Introduction
Mary Astell and John Norris: A Correspondence

For precisely one year, from St Matthew's Day (September 21), 1693 until St Matthew's Day, 1694, Mary Astell (1666–1731), a native of Newcastle but by then five years a resident in the Chelsea district of London, and John Norris (1656–1711), newly appointed rector of Bemerton – then, as now, a suburb of Salisbury – corresponded. At the time of her first letter, Astell was a well-read but unpublished young woman of significant perspicacity. She wrote to the already well-known philosopher and theologian Norris with a question about a thesis he had proposed in the third volume of his *Practical Discourses Upon Several Divine Subjects* (1693), namely, that since God is the efficient cause of all our pleasure, He is the only proper object of our love. Fifteen letters, ranging from 850 to more than 5000 words, passed between the two during this time, roughly one every three weeks; the exchange constitutes the text of *Letters Concerning the Love of God, Between the Author of the Proposal to the Ladies and Mr. John Norris: Wherein his late Discourse, shewing That it ought to be intire and exclusive of all other Loves, is further cleared and justified*, published in 1695 by Samuel Manship, Norris's publisher, and Richard Wilkin, who had published Astell's *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* the previous year. Manship and Wilkin offered a second edition of *Letters* in 1705, '*Corrected by the Authors, with some few Things added*', as the title-page has it. A third edition, published by Edmund Parker, appeared under the same title in 1730.[1]

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[1] In her biography of Astell, Ruth Perry writes that toward the end of her life, Astell 'arranged with William Parker, who had taken over Wilkin's stock, to republish her most popular books' (*Astell*, 315); specifically, Parker 'reissued *A Serious Proposal Parts I and II*, and a fourth edition of *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*' (532, note 2). Edmund Parker, who does not appear to share kinship with William, acquired the rights to many of Norris's works from Samuel Manship between 1713, when Manship published a sixth edition of Norris's *Practical Discourses*, and 1722, when Parker published a fifth edition of Norris's *A Practical Treatise Concerning Humility* (1707). There is no entry for William Parker in Henry Plomer's *Dictionaries of the printers and booksellers who were at work in England, Scotland and Ireland, 1557–1775*. Plomer's entry for Edmund Parker, 'a bookseller in London', notes that he 'was still in business in 1723'; in fact, he was active as late as 1730, when he issued the third edition of Norris and Astell's *Letters*.

Letters has never since been reprinted. On the surface, there is nothing in this fact of particular moment; many early-modern texts that had far more than three editions have failed to rouse sufficient interest among modern scholars to gain life in new editions, and survive only within the severely limited pale of university special-collections and the holdings of antiquarian booksellers and collectors. Norris's *Miscellanies* (1687), which reached a tenth edition in 1749, for instance, has been reprinted in its entirety only once in the past 250 years, and then only in a very limited fashion.[2] Norris was not, however, the sole author of *Letters*, and while his popular flame continues to flicker only dimly, his co-author's has veritably exploded. That *Letters* has not yet been caught up in this explosion offers perhaps our first important clue to its contents.

Recent interest in Astell has tended to revolve, naturally enough, around her status as 'the First English Feminist' or 'an Early English Feminist',[3] and this interest has led to the appearance of new or facsimile editions of all of Astell's most explicitly feminist works. In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part I* and *Part II* (1694; 1697), Astell proposes, respectively, the construction of female religious academies and the proper method by which women may educate themselves; in *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700), she offers a cunning and acerbic condemnation of the male-dominated marital assumptions and practices of the British moneyed classes. The attention paid by recent scholarship to these undoubtedly important works has had, unfortunately, the consequence of limiting our understanding of Astell's complexity as a thinker and writer.

In the first place, the totality of Astell's thought is currently represented in easily accessible texts by only a few of her primary works; it is worth noting that Astell's *Serious Proposal, Part II* never went into a second edition in its own day, but that in the past three decades it has been reprinted twice *in toto*, and excerpted once.[4] In the second place, while Astell's centrality in the canon of Western Feminism is well deserved, interest in Astell as a feminist has tended to vitiate a full understanding of her philosophical and theological inclinations. As Patricia Springborg persuasively argues, ‘relative inattention to Astell’s philosophical and theological works has meant that modern readers of her more ephemeral political pamphlets, and even the timeless *Reflections Upon Marriage*, underestimate the degree to which they were embedded in these deeper philosophical issues’ (‘Astell, Masham, and Locke’ 110).

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[2] The facsimile reprints of Norris's works, part of the *British Philosophers and Theologians of the 17th and 18th Centuries* series edited by René Wellek in the late 1970s (Garland), are no longer in print, and rival original copies of Norris's works in price; they only included roughly half of Norris's many publications. More recently, Thoemmes Press (2001) published a facsimile collection of Norris's 'Philosophical and Theological Writings' in eight volumes, with a perfunctory introduction by Richard Acworth. It contains the 'Prose Part' of *Miscellanies* in its first volume, but, oddly enough, ignores *Letters* completely.

[3] These phrases come from the titles of Perry's and Bridget Hill's respective books on Astell.

[4] Astell's *Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part I* and *Part II* (1694; 1697) were reprinted in 1970 by Source Book Press (London); all of *Part I* and excerpts from *Part II* were included in Hill's *First English Feminist*, 135–79. Our own citations are to Patricia Springborg's scholarly edition of *Part I* and *Part II*. *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700) has been reprinted and anthologized several times, most recently in Springborg's *Mary Astell: Political Writings*. Citations are from this edition.

One such oft-forgotten text is *The Christian Religion as Profess’d by a Daughter of the Church of England* (1705; 2nd ed. 1717; 3rd ed. 1730), Astell’s *magnum opus*, to borrow Springborg’s characterization of it. The significance of *Christian Religion* to Astell must indeed have been great; no other of her works approaches it in length (over 300 pages), scope (it is equal parts political manifesto, theological treatise, philosophical discourse, and personal defence), or level of detail (Astell’s meticulous marginalia, while not Joycean in intent, can be similarly overwhelming). Nor was *Christian Religion* insignificant to Astell’s age. Through it, she solidified a cornerstone of her reputation, namely, her total dissent from English empiricist, contract theorist, and perceived opponent of Christian mystery, John Locke.

In his *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), arguably the first work of historical feminism in English, George Ballard wishes Astell’s *Christian Religion* ‘was in every hand’, being himself ‘persuaded’ of its moral and educational value; and he ‘subjoin[s]’ to his own praise that of a ‘worthy friend’, who concludes that ‘the learned authoress has with great dexterity and success retorted Locke’s … whimsical idea of thinking matter’ and shown that in his *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), Locke ‘had no honest design’ and ‘instead of promoting Christianity’ tended ‘rather to undermine and subvert the true faith’ (388–89). It was largely through *Christian Religion* that Astell came to be known, to quote Samuel Maunder’s *Biographical Treasury*, ‘as one of the most strenuous impugners of the principles of Locke’ (s.v. ‘Astell’). For this reason, we have decided to reprint in this volume Astell’s ‘Appendix’ to the second edition (see Appendix Three), wherein Astell gathered together many of her criticisms of Locke scattered throughout the text of the first edition, criticisms essential for understanding not only the full range of Astell’s thought in general, but, more specifically, the full implications of her exchange with Norris.[5]

In fact, we would suggest that *Letters* led directly to Astell’s *riposte* to Locke in *Christian Religion*; one need not read *Christian Religion* to understand the argument of *Letters*, but the reverse cannot be said. Three years before Astell wrote to Norris, he had already published a critique of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), entitled *Cursory Reflections Upon a Book Call'd, 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding'* (1690), which we have reprinted in Appendix Two. As we shall see, whether or not Astell meant to throw in completely with Norris's philosophical difference from Locke during the time of their correspondence – her final missive to him suggests lingering doubts – the eventual effect of their exchange was just this choice of allegiance. The story of Astell's antipathy toward the positions of arguably the most important figure of the modern epistemological era begins with *Letters*.

