part II, however, is primarily informative (though it is, of course, designed to be persuasive as well).² And although, like Part I, it is concerned with education, it includes long passages of philosophical discussion, a necessary background to the educational principles that

Astell sets forth. One might think that the intellectual level of the argument would go far beyond the capacity of barely literate women who have yet to embark seriously upon their education. Yet it is not so: Astell includes nothing that is not comprehensible to an uneducated but intelligent and interested audience.

On the question of the audience: the title implies that the audience of Part II is exclusively the ladies whose education Astell is concerned to promote. However, as with Part I, the ladies, though they constitute her primary audience, are probably not the only readers she has in mind. In fact, what we have here is at least a double audience. Besides the ladies, Astell is addressing such members of the general public as are interested in the current philosophical, theological, and political debate; for Part I of *A Serious Proposal* had created a great deal of interest, and not only among women.³ Moreover, it is probable that she is also addressing the professional philosophers of the time, in particular John Locke and his followers, with many of whose ideas she strongly disagreed. Yet although she shows in this work her awareness of the Lockean position, I cannot agree with Patricia Springborg that the work is chiefly addressed to him (Springborg, *Mary Astell* xvi). Some discussion of this issue is necessary in order to clarify the important question of Astell's primary audience in *A Serious Proposal, Part II*.

As we have seen, Astell was strongly influenced by Neoplatonism and had engaged in correspondence with one of its foremost proponents at the time. *Letters Concerning the Love of God, Between the Author of the Proposal to the Ladies and Mr John Norris* had been published in 1695, one year after the first part of *A Serious Proposal*. Later in the same year, there was published, anonymously, *A Discourse Concerning the Love of God*, which attacked Norris's philosophy, and in particular the idea that we see all things in God. Since John Locke was known to be an opponent of the philosophy of John Norris, and the ideas expressed in *A Discourse* were very similar to those of Locke, Astell assumed that it was he who had written it. In fact, though no doubt he inspired it, it was written by his close friend, Damaris Masham, daughter of Ralph Cudworth. Ironically, Astell's *A Serious Proposal* had been attributed to Masham, for its Neoplatonist position seemed appropriate in the daughter of Cudworth, and she was known to be interested in education. Even more ironically, Masham had at one time been a correspondent of John Norris, who had dedicated a work to her. Now, however, under the influence of Locke, she had moved away

from his ideas. The substance of Masham's criticism of Norris is that his conviction that we see all things in God promotes disengagement with the world, a selfish retirement into "hermitages" and a refusal to deal with the realities of human experience. A pupil, by now, of Locke, she finds the philosophy of Norris (and Astell) far too remote from human experience and the empiricism promoted by Locke.⁴ *A Discourse* attacks Norris's ideas as put forward in *Reflections upon the Conduct of Human Life* (1690), as well as his joint work with Astell, *Letters Concerning the Love of God*. Masham refers to Astell obliquely, on page 120 of *A Discourse*:

These Opinions of Mr. N. seem also to indanger the introducing, *especially among those whose Imaginations are stronger than their Reason*, a Devout way of talking; which having no sober, and intelligible sense under it, will either inevitably by degrees beget an Insensibility to Religion, in those themselves who use it, as well as others; By thus accustoming them to handle Holy things without Fear; or else will turn to as wild an Enthusiasm as any that has been yet seen; and which can End in nothing but *Monasteries and Hermitages*; with all those sottish and Wicked Superstitions which have accompanied them where-ever they have been in use. (italics added)

The possible references to Astell and her proposal are few. The focus of *A Discourse* is on the question of whether or not we see all things in God. Masham does not mention women's education as such at all. Yet Patricia Springborg believes that Masham's work so redirected Astell's focus in *A Serious Proposal, Part II* that a "revolution in her thought takes place between Part I and II" (*Mary Astell* xvi):

[A]n important and undisclosed hiatus divides the first from the second part of *A Serious Proposal*. Into that gap stepped Lady Damaris Masham. As a consequence Astell's project changed course. What began as a fairly conventional proposal for a women's academy ended as a full-scale philosophical defence of women's intellectual equality and Cartesian epistemology that would support it. (xv)

Springborg, then, believes that "[u]nder the sting of criticism Astell turned a fairly conventional proposal for the education of women

in a *Serious Proposal, Part I* into a major philosophical edifice in *Part II*. Education as such was no longer her project, but rather those deep background philosophical and theological assumptions which deny women the capacity for the improvement of the mind” (xvii). She therefore claims that Astell “disavows any intention of laying out a curriculum” (xvii) and that *A Serious Proposal, Part II* is a work of philosophy, not of education.