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[5] Perry refers to the many unsold copies of ‘the one and only edition of *The Christian Religion*’ which remained in William Parker’s shop at his death in 1749 (*Astell* 70). One assumes she means the only edition printed by Parker – the third edition of 1730 – since Wilkin had printed both the first and second editions of it in 1705 and 1717. Parker’s third edition is merely a reissue of the second edition; however, Astell’s reorganization and revision of the second edition differentiate it in important ways from the first edition. See the editor’s note to Appendix Three.

Furthermore, it was *Letters*, along with *Serious Proposal* and *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*, that garnered particular prominence in contemporary appraisals of Astell. For example, the heroine of Samuel Richardson's masterpiece *Clarissa* (1747–48), herself a fond reader of Norris, not only complains of the unfair footing upon which women and men enter into marriage, not only wishes she could escape to a female retreat, but also maintains epistolary relationships with established divines.[6] Richardson's religious advisor William Law, the famous nonjuror and eventual Christian mystic, had his own copy of *Letters* – it can still be found in the remnants of his library, along with other Astell titles – and his writings are often remindful of Norris's and Astell's work.[7] Sarah Chapone, another of Richardson's mid-century correspondents, informed Ballard that *Letters* was 'generally considered' Astell's 'most "sublime" work', and she lent him her copy for his work on *Memoirs of Several Ladies* (Perry, *Astell* 82). Ballard's enthusiasm for *Letters* came to rival that of Chapone. In the course of his synopsis of it – longer and more thorough than his treatment of any other of Astell's works – he notes that Astell's 'letters have been much applauded for their good sense, sublime thoughts and fine language' and concludes, 'if there was nothing more remaining of this worthy gentlewoman's performances, this alone would perpetuate her memory to latest posterity' (383). Ballard appears not to have been hyperbolizing terribly much on this point, at least from his moment in history; the first work mentioned in Astell's obituary in the *Daily Journal* of May 29, 1731, is her 'Correspondence with the famous Mr. Norris of Bemerton, on the celebrated subject of the *Love of God*, [which] gain'd her no small Applause' (Perry, *Astell*, 324).

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[6] As Jocelyn Harris has noted, Clarissa, like Astell, benefited greatly from corresponding with divines in her youth (193). Much like Astell's own exchange with John Norris, Clarissa's letters, as Clarissa explains in her will, 'exhibit a correspondence that no young person of my sex need to be ashamed of' (1417). Highlighted in Anna Howe's list of her deceased friend's many accomplishments, in fact, is her relationship with Dr. Lewen, 'with whom likewise she held a correspondence by letters' (1470). Like Astell, Clarissa proves her intellectual mettle in part by holding her own in a correspondence on 'serious subjects' (1417) with a learned, respected, and (necessarily) male theologian.

[7] Law owned the second edition (1705). For an explanation of how Astell's books became part of Law's library, see below, note 18. Law stresses the essential point of *Letters* in many of his works; to take just one example, consider his formulation of Divinity in *The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration, or the New-Birth* (1759): 'For God is love, yea, all love; and so all love, that nothing but love can come from Him; and the Christian religion is nothing else but an open, full manifestation of His universal love towards all mankind' (*Mystical Writings* 15).

As Ballard's comments and Astell's obituary might suggest, the connection *Letters* established between Astell and 'the famous Mr. Norris of Bemerton' weighed heavily on her contemporary reputation – for better and, in the case of Damaris Masham, for worse. (Lady Masham, as we shall see, attacked Astell only in the course of her much more thoroughgoing attack on Norris.) Where today Norris finds himself in print again largely because of his fortuitous connection to the now famous Astell – her name heads our text, not his – 300 years ago his fame outstripped hers. Ballard, for example, found information on Astell in the entry for 'Norris' in Pierre Bayle's *Dictionary*; it is telling not only that he *had* to look there (there is no entry for Astell), but also that he *knew* to look there.[8] Anyone seeking a full understanding of the intellectual figure Astell cut among contemporaries will want to consider her relationship, and correspondence, with 'the famous Mr. Norris of Bemerton'.[9]

Finally, as much as Astell's correspondence with Norris affected her reputation, it also coloured her thought. Some modern scholars have taken a different road from Ballard, either by highlighting Astell's very few disagreements with Norris, or by underestimating Norris's importance as a thinker, or by disregarding the importance of *Letters* altogether, perhaps in order to promote their subject's intellectual independence and thus her feminism. Or perhaps it is simply embarrassing that in her exchange with Norris, Astell aligns herself so unabashedly against much that the twenty-first century values (the human form, political liberalism, religious tolerance), and that she does so by subscribing to a mystical brand of Christianity that in today's secular society seems to be intellectually or politically naïve. It is our contention, however, that Astell's thought, including her feminist thought, cannot properly be understood without studying her correspondence with Norris; thus, we can think of no better corrective to the present discourse about Astell than to make *Letters* available to a modern audience.

The three texts of this present edition were written over a twenty-five year period. When Norris wrote his *Cursory Reflections* in 1690, he was a newly married man five years removed from matriculation at Oxford's All Souls College, while Astell was a young, single woman of gentrified but bankrupt stock, just beginning to gain her feet in London. William of Orange and his wife Mary had only recently been handed the monarchal reins wrested from James II by Parliament and its 'Glorious Revolution', while James's son ('The Old Pretender'), Newton's description of gravity, and Locke's *Essay* were, respectively, two years, three years, and five months old. When Astell finished the page proofs for the second edition of *Christian Religion* in 1717, she was an aging but established Chelsea maiden on the declining side of her popular apogee; Norris was four years dead, survived by a wife and three children. Nonjurors (those who refused to swear loyalty to William and Mary on the grounds that James II was the rightful King), whose hopes had been raised by the accession to the throne of James's daughter Anne in 1694, had subsequently seen them dashed when, despite eighteen pregnancies, she died without an heir in 1714, thus ensuring the Hanoverian succession *via* the Act of Settlement (1701); the Old Pretender's invasion attempt of 1715 began and ended in Scotland. Locke was dead (1704), but his and Newton's respective stars had already begun their steady, if contested, ascents.[10]

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[8] Ballard, 387, includes in his sketch of Astell a letter he found printed in Bayle's entry for Norris, in which Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester (1662–1732), describes Astell's acute intellect and admits, 'I dread to engage her'.

[9] Richardson uses this phrase in a letter to Elizabeth Carter (Pennington 1:101–2). As Derek Taylor, 'Clarissa Harlowe', notes, the author had included Carter's 'Ode to Wisdom' in the text of *Clarissa* on the mistaken assumption that she was related to Norris.