But if that is so, Mary Astell herself is mistaken as to the intention and nature of her work as set forth in the introduction. Far from being remote and withdrawn from the world into mystical contemplation, as Masham had charged (120), Astell was intensely practical. Her main concern in this work is to promote such education as the women may undertake in the absence of the institution she is still hoping one day to provide. She refers to the “favourable reception” of Part I, but complains that no steps have been taken to put the proposal into effect: “It were more to her [Astell’s] 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” (72). She begins by blaming the ladies for not doing anything about it: “Why won’t you begin to think?” she asks. “Why does not a generous Emulation fire your hearts and inspire you with Noble and Becoming Resentments?” (72). She concludes that the problem is not lack of motivation but uncertainty as to how to proceed: they “think that they’ve been bred up in Idleness and Impertinence, and study will be irksome to them, who have not employ’d their mind to any good purpose, and now when they wou’d they want the method of doing it” (76). She therefore proposes to give them more specific advice. Referring to Part I, she acknowledges that

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] 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. (78)

And she does in fact give the most minute directions. Springborg represents Astell as turning to the work of the Port Royal scholars

in order to refute Masham/Locke, but she does not mention that the particular works that Astell draws on (as confirmed by her own marginal notes) are works on education: *The Art of Thinking* (by Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole of Port Royal) and *The Art of Speaking* (by the Oratorian, Bernard Lamy). These two works form the basis of the quite specific instruction Astell gives in chapter 3: ninety-six pages (in the original edition) on the methods of logic and rhetoric. (The details of this rhetorical theory will be discussed in another chapter.) Ninety-six pages represent a good proportion – about one-third – of the whole work. As Springborg acknowledges, Astell was concerned to provide her academy “with sound epistemic, moral and Christian footings” (*Mary Astell* xviii). This philosophical discussion, however, does not displace the details of the educational programme: it underpins them. Such details have no force unless they are consistent with her philosophy of education. The exposition of this philosophy should therefore be seen as a necessary, if lengthy, preliminary. In “laying out the foundations of her metaphysics, ethics, philosophy of education and religion systematically” (*Mary Astell* xviii), then, she was concerned to support the “minute Directions” that she had promised in the introduction to give.

That said, there is, however, no doubt that Astell had read Masham’s *A Discourse* (even if she probably attributed it to Locke), and she responds, though only briefly, to some of the objections made in it.⁵ In the earlier part of chapter 3, and particularly at the end of chapter 4, one is aware of her taking into account this adverse criticism and the (as she sees it) too secular philosophy of Locke. In an illuminating note, Springborg shows that one particular passage, for instance, may be a direct reply to one of his tenets. I quote her note in full:

Locke in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, (1695 edn), p. 279, had argued from the impossibility of making ‘the Day-Labourers and Tradesmen, the spinsters and Dairy Maids [...] perfect Mathematicians,’ an equal impossibility of perfecting them ‘in Ethicks’ in the Neoplatonist mode (279). Astell turns the argument against him here. (*Mary Astell*, 187n.63)

What Astell says is this:

For the difference between a plow-man and a Doctor does not seem to me to consist in this, That the Business of the one is to search after Knowledge, and that the other has nothing to do with it. No, whoever has a Rational Soul ought surely to employ it about some Truth or other, to procure for it right Ideas, that its Judgments may be true tho its Knowledge be not very extensive. (*Serious Proposal, Part II* 105)

In short, as Astell says elsewhere, each person ought to exercise the mind according to its given capacity. (Incidentally, it appears here that Astell, the Tory, is more egalitarian than Locke, the Whig.) In this passage, and in others that defend piety and devotion to God (and not just to the observance of moral rules) as a necessary part of human experience and development, Astell shows her awareness of and resistance to the ideas of the Locke/Masham faction.

As for the charge of reintroducing monasteries, as Astell points out, it is quite clear from the text of *A Serious Proposal, Part I* that the life in her proposed institution is to be in most respects quite different from life in a nunnery. The women are to study in an academic programme, and they are not to take vows. The planned ministry of the ladies to the poor and the sick will, it is true, be shared by nuns, but will hardly be exclusive to them; and the daily services of morning and evening prayer were a common feature of great (secular) houses at the time. Astell is not here making excuses: she draws attention to facts as found in the text of Part I. She specifically addresses this criticism toward the end of chapter 4:

They must either be very Ignorant or very Malicious who pretend that we wou'd imitate Foreign Monasteries, or object against us the Inconveniences that they are subject to; a little attention to what they read might have convinc'd them that our Institutions [*sic*] is rather *Academical* than *Monastic*. So that it is altogether beside the purpose to say 'tis too Recluse, or prejudicial to an Active Life; 'tis as far from that as a Ladys Practising at home is from being a hindrance to her dancing at court. For an Active Life consists not barely in *Being in the World*, but in *doing much Good in it*: And therefore it is fit we Retire a little, to furnish our Understandings with useful Principles, to set our Inclinations right, and to manage our Passions, and when this is well done, but not till then, we may safely venture out. (178)

Astell does, then, take some account of the charges made against her and Norris. However, as Springborg herself acknowledges, she postpones a full response to a later work, *The Christian Religion*, published in 1705.⁶ To see *Part II* as primarily an address to Locke and/or Masham is to exaggerate her response to them beyond anything that can be supported by the text.⁷

If, as I have argued, the main (although not exclusive) address in this work is to the ladies, and its subject their self-education, how does Astell proceed? She begins, logically, with a discussion of the purpose of education, answering the implied question, “What is education for?” In Astell’s view, it is to prepare us for life, not only in this world, but also in the world to come, in eternity. Part of this preparation consists in the practice of morality, and it is Astell’s conviction that to engage in such practice demands not only obedience to rules but also an understanding of basic principles. True to her Neoplatonist beliefs, she asserts the interdependency of the understanding and the will. So crucial is this relationship between the intellectual and the moral that she makes a discussion of it the starting point of *A Serious Proposal, Part II*. The first of the four chapters of this work is entitled “Of the Mutual Relation between Ignorance and Vice, and Knowledge and Purity” (81). Astell discusses the reciprocity of the understanding and the will at the beginning of the first chapter:

What are Ignorance and Vice but Diseases of the Mind contracted in its two principal Faculties the Understanding and Will? And such too as like many Bodily distempers do mutually foment each other. Ignorance disposes to Vice, and Wickedness reciprocally keeps us Ignorant, so that we cannot be free from the one unless we cure the other. (81)

If the reason and the will are thus mutually dependent, which takes priority? Where should we begin? On the one hand, Astell asserts that knowledge is primary: “There are some degrees of Knowledge necessary before there can be any Human Acts, for till we are capable of Chusing our Own Actions and directing them by some Principle, tho we Move and Speak and do many such like things, we live not the Life of a Rational Creature but only of an Animal” (82). On the other hand, however, the will is active in the human being long before the reason has developed. It is therefore necessary to be guided by the reason of others until our own is fully

awake and functioning and ready to take charge. This is where education comes in. Astell contends that only a trained faculty of reason can be robust enough to counter the insistent claims of the passions. The traditional complaint that women are dominated by their passions, rather than by reason, Astell attributes to their lack of education. The apparent lack of the rational faculty, then, is not natural, but culturally induced: it is nurture, not nature, that makes women irrational. The training of the mind will promote the directing of the will: "Some Clearness of Head, some lower degrees of Knowledge, so much at least as will put us on endeavouring after more, is necessary to th'obtaining of purity of Heart." (84). In thus asserting the necessity of the exercise of the reason in living a good life, Astell is challenging the received opinion that women do not need to understand; they need only obey. She is in fact reiterating a conviction she stated in *A Serious Proposal, Part I* – that mere blind obedience to a set of rigid rules will not work:

[A woman] is taught the Principles and Duties of Religion, but not acquainted with the Reason and Grounds of them, being told 'tis enough for her to believe, to examine why and wherefore, belongs not to her. And therefore, though her Piety may be tall and spreading, yet because it wants foundation and Root, the first rude Temptation overthrows and blasts it, or perhaps the short liv'd Gourd decays and withers of its own accord. (*Serious Proposal I* 16)

But if understanding should guide morality, morality must purify the understanding. The relationship is reciprocal: "She then who desires a clear Head must have a pure heart" (*Serious Proposal II* 82). Unfortunately, this is not easy to achieve:

Indeed if we search to the bottom I believe we shall find, that the Corruption of the Heart contributes *more* to the Cloudiness of the Head than the Clearness of our Light does to the regularity of our Affections, and 'tis oftener seen that our vitious Inclinations keep us Ignorant, than that our Knowledge makes us Good. For it must be confess'd that Purity is not *always* the product of Knowledge; tho the Understanding be appointed by the author of Nature to direct and govern the Will, yet many times its head-strong and Rebellious Subject rushes on precipitately, not only without, but against its directions. When a

Truth comes thwart our Passions, when it dares contradict our mistaken Pleasures and supposed Interests, let the Light shine never so clear we shut our eyes against it, will not be convinc'd, not because there's any want of Evidence, but because we are *unwilling* to Obey. (84)

Reason and will must therefore work together, assisting and correcting one another. If women can receive an education, they will be in a position to practise virtue at a higher level and to a greater degree than is now possible for them. We should note here, too, that for Astell morality is not just a matter of social practice, but includes also the spiritual: a woman's first duty is to God. She is bound, therefore, to develop her spiritual capacities; such development is part of the responsibility to use all God-given talents that Astell sees as the primary business of human existence. Ultimately, the reason and the will work together to bring this about.