These years saw the genesis of an historical and intellectual milieu that, over the course of the eighteenth century, would produce apparently dichotomous fruits in abundance – the Third Earl of Shaftesbury and Bernard Mandeville, Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift, George Berkeley and David Hume, Samuel Clarke and John Wesley, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Hannah More, Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft. And yet, one need only tug a bit for the dichotomies to begin to unravel. Clarke may have been a staunch proponent for rational theology, but it was Wesley who admired Locke.[11] Berkeley, the immaterialist, fumed at being taken for a philosophical cousin to Norris and Malebranche; Hume, who could never be taken for a theocentrist, recognized similarities between his philosophical system and that of Malebranche.[12] More was a sexual and religious conservative, but

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[10] We say 'respective stars' in light of B.W. Young's persuasive dismantling of the traditional union of these two figures in his *Religion and Enlightenment* (1998; rpt. 2001). Young explains that 'it is a Gallocentric ideal of Enlightenment which has tended to enshrine the error of Newtonian cosmology and Lockean epistemology as paving the way to a high Enlightenment'. In Young's view, 'any challenge to this compelling evolution involves dissolving the Locke-Newton hybrid into its component parts within a primarily English setting', where 'it will become apparent that, far from being a rationalistic monopoly, religious debate in eighteenth-century England contained significant mystical, visionary, and essentially biblical elements' (114, 121).

[11] For Clarke's Newtonian stance against proponents of Locke, see Young, esp. chap. 3 – 'Metaphysics before Physics: The Cambridge Critique of Newtonian Religious Apologetic' (83–119). For a comprehensive account of Wesley's relationship to Locke, see chaps. 1–3 of Richard Brantley, *Locke*.

[12] See the chapters on 'Berkeley' (205–53) and 'Hume' (254–90) in the fine study by Charles J. McCracken, *Malebranche*.

Montagu was Astell's close friend.[13] That those erstwhile transparent concepts, 'enlightenment' and 'counterenlightenment', have come to function so inefficiently is largely due to the fact that so many of the individuals and movements they purport to describe belong, like Norris and Astell – or like Locke and Newton, for that matter – to both traditions. Dichotomies are often useful to theorists and scholars alike, but they are always simplifications; real life – and we include theology and philosophy among the realities of life – is always more complicated. The Astell-Norris exchange offers a window of insight into how complicated life had become for thinking women and men at the end of the seventeenth century.

Astell and Norris before *Letters*

That Astell ever attained a mode of existence capable of sustaining such relatively leisured activities as letter-writing is partly a matter of good fortune, partly a marker of her distinction from other English women of her time. Astell came to Chelsea from Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1688, having exhausted her family's limited resources and her city's limited opportunities.[14] Her father was dead, her mother in debt, and she herself (for reasons certainly financial and possibly personal) an unlikely marriage prospect.[15] Had she been a man, of course, her options would have been more numerous; through the support of his extended family in Newcastle, Astell's younger brother Peter became a successful lawyer and eventually paid off his mother's debts (Perry, *Astell*, 59–60). Though it is unclear just what Astell meant to do in London, the awkwardness of her social position is painfully evident. As Perry puts it, Astell was 'too genteel and intellectually sophisticated to want to enter demeaning service as a governess or a teacher in a boarding school'; but if 'she hoped to be taken into some great family as a companion', she was sorely disappointed (64). Her blood was too blue to allow for gainful, if menial, employment, not blue enough to ensure the connections needed to dispose of such practical concerns. Nor could Astell simply turn novelist or playwright; the Delarivière Manleys and Eliza Haywoods of the early eighteenth century had yet to appear on London's literary landscape, and though Aphra Behn had managed since the 1670s to support herself (at least in part) through her plays and prose pieces, she was overwhelmingly the exception to the rule.[16] Astell detested most modern fiction, at any rate, and one can only with enormous difficulty conceive of the future author of works like *Letters* and *Christian Religion* penning a compelling, or even an interesting, work of imagination.[17]

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[13] For Astell's friendship with Montagu, see Perry, *Astell*, esp. 269–77.

[14] This section relies heavily on Perry's biography of Astell; the quoted material only begins to cover our debt to Perry's pioneering work.

[15] As Hill has pointed out, Astell was joined by 'many of the outstanding women of the period' in remaining unmarried, including Elizabeth Elstob, Jane Barker, Celia Fiennes, Anne Killigrew, and Bathsua Makin (14). Ballard claims that he was 'informed' that one motive for Astell's *Reflections on Marriage* 'was her disappointment in a marriage contract with an eminent clergyman' (385). While there is no supporting evidence for this claim, neither is there any evidence to prove that he 'invented' this 'unhappy love affair' (Hill 36).

Astell's one advantage was her refined intellect, and it served her well. Like many women of her age, one assumes, Astell had a naturally sharp mind; unlike the vast majority of such women, however, Astell's intellectual bent had been encouraged, fed, and developed during her childhood and adolescence. Perry tells us that 'according to tradition', Astell owed her education to an uncle named Ralph, himself a minor curate and very minor poet (46). Evidence attesting to the veracity of this tradition can be found in the Northampton Records Office's collection of books that once constituted William Law's Kings Cliffe Library; several of these books formerly belonged to Astell, and one contains a childhood inscription reading 'Mary Astell her Book given her by her Uncle Mr. Ralph Astell 1677'.[18] Astell appears to have read widely under her uncle's tutelage. The poetry of Spenser, Milton, and Cowley inspired Astell's own attempts at versification, while the theology and philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists – whether read directly or imbibed from her uncle – established early on Astell's lifelong adherence to Christian Platonism, as well as a working knowledge of Descartes and a healthy disdain for Hobbes.

When her few family connections ran out in London, Astell's intelligence remained, and it was this idiosyncrasy, along with her nonjurist sympathies, that must have recommended her to William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, to whom she sent a 'handstitched booklet of her own poems' and a plea for assistance in 1689 (Perry 68).[19] Sancroft's ties to the 'conservative publishing establishment',

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[16] Melinda Zook reminds us that although Behn remained for 'an unusually long time … outside the patronage system', in 1679, she began 'openly soliciting literary patronage for her plays' (79).

[17] Like many contemporary proponents of female education, Astell regarded 'Plays and Romances' as having no pedagogical value, wondering aloud in *Serious Proposal, Part I*, 'How can she be furnished with any solid Principles whose very Instructors are Froth and emptiness?' (13). For Astell's grave attitudes and limited preferences regarding literature, see Perry, *Astell*, 73.

[18] Law founded the library in 1752 in order to lend 'Books of Piety … to any Persons of this or ye Neighbouring Towns' (From Law's inscription above the main doorway; see Walker 170). Law was at this time living a life of retired devotion and charity with two women, Hester Gibbon (the historian's aunt) and Elizabeth Hutcheson, close friend to Astell and the executrix of her will (Perry, *Astell*, 519, note 27). Astell would surely have enjoyed the thought that her personal library had been put to benevolent use by the trio, whose 'acts of charity', according to residents of Kings Cliffe, 'were boundless' (Walker 170). Several boys' and girls' schools, as well as tenements for 'old and poor widows', were also established by them (170).