And afterward, when we have procur'd a competent measure of both, they mutually assist each other; the more Pure we are, the clearer will our Knowledge be, and the more we Know, the more we shall Purify. Accordingly, therefore, we shall first apply our selves to the Understanding, endeavouring to inform and put it right, and in the next place address to the Will, when we have touched upon a few Preliminaries and endeavour'd to remove some Obstructions that are prejudicial to both. (84)

Chapter 2, then, addresses these problems. Its heading reads as follows:

Containing some Preliminaries. As I. The removing of Sloth and stupid Indifferency. II. Prejudices arising. (1.) From Authority, Education and Custom. (2.) From Irregular Self-Love, and Pride. How to cure our Prejudices. Some Remarks upon Change of Opinions, Novelty and the Authority of the Church. III To arm ourselves with Courage and Patient Perseverance against (1.) The Censures of ill People, and (2.) our own Indocility. IV. To propose a Right End. (87)

She proceeds to give instructions on how to remove those moral failures that contribute to a faulty understanding and hence to deficient moral behaviour. They arise partly from societal and partly

from personal conditions. In resisting certain traditional prejudices, Astell shows her modernity, but in tracing some of the most deep-seated deficiencies to personal imperfection, she demonstrates her allegiance to traditional Christian values.

As Astell herself notes at the beginning of the heading of chapter 2, these are *preliminary* remarks: she has not yet come to the heart of her discourse. This she reaches in chapter 3: "*Concerning the Improvement of the Understanding. I Of the Capacity of the Humane Mind in General. II Of Particular Capacities. III The most common Infirmities incident to the Understanding and their Cure. IV A Natural Logic, And V. Rhetoric propos'd. VI The Application and Use of our Knowledge*" (99). Here she discusses the philosophy of mind as a necessary basis for understanding how to practise the clear thinking upon which she insists. She distinguishes among faith, science, and opinion. Particularly interesting is her discussion of the relationship between faith and science, in which she criticizes those who "wou'd make that the Object of Science which is properly the Object of Faith, the Doctrin of the Trinity" (100).⁸ Having discussed the basic principles of enquiry and argumentation, and the premises that should be drawn upon in the different categories, Astell goes on to give instructions for the practice of logic and rhetoric. I will consider these in the context of her rhetorical theory in a later chapter.

As the last part of the heading of chapter 3 indicates, all her theorizing is meant to support application. In the fourth chapter, therefore, she returns to her starting point: the relationship between the understanding (which processes knowledge) and the will (the organ of moral choice); but now she actually applies the theory and gives specific advice. Chapter 4 is headed: "*Concerning the Regulation of the Will and the Government of the Passions*" (153). This chapter is less a philosophical disquisition than an exhortation with philosophical and in particular theological underpinnings. To a twenty-first-century mind, Astell perhaps appears to have strayed off the point. In terms of her own priorities, however, she has finally reached it, for the purpose of education is to promote happiness, and true happiness can be achieved only by finding and doing the will of God. The understanding assists in the finding, the will in the doing. Consistently throughout the work, Astell has emphasized that the two are mutually dependent. She ends by reiterating that conviction.

What then is Astell's achievement in *A Serious Proposal, Part II*? How successfully does she fulfill her purpose as stated in her introduction? How well does she respond to the rhetorical situation and accommodate her various audiences? In response to these questions it must be said at once that *A Serious Proposal, Part II* is a rhetorical *tour de force*, a balancing act, for as we have seen, her primary task is complicated by a subsidiary purpose and a double, if not triple, audience. Although, as I have argued, she does indeed see her main task to be providing those "more minute Directions" to which she refers in her introduction (79), she has as a subsidiary purpose an address to the more general public and to those philosophers who fundamentally disagree with her. Furthermore, in her advice to the ladies, she must walk a rhetorical tightrope: on the one hand, to support her specific advice she must lay the philosophical foundations of her theory; on the other hand, she must bear in mind their intellectual limitations. Although much of the subject matter – philosophy – might be considered beyond the interest of uneducated ladies, the clarity of her exposition makes it comprehensible and the manifest passion that underlies the arguments makes it attractive. At no point does Astell forget that she must remain accessible to her audience of women. She repeatedly draws back from too deep an engagement in discussions that they could not follow. For example, in her advice on the control of the emotions, she specifically undertakes "not to enter too far into the Philosophy of the Passions" (161). The short account she gives is fully comprehensible to her female audience and quite sufficient to support the practical advice on the options for dealing with emotional arousal.⁹