[19] Perry reprints this manuscript in *Astell*, 400–454. Sancroft was already a leading nonjuror when Astell wrote to him; he would lose his position as archbishop one year later

Perry suggests, would explain how Astell came to know Richard Wilkin, a Tory publisher with whom Astell shared 'a whole range of social attitudes and religious and political opinions' (68). Starting with *Serious Proposal, Part I* in 1694, Wilkin served as Astell's publisher for thirty-six years, while his shop provided her a base of operations for her intellectual pursuits.[20] It was intellectual connections such as these, then, not connections of blood, class, or marriage, that allowed Astell to secure relative financial stability through the exertion of her primary talents – thinking and writing. It is thus no surprise that throughout her writings, Astell insists that a woman's mind is her best route to self-worth and independence.[21]

Indeed, in *Serious Proposal, Part I*, published one year before *Letters*, Astell outlines her ideas for alleviating precisely those distresses she herself had felt so keenly after her father's death, and for providing other women with her own saving grace, an education. Women, she begins, are accused of being ignorant, imprudent, and materialistic. And, in a shrewd rhetorical move, Astell largely agrees; the women of her age care far more about their 'corruptible bod[ies]' than their 'immortal soul[s]', more about 'a sounding Title or a great Estate' than 'the highest Mansions in the Court of Heav'n' (5, 7). Why, she wonders, would any woman invest more energy pondering 'what Dress becomes [her] best' than developing her mind, 'that particle of Divinity within' her (6)? For 'Men of more Wit than Wisdom', the answer lies in women's inherent condition: women are by nature foolish, weak in mind as in body (9); it was appropriate and telling that Eve had fallen first. But, Astell notes, history and Scripture provide ample counterexamples to this tendentious line of argumentation (9–10). Furthermore, if Reason is, as Descartes and a host of English and continental followers had maintained, immaterial, then physiology is irrelevant to the function of the intellect. 'GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls' (22), and there is thus no clear and distinct reason to suppose physiology determined intelligence.[22] If, then, women inherited the same portion of reason as did men, what

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as a result of his refusal to endorse William as the rightful king. His intransigence in defending the prerogatives of the Church of England would have endeared him to the likeminded Astell; as Perry puts it, 'Archbishop Sancroft's behavior was exemplary in the ways that mattered to Astell' (66).

[20] Wilkin was, according to Perry, 'the perfect bookseller for Mary Astell'; he 'was a monarchist, a conservative man, and highly respected for his strict probity and polite bearing' (*Astell* 68), and his shop would become 'a kind of headquarters for the High Church faction' (212).

[21] Astell was being supported, no doubt, in part by her wealthy friends, but it was Astell's keen intellect that attracted them to her in the first place. See Perry's chapter, 'The Company She Keeps', for a description of Astell's many patrons, most of them women (*Astell* 232–82). For example, Perry points to drafts to Astell from Lady Betty (Elizabeth) Hastings's bank account, the last one for £55 the year before Astell's death (263).

[22] Several scholars have examined this important aspect of Astell's thought. See, e.g., Perry, 'Radical Doubt'; Cynthia Bryson, 'Mary Astell'; and Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples*, esp. chap. 4, '"A *New Path to Honor*": English Feminists, 1690–1710' (115–50).

caused their perceived intellectual inferiority? The answer, for Astell, is simple: ''Tis Custom … that Tyrant Custom' (15). Custom tells men to deny women the education they require; custom tells women to 'value' themselves upon their 'Beauty, or Money, and what that can purchase' (12). And each new generation of vacant women and self-interested men only further reified, Astell knew, her culture's firmly entrenched views on female intellect.

Astell's plan to 'break the enchanted Circle that custom has plac'd us in' (7) partakes of equal parts realism and idealism. Realistically, Astell knew that it was futile to rest her hopes for social progress on changing the hearts and minds of individual men who might then agree to educate their daughters on their own; her proposal is addressed 'To the Ladies', not to their potentially scoffing fathers, uncles, and brothers. By erecting an all-female Protestant '*Monastery*' (or '*Religious Retirement*' for those too 'scrupulous and injudicious' for the first term [18]), Astell and her supporters (both moral and financial[23]) would provide women with a tangible option that did not depend in any direct fashion on men at all. The best way 'to amend the present and improve the future Age' for women (18), in other words, was to create an institution the stability of which depended not on the good will of the many, but on the charity of the few. The sunny optimism Astell displays as she ponders a future shaped by the implementation of her scheme is characteristic of her tone throughout. 'From this sacred Mountain', she writes, 'the world will be plac'd at our feet, at such a distance from us, that the steams of its corruptions shall not obscure our eye-sight' (34); at night, the inhabitants will 'sleep in peace and safety, Angels pitching their Tents round about them' and allowing them to think about nothing so much as the 'progress' they have 'made towards Heaven' (27). Astell's is a 'serious' proposal for constructing a female, religious utopia.

Women would make their way to such an establishment, Astell believed, for a variety of reasons. She hoped some would have grown weary, once and for all, of the 'noise and hurry of the World' and would have realized the 'emptiness of earthly Enjoyments' (18). She knew others might have more pragmatic, and less permanent, inducements – for instance, a desire to 'be kept secure, from the rude attempts of designing Men', or to escape being 'inveigled and impos'd on' by 'rapacious' family members until they were 'dispos'd to marry' (39).[24] Whatever her motive for seeking shelter at Astell's 'Monastery', while there, a woman could expect her time and energy to be engaged entirely in matters of 'Religion', which was, in Astell's view, 'the adequate business of our lives', that which 'largely consider'd, takes in all we have to do' (21).

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[23] Astell would need the charitable support of the very wealthy as capital for constructing her proposed 'religious retirement'. Once built, it would be at least partly self-supporting. Astell suggests 'five or six hundred pounds' in *Serious Proposal, Part I* as the appropriate entrance fee for future residents (who would be, it must be remembered, 'Persons of Quality'), noting that this was far less than would be required by a suitable husband – assuming one could even be found – and well worth the protection it gave against an *un*suitable match (42–43).

[24] In other words, Astell envisions both permanent and temporary residents, though she probably realized and accepted that the latter would be more numerous. Richard A. Barney is mistaken, we believe, in claiming unequivocally that 'Astell's school would be only a

'Religion' sounds more limiting to twenty-first-century ears than Astell intends (as it must have to contemporary ones as well, since she defends her broad use of what some might consider 'too contracting a word' [21]). But we must recognize that for Astell, no 'employment for a rational Creature' was fit that did not tend 'to this great and *only* end' (21); becoming educated was itself a religious duty. The entirety of a woman's lived experience, Astell believed – whether educating herself or 'those of [her] own Sex' (25), 'relieving the poor, healing the Sick' and 'comforting the Afflicted', expressing 'unfeigned Friendship' for a particular 'beloved Person' (37), or merely enjoying 'harmless and ingenious Diversions' like 'Musick' or a 'plain and decent' meal (26) – not only *could*, but *should* resolve into prayer, and her institution would make achieving such a quietest existence a practical possibility. There, Astell promises, women would find 'no Rivalling but for the Love of GOD, no Ambition but to procure his Favour' (20). In all it did, even in its 'dear affection to each other' (20), Astell's 'happy Society' would 'perpetually [breathe] forth it self in flames of holy desires after GOD' (27).

It is easy to detect in such passionate religious language the co-author of *Letters Concerning the Love of God*. Not surprisingly, Astell's correspondence with Norris occurred either concomitant with or just prior to her composition of *Serious Proposal, Part I*, and one wonders if Norris's serious and respectful treatment of her ideas in 1693 may have emboldened Astell to speak her mind for the first time (albeit anonymously) to a public audience in 1694. For his part, Norris was already on his way to becoming an established public intellectual when Astell's initial letter arrived. Given the myriad male authors to whom Astell might have written, it is well worth weighing those aspects of Norris's public figure that would have recommended him to her as a potentially valuable and sympathetic correspondent.

In the first place, Norris's dual allegiances to Christian Platonism and Cartesian Rationalism must have struck a chord in Astell's similarly tuned mind; she, like Norris, might well be called a Cartesian Platonist. Among Norris's earliest published works is his translation from the Greek of a seminal work of early (fifth century) Neoplatonism, *Hierocles Upon the Golden Verses of the Pythagoreans* (1682). This text, as Richard Acworth has urged, offers a 'fine example of the sort of Platonism which formed the starting point of Norris's own thought'; Norris would 'throughout his life' follow Hierocles in insisting 'that truth is eternal and unchangeable, identical with the nature of God himself, and is immediately present to every soul, though it cannot be known except at the price

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temporary oasis for women's study and self-examination, before they reentered the world to take up their lives as daughters, wives, or mothers' (186).

of close attention' (22, 24) – a point Astell would later stress in *Serious Proposal, Part II*.[25]

Norris's reputation as a Platonist was solidified with his first substantial and original work, *A Collection of Miscellanies* (1687), a gathering of poetic meditations and prose treatises on Christian-Platonist themes (e.g., the mysterious connection of the soul and the body, the ineffable translation of the soul out of time and into eternity, the possibility of continuing friendship in Heaven, the correspondence of true Ideas with the Divine Essence); it would become Norris's most popular and enduring publication.[26] A philosophical sermon included in *Miscellanies*, entitled 'A Discourse upon Romans 12.3' (or, as Acworth notes, 'The Root of Liberty'), led to Norris's own self-promoting epistolary debate, in this case with the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614–87), concerning the source of human liberty, which Norris, following Hierocles, located in the human being's capacity for attending or not attending to a particular object or end, and thus in the Understanding rather than the Will, *per se*.

Included as an appendix to Norris's *The Theory and Regulation of Love* (1688),[27] the debate with More has done much to secure for Norris the somewhat misleading title of ‘last of the Cambridge Platonists’. Although Norris – an Oxford man – followed Cambridge scholars Benjamin Whichcote (1609–83), Ralph Cudworth (1617–88), John Smith (1618–52), and More in characterizing human reason as the ‘candle of the Lord’ (from Proverbs 20:27: ‘The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord’), God’s indwelling light by which Truth effectively could be sought, and while he certainly agreed with their location of eternal ideas in the mind of God and with their sense of the direct dependence of creation on Divinity, he broke ranks with the Cambridge Platonists in their ultimate disavowal of Descartes, to whom Norris refers in *Letters* as ‘my most admired Philosopher’ (96.16).[28] Indeed, it is telling both of his relationship with and distinction from the Cambridge Platonists that, in her final letter, Astell appeals to Norris’s ‘Friend Dr. *More*’ (132.5) as a means of *disagreeing* with Norris’s too-strict application of Cartesian dualism, as she then saw it.[29]

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[25] Astell writes, 'properly speaking all Truth is Antient, as being from Eternity in the Divine Ideas' (92). Acceptance of this Neoplatonic conception of Truth would not have disallowed Astell from agreeing with Locke's rejection of innate ideas, as Kathleen Squadrito, 435, claims. As with Norris, Astell likely agreed with Locke on innate ideas *and* believed that Truth existed from eternity in the mind of God; the two ideas were not mutually exclusive.

[26] As noted above, *Miscellanies* reached a tenth edition in 1749, but its popularity can also be gauged anecdotally. Patricia Fara explains that 'during the eighteenth century, appreciative audiences admired Henry Purcell's musical rendition of Norris's lines [from 'The Aspiration', (*Miscellanies* 117)] describing the uncertainty of an equivocating spiritual pilgrim' (185). In Richardson's *Clarissa*, Anna Howe quotes a line from Norris's 'Damon and Pythias. Or, Friendship in Perfection' (131; *Miscellanies* 95–96), and sends money to the besieged Clarissa in her copy of *Miscellanies* (512), while Jack Belford twice reads a stanza from Norris's 'The Meditation' to the dying Tom Belton (1229–30; *Miscellanies* 30–1). While evangelizing the American colonies in 1737, John Wesley recorded the story of a man who used this same stanza for his suicide letter (*Journal* 1:345). Samuel Johnson relied on Norris's *Miscellanies* in compiling his *Dictionary* (1755), according to James Clifford, 295, 165; his annotations are still legible in the margins of his copy. And, as Acworth notes, even in the early nineteenth century, J. Aubrey, the editor of *Letters written by Eminent Persons in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1813), writes of Norris that 'his *Miscellanies* are still read and applauded', while Robert Watt, MD, similarly maintains in *Bibliotheca Britannica* (1824) that the *Miscellanies* 'is the most popular of all his works, and affords the picture of a truly amiable mind' (323, notes 1 and 2).

[27] *The Theory and Regulation of Love* was dedicated to future adversary Damaris Masham; it too would prove popular, reaching a seventh edition in 1723. Samuel Johnson became quite serious in recommending this work in 1755 to Frances Burney, who recalls in her *Diary* the following dialogue with him: '"You shall give me," cried he "a discourse upon the

In this matter, Norris was only following the lead of his other ‘favorite’ philosopher, Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), whose works Norris seems first to have encountered in 1688.[30] It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of

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passions: come begin! Tell us the necessity of regulating them, watching over and curbing them! Did you ever read Norris’s *Theory of Love*?” “No, Sir,” said I, laughing, yet staring a little. Dr. J. – Well, it is worth your reading. He will make you see that inordinate love is the root of all evil: inordinate love of wealth brings on avarice; of wine, brings on intemperance; of power, brings on cruelty; and so on. He deduces from inordinate love all human frailty’ (1:117). We are grateful to Brian McCrea for alerting us to this passage.

[28] While the Cambridge Platonists finally rejected as atheistic Descartes’s seemingly strict separation of spirit and matter (opting instead for a revamped version of the scholastic ‘Intellectus Agens’ – some middling form of spirit *in* matter, such as what Cudworth in his *True Intellectual System* [1678] calls ‘Plastick Nature’), in Norris’s view, Cartesian dualism and Christian-Platonic idealism were perfectly compatible; both stressed, he believed, the essential nothingness, or deadness, of matter in comparison to spirit. In *Spiritual Counsel: or, The Father’s Advice to his Children* (1694), Norris labels the ‘imputation of Atheism’ to Descartes ‘a silly Charge, and such as nothing but … Ignorance of him can excuse’ (500). John Hoyles aptly notes that ‘for Norris, Platonism and Cartesianism carry the same message’ (*The Waning of the Renaissance* 101). See Norris’s dismissal of the ‘*Intellectus Agens*’ in *Cursory Reflections*, 193.2ff. and note.

[29] Her hesitancy here notwithstanding, Astell never stopped admiring or recommending Descartes – in *Serious Proposal, Part I* she suggests women give over ‘reading idle *Novels* and *Romances*’ and instead engage the ‘Philosophy’ of ‘*Des Cartes*’ and his follower ‘*Malebranch*’ (24), while in *Serious Proposal, Part II* she proffers as ‘the First and Principle thing to be observed in all Operations of the Mind’ Descartes’s rationalist doctrine of clear and distinct ideas (122). As we shall see, her uncertainty regarding Cartesian dualism would be relatively short-lived, for, as Perry, *Astell*, 70–71, and Bryson, 1, have pointed out, the strict separation of spirit from matter enabled Astell’s fundamental claim regarding female intellectual potential; as Bryson puts it, ‘souls are equal even if bodies … are not’.