On the other hand, insofar as she does deal with philosophical issues, she does so superbly. As Springborg says, the work is "enormously wide-ranging in its capacity to syncretise contemporary philosophical debate" (*Mary Astell* xv). It offers "one of the most brilliant disquisitions of the age on Descartes 'clear and distinct ideas'" (xviii). Furthermore, though she postpones a full refutation to her later work, she sufficiently addresses some of Locke's theories to satisfy all her audiences in this work:

Astell's critique of Locke's sensationalist psychology is devastating. She has caught him every which way. If sense experience is logically prior to reflection, as he claims, then he is in no position to claim for himself a privileged position in expound-

ing the truth. But if truth is a function of propositional logic, as he also maintains, he cannot claim the priority of sensational knowledge, which must be submitted to the criterion of reason. (Springborg, *Mary Astell* xxix)

To do all this without exceeding the capacity of her primary audience of women to follow her argument shows a truly unusual rhetorical skill.

This skill is also apparent in the tone she uses. She begins, indeed, by scolding her audience of women, trying to stir them up to start on their education: “Why won’t you begin to think, and no longer dream away your time in a wretched incogitancy?” (72). But having – she hopes – aroused them, she addresses them with gentleness and understanding, making excuses for them, reassuring them, telling them that the methods of learning are not nearly as hard as they might suppose. In chapter 2, for example, she encourages the ladies not to be too hard on themselves:

As we disregard the Censures of ill People, so are we patiently to bear with our own backwardness and indocility. There goes a good deal of Time and Pains, of Thought and Watchfulness to the rooting out of ill-habits, to the fortifying our Minds against foolish Customs, and to the making that easie and pleasant which us’d to be irksome to us. (96)

Some of her readers may despair of ever having the mental grasp to undertake intellectual improvement. If they really find themselves incapable, she reassures them that they can still “do some Good in an Active Life and Employments that depend on the Body” (III). But before they give up, she asks them to consider whether they have correctly evaluated themselves. What they most probably lack is knowledge of the subject: “The way of Considering and Meditating justly is the same on all Occasions. ’Tis true, there will be fewest Ideas arise when we wou’d Meditate on such Subjects as we’ve been least conversant about; but this is a fault which it is in our power to remedy, first by Reading or Discoursing, and then by frequent and serious Meditation” (III).

Astell shows tenderness and consideration for her readers again in dealing with the mechanics of writing, which can be very daunting to the inexperienced. Particularly engaging is her advice about

spelling: English women of the time had a reputation for being extremely poor spellers.

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 that 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, and Custom rather to blame than we. (144)

She goes on to discuss grammar, and here again she offers her female readers reassuring advice, as well as making a little jab at the men:

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. [...] [T]hose 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. (144)

If she is careful to reassure her insecure audience about their possible mistakes, she is also concerned to build up their confidence by drawing their attention to their talents. One of these is the quality of the voice: "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" (143). Since in Astell's opinion it is not appropriate for women to engage in public speaking, they do not need the harsh, more carrying qualities of the masculine voice. And in one particular respect, Astell considers women (in general) to be far superior to men – they are much more reliable as teachers of small children:

Education of Children is a most necessary Employment, perhaps the chief of those who have any; But 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 laborious work, they have not such opportunities of observing a Child's Temper, nor are the greatest part of 'em like to do much good, since Precepts contradicted by Example seldom prove effectual. (150)

In conclusion, then, Mary Astell's rhetorical achievement in *A Serious Proposal, Part II* is considerable. She selects her material with due regard to the interests and capacities of her readers; she deals sufficiently, but by no means exhaustively, with the criticism of the Locke/Masham faction; and she takes into account not only the relative ignorance but also the lack of self-confidence of those who constitute her primary audience. The whole of the second part of *A Serious Proposal* is written with clarity and passion. Skilfully negotiating the various requirements of the rhetorical situation, Astell produces a document that is still capable of instructing, delighting, and persuading even an audience of the twenty-first century.