[30] In *Spiritual Counsel*, e.g., Norris recommends Descartes as foundational philosophy, but Malebranche as the ‘universal key’ (500).

Malebranche, a French priest and self-proclaimed inheritor of the 'true' Cartesian legacy, in the development of Norris's thought and reputation.[31] While Astell might not yet, in 1693, have considered him 'the English Malebranche',[32] she certainly would have recognized Norris's pronounced interest in the French father's theocentric philosophy – and reverence for the man himself – from her reading of Norris's works. Norris first mentions 'the excellent *Monsieur Malebranche*' in *Theory and Regulation of Love*, 18, but his references to specific theories are here cursory, albeit admiring. With *Reason and Religion* (1689), Norris's enthusiasm for 'the incomparable' Malebranche's theosophy had become virtually boundless (186). Thereafter, the 'Excellent M. *Malebranche*', whose works were so 'deservedly admired' (*Reflections Upon the Conduct of Human Life* [1690; 2d. ed. 1691, 'with Large Additions'], 89, 34), this 'Gallileo of the Intellectual world' (*An Essay Towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World* [1701, 1704], 1:4), would provide Norris both a theoretical touchstone and a sorely needed philosophical ally. In short, 'from 1688 on', as Charles McCracken puts it, 'Norris's works were saturated with Malebranchean doctrine' (158). Astell would probably have understood that the initial question she posed to Norris reflected, ultimately, on his endorsement of Malebranche, but she almost certainly had not herself read the French Father's cornerstone text *De la recherche de la vérité* (*The Search After Truth* [1674]) when she initiated the correspondence with Norris.[33]

Malebranche's philosophy emerges as a complex interweaving of Platonic idealism, Cartesian dualism, and Augustinian theocentrism, and resulted in two specific, closely related theories by which Malebranche is still best known: his concept of

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[31] Nicholas Jolley explains that while Malebranche 'can be openly critical of Descartes, he is also capable of portraying himself as Descartes's true heir' (6). In general, Malebranche disagreed with Descartes on whether the mind was, on the one hand, 'cognitively powerless without divine assistance' or, on the other hand, 'to a large degree cognitively self-sufficient' (7). Did human minds formulate ideas on their own, as Descartes sometimes suggested, or find them in God, as Malebranche always insisted, following Augustine and, he believed, Descartes's best instincts?

[32] See John Passmore's entry for Norris in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967). McCracken notes that Norris's contemporary adversary John Sergeant was the first to use this label (179).

[33] *De la recherche de la vérité* was first published in 1674, and not translated until 1694, when both Thomas Taylor and Richard Sault produced versions of *The Search After Truth*. Astell makes a point of her inadequacy in reading foreign languages, so much so that she appears to have stopped the press during the first run of *Letters* to alter her sentence, 'For though I can't pretend to a multitude of Books, or the advantages of Academical Education, yet …' to 'For though I can't pretend to a Multitude of Books, Variety of Languages, the Advantages of Academical Education, or any Helps but what my own Curiosity affords …' (*Letters* 69.17–19; see 'Note to the Text' below).

We have quoted *De la recherche* throughout from the fine modern translation of Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (1980).

Occasionalism, and his doctrine that human beings 'see all things in God' ('*que nous voyons toutes choses en Dieu*'). Through Occasionalism (an old theory, it should be noted, and not Malebranche's invention[34]), Malebranche thought he could solve, in particular, the Cartesian conundrum of communication between the immaterial human mind and the material human body; more broadly, he found in Occasionalism a means to ensconce firmly the direct will of God in the operations of a universe beginning to come under the sway of increasingly secular-empirical explanations. According to Malebranche, all apparent causal relationships – whether one billiard ball careening off another, a planet revolving around the sun, or a human mind directing the movements of its body – are in fact only the *occasions* for expressions of the true causal agent, God's 'efficacious will' (*Search*, Elucidation 15, 680). Although our senses deceive us into accepting the alleged 'efficacy of secondary causes' (673), in fact 'the action of secondary causes is not different from the action by which God cooperates with them' (678). In other words, all causality is inherently primary and Divine, and only in our fallenness do we fail immediately to recognize 'God in all things' (657).[35]

This failure included, for Malebranche, the realm of human perception, *mutatis mutandis:* If human beings did not see God in all things, neither did they realize that they necessarily 'see all things in God', 'things' here meaning *ideas*, according to Malebranche, who, following Descartes, believed that minds perceive ideas of objects, not objects themselves.[36] This second theory is perhaps best understood as a corollary of Occasionalism as it applies to vision (i.e., the human perception of extended objects). Building on Augustine's Platonic argument for the human perception of eternal truths in God and Descartes's famous proof in the *Third Meditation* that the perception of finite objects is predicated on a perception of infinitude, Malebranche maintained that our ability to 'see' extended objects, as the vulgar would put it, could philosophically be explained only by having recourse to God, who alone could possibly contain 'the ideas of all the beings He has created' (*Search* III.2.6.230). Thus, in a hypothetical encounter with an apple, at the occasion of my eyes alerting my material brain, God reveals to my immaterial mind (or allows me *to see*) the appropriate idea of the extended object. The apple's texture, colour, scent, and taste would all likewise emerge, of course, but these were matters of Occasionalism for Malebranche, not of vision in God, because unlike extension, these were not primary qualities. This distinction proves crucial to Norris in his reply to Astell's final distancing letter; 'there is', he there insists, 'a vast Difference between knowing by *Sentiment* and knowing by *Idea*' (134.4–5).[37]

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[34] According to McCracken, Occasionalism can be traced at least as far back as Islamic scholars of the tenth century, but 'it was among Cartesians that Occasionalism finally made some headway in the Christian world' (92). Although Descartes accepted the existence of secondary causes, his conception in the *Third Meditation* of 'continuous creation', wherein 'the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one' (2:33), is certainly redolent of Occasionalism; it is thus 'not hard to see why some readers of Descartes – Louis de La Forge, Malebranche, Fontenelle, and Hume among them – took Descartes himself for an Occasionalist' (McCracken 93). Cf. Andrew Pessin, 'Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism?' where it is argued that, from a strictly logical perspective, Malebranche's subscription to Occasionalism determines his view of Continuous Creation, and not, as is commonly assumed, vice versa.

[35] John Milton's epistemology would seem to be quite similar, inasmuch as Eve's disaster in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost* is carefully presented as a fall into belief in secondary causes. As he draws his final, victorious speech to its climax, Satan skeptically (and seductively) insists, 'The Gods are first, and that advantage use / On our belief, that all from them proceeds; / I question it, for this fair Earth I see, / Warm'd by the Sun, producing every kind, / Them nothing …' (718–22). Malbranche, interestingly enough, labels belief in secondary causes the 'philosophy' of 'the serpent' (*Search* VI.2.3.451).

[36] Malebranche did not, however, necessarily follow Descartes in defining the nature of ideas. Malebranche continued to subscribe to an Augustinian view of ideas as independent, objective, abstract entities existing in the mind of God; as Steven Nadler puts it, 'Malebranche's theory of ideas is an amalgam of Cartesianism and Augustinianism' (12).

In Malebranche's writings, which included not only *The Search After Truth* but also *Traité de la nature et de la grace* (*Treatise on Nature and Grace* [1680]), *Traité de Morale* (*Treatise on Ethics* [1684]), and *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur la religion* (*Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion* [1688]), Norris found not so much new ideas as a rigorous systematization of precepts he had already accepted on the basis of his own reasoning, or of the reasoning of other cherished philosophers – and, probably most importantly, of what he believed he had found in Scripture. In *Reason and Religion*, Norris claimed in solid Cartesian fashion to have 'very early lighted upon' the principle that we 'see and know all things in *God*' of his own accord, before he 'had consulted with any Authors that might imbue me with it' (185–86). While he acknowledges contributions to this line of

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Descartes at times suggests a similar understanding of ideas, hence Malebranche's contention that his conception of ideas was Cartesian; but even Malebranche recognized that Descartes more frequently defined ideas as mental events, and thus located their existence in human minds. For an excellent discussion of Descartes's sometimes inconsistent understanding of ideas, and how his differing accounts of them evolved into the respective theories of ideas expounded by Malebranche, Antoine Arnauld, and Gottfried Leibniz, see Jolley's *The Light of the Soul*.

[37] For Malebranche, sentiments, or secondary qualities, existed only in the human mind, and thus outside the realm of *a priori* reasoning or 'proof'; ideas, or primary qualities, demonstrably existed in God. As Jolley puts it, 'according to Malebranche, it is only the primary qualities that we see in God, for these are the only properties that bodies possess. Secondary qualities are not properties of bodies at all; they are merely sensations in the human mind. Thus colours, tastes, smells, etc. do not fall within the scope of the thesis that we see all things in God' (82). Cf. Norris's reply to Astell in *Letters*, 134.4–6: 'Accordingly there is a vast Difference between knowing by *Sentiment* and knowing by *Idea*. We know Numbers, Extension, and Geometrick Figures by Idea, but we know Pleasure and Pain, Heat and Colour, *&c.* by interior Sentiment'.

thinking made ‘by *Platonists*’ like St Augustine, Plotinus, Proclus, Marsilio Ficino, Jean Baptiste Du Hamel (1624–1706), and even ‘*Aquinas* himself’, Norris insists that it was the ‘incomparable Monsieur *Malebranche*’ who had established ‘the truth of it beyond all cavil or exception’ (186).

Norris does not mean that Malebranche *created* otherwise unknowable truths; rather, he demonstrated philosophically what would be ‘familiar and obvious’ to us were we not misled by ‘the prejudices of our Education’ and the reports of our senses to believe the ‘vulgar Philosophy’ of secondary causes (*Reason and Religion* 185).[38] One need only turn to God’s revealed Word to see that Malebranche was on the side of the angels, and thus of truth; and, indeed, at the conclusion of this first sustained explication of Malebranche’s positions, Norris adduces a host of supporting examples from ‘*Scripture-Authority*’, including passages from Proverbs and John (219–22).[39] Perhaps most importantly, and like many later admirers of Malebranche, including Astell, William Law, and John Byrom, Norris recognized in the French Father’s philosophy a profound metaphysical demonstration of St Paul’s pronouncement in Acts 17:28 of our absolute human dependence on Divinity: ‘For in him we live, and move, and have our being’.[40] Despite Norris’s theoretical interest in the technicalities of Malebranche's theories, in other words – evident particularly in his two-volume *Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World* – Norris valued Malebranche's writings not for their novelty, but for their tendency to clarify a theocentric perspective he had long maintained. When, under the influence of Malebranche, Norris appeals to Paul's formula – 'O *Being it self*, 'tis in thee that I *live*, *move*, and *have my being*. Out of thee I *am* nothing. I *have* nothing, I can *do* nothing' (*Reason and Religion* 29) – he sounds exactly the same as the Norris who, before encountering Malebranche, had composed the many similarly ecstatic meditations found in *Miscellanies*.[41]

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[38] Norris alludes to this line of argumentation in Letter 4 when he refers to the ‘early Prejudice that sensible Objects do act upon our Spirits, and are the Causes of our Sensations’ (86.31–32).

[39] For Malebranche’s own elaboration of scriptural support for his philosophy, see *Search*, Elucidation 15, 672–85. Malebranche insists that there are ‘an infinity of passages that attribute to God the alledged [sic] efficacy of secondary causes, and that destroy the *nature* of the Peripatetics’ (673).

[40] In *Christian Religion*, Astell writes, ‘[God] *is not far from every one of us, for in Him we Live, Move, and have our Being, as the very Heathens own’d…* He has more right in us than we have our selves, since we subsist only by His Power, depending upon Him for every moment of our Being’ (6–7, 61). William Law similarly maintains in his enormously popular *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729): ‘The *weakness* of our state appears from our inability to do anything, as of ourselves. In our natural state we are entirely without *any power*; we are indeed active beings, but we can only act by a power, that is every *moment* lent us from God… . To think that you are your own, or at your own disposal, is as absurd as to think that you created, and can preserve your self. It is as plain and necessary a first principle, to believe you are thus God’s … as to believe, that in him you *live, and move, and have your being* (295–96, 441). According to Erwin Rudolph, Law had ‘absorbed’ Malebranche’s ‘teachings’ while at Cambridge, completing a thesis on his theological philosophy in 1712 (48). Walker notes that Malebranche was the ‘most significant’ early influence on Law, and that Law could still claim in 1729 that he was willing to go to Paris to ‘converse with anyone who had known’ the French priest (7). Even when Law had found in Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) a new mystical master, his conceptions of the absolute and direct dependence of the human being on God remained basically unchanged: ‘[It is a] literal, real, immutable, and eternal truth … when it is said that “in God we live and move and have our being”’ (*Demonstration* 5). When John Byrom, Law’s steadfast supporter, ‘defended Malebranche as saying the same thing as

Norris's enthusiasm for Malebranche's divine explanations for human experience pitted him squarely against the 'new way of ideas'[42] presented by John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and he was quick to respond, appending his *Cursory Reflections Upon a Book Call'd, 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding'* to a collection of sermons published only five months after the *Essay* had appeared. *Christian Blessedness: Or, Discourses Upon the Beatitudes of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (1690) would become the first of four volumes of *Practical Discourses Upon Several Divine Subjects* (1691, 1693, 1698) and would prove to be one of Norris's most popular works, reaching a fifteenth edition by 1728. Astell, we know, had read it by 1693.[43] Her decision in 1694 to publish her amicable dialogue with Locke's first critic – indeed, her decision to write to him in the first place – suggests that her tendencies away from Locke's reluctant secularism and toward Norris's staunch theism, so fully revealed in *Christian Religion* a decade later, were deep-seated, integral aspects of her personality and thought. It was fully appropriate for Norris to combine a collection of scriptural devotions with an acute philosophical analysis; it was equally appropriate for such a combination to appeal to Astell.[44]

Paul, "In him we live and move," etc.', he was only making explicit a connection already present in the works of Norris, Astell, Law, and likeminded Christian-Platonist thinkers. See Byrom's diary entry for December 31, 1729, 1:399; quoted in John Hoyles, *The Edges of Augustanism*, 105.

[41] That God provides the 'very *frame* and *contexture* of [our] *being*' was as early as 1687 the concomitant conclusion to Norris's acceptance of the belief that every man 'owes his *life*, his *motion* and his very *being*' to God (see 'Considerations Upon the Nature of Sin', *Miscellanies* 383).

[42] This famous phrase was coined by Bishop Edward Stillingfleet in his opening assault on Locke, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1697).

[43] Along with the third volume, which contains the subject of Astell's opening letter to Norris, Astell had (at least) also read the first volume; she cites it ('your *Christian Blessedness*'), wittily enough, back to Norris in defence of her hypothesis of a bifurcated soul in *Letters*, 88.30–32*;* see our note to that passage.

[44] For an illustration of the point that 'Norris's philosophy ought not be considered apart from his theology' see Melvyn New's entry on Norris in *Dictionary*; New uses the first discourse in *Practical Discourses, Volume Three* to demonstrate Norris's procedure, the

In Norris's *Cursory Reflections*, Astell would have found a philosophical, not a moral or theological, response to Locke's *Essay* – though, given Norris's inclinations as a thinker, even his most 'philosophical' works ultimately amount to theosophy. Most of Norris's criticisms resolve into the general charge that, in denying that human beings have any knowledge of essences, Locke falls into the skeptical trap of disabling his own truth claims.

Locke had spent a significant portion of the *Essay* refuting the Platonic notion of innate ideas in order to bolster his theory that human ideas derive exclusively from a combination of sense perception and mental reflection. The non-coincidence of any two people's ideas or perceptions of a given proposition or object, Locke maintained, proved that human beings did not share the same innate, originary ideas, but arrived at them experientially by similar, but subjective, operations of their bodies and minds.

Although Norris's alliance with Malebranche allowed him to agree with Locke's dismissal of 'that grey-headed venerable Doctrin of Innate or Common Principles' (*Cursory* 191.19–20) – 'I do as little believe there are any such things as Innate Principles strictly and properly so called … as the Author himself' (191.1–4) – he disputed Locke's reasons for doing so. In Norris's view, Locke is able to reject innate ideas only because he has confused the 'Truth of the Subject', conditional truth, with the 'Truth of the Object', necessary truth (188.25–28); this is a mistake Norris finds throughout the *Essay*. To Locke's claim that truth is 'nothing but *the joining or separating of Signs, as the Things signified by them, do agree or disagree one with another*' (*ECHU* IV.5.2.574), Norris characteristically responds, 'This indeed is Truth of the *Mind* or of the *Subject*, but not Truth of the *Thing* or of the *Object*, which consists not in the minds joyning or separating either Signs or Ideas, but in the Essential Habitudes that are between the Ideas themselves' (196.33–35).

Locke saw that human beings could not even agree on the proper definition of basic words, much less on the fundamentals of morality, and he took this, somewhat despairingly, as representative of the basic human epistemological condition. Norris insisted, to the contrary, that our inability to 'know all the Essences of things' (195.30) did not constitute a viable 'Argument against the Being of real Essences' (195.43–196.1). Indeed, Norris's own account of '*Human Understanding*' was fully essentialist – it was precisely through 'the Presentialness of the Divine λόγος or Ideal World to our Souls', Norris claimed, that 'we see and perceive all things' (191.10–11). It thus followed for him that careful attention could in fact allow us to transcend 'the Veil of our *Mortal Flesh*' and arrive at those essential truths we now perceive '*through a Glass darkly*' (*Reason and Religion*

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same text that Astell used to open her correspondence with Norris. In the same volume, Jacqueline Broad's entry on Astell illustrates the all too familiar approach that emphasizes Astell's valid questions to Norris, without acknowledging the profound intellectual affinity that existed between them.

217).[45] Norris urged his readers to look for truth by disavowing sensory input; Locke insisted that the senses provided the cornerstone for all knowledge. As John Hoyles succinctly puts it, ‘each is sceptical of the other’s home ground’ (*Waning of the Renaissance* 107).

It is important to recognize, however, not only what Astell found in Norris’s critique of *Essay*, but also what she did not find. In being Locke’s ‘first’ critic, Norris was not yet Locke’s enemy. His disagreements with Locke in *Cursory Reflections* are numerous and substantial, but they are not unequivocal, and his presentation of them is friendly and conciliatory – unlike the *ad hominem* and somewhat unfair response to *Cursory Reflections* penned by Locke’s friend Jean Le Clerc and printed in translation in the *Athenian Gazette* in 1691.[46] (We have included as part of Appendix Two Norris’s puzzled and frustrated ‘A Brief Consideration of the Remarques made upon the foregoing Reflections by the Gentlemen of the *Athenian Society*’, which appeared just after *Cursory Reflections* in all subsequent editions of *Christian Blessedness*, beginning with the second edition of 1692.) Norris concludes his critique of Locke by proclaiming himself ‘as great an Admirer of him as any of his most sworn Followers’, insisting that he ‘would not part with his Book for half a *Vatican*’ (198.22–23). This is not merely a rhetorical flourish. Evidence of Norris’s respect for Locke’s *Essay*, as well as his lingering suspicions of its implications, can be found in an undated letter (*c*. 1700) he wrote to Elizabeth Thomas (1677–1731) in response to her request for advice on self-education: along with Descartes and ‘the best *Cartesians*’, especially Malebranche, of course – the key for Thomas’s being able to direct herself ‘in all [her] farther Progress’ – Norris also recommends ‘*Mr.* Locke *of Understanding*’ as a work Thomas ‘should read’, albeit not yet, and only with ‘*due Caution* and *Circumspection*’.[47] It is thus not surprising that neither Norris nor Astell reproves Locke directly in *Letters*; however flawed his sense-based philosophy must have seemed to the correspondents in 1693–94, Locke did not appear to be their necessary adversary.

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[45] Norris is quoting one of his favourite Scriptural verses, 1 Corinthians 13:12: ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known’. One would be hard pressed to find a work authored by Norris that does not quote this Platonic insight.

[46] See Acworth, 262–67. Le Clerc published regular philosophical reviews in his *Bibliothèque Universelle* (later renamed *Bibliothèque Choisie*); he and Locke had become friends during the last years of Locke’s exile in Holland.

[47] Perry reprints Norris’s letter as a demonstration of his ‘views on education’ (*Astell*, 484–85, note 60). Norris’s correspondence with Thomas can be found in vol. 2 of *Pylades and Corinna*; see ‘Letters from Mr. Norris to Corinna, for the Direction of her Studies’ (199–216). The correspondence between them must have occurred several years after Norris and Astell’s own correspondence, since they discuss the public reception of the first volume of his *Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World*, published in 1701. For a fine discussion of Thomas’s overdetermined personal and literary reputation – she appears as ‘Corinna’ in Alexander Pope’s *Dunciad* – see Anne McWhir, ‘Elizabeth Thomas’.

Norris began his letter to Thomas with the phrase, 'Since we are all rational Creatures … .' The belief embodied in this equitable phrase – men and women partake equally of universal Reason – constitutes the lynchpin of Astell's feminism.[48] Not surprisingly, Norris's interest in the educational pursuits of women constitutes yet another, perhaps the primary, aspect of his reputation that attracted Astell. Norris's exchange with Elizabeth Thomas would take place some years later – indeed, Thomas was likely inspired to contact him by her reading his correspondence with Astell – but Astell may already have known Mary, Lady Chudleigh (1656–1710), another of Norris's female correspondents and his personal friend; and although Astell never accepted Thomas, she would eventually develop an epistolary, and possibly a personal, friendship with Chudleigh.[49] Astell certainly knew of Norris's *Reflections Upon the Conduct of Human Life: With Reference to the Study of Learning and Knowledge* (1690), a popular educational tract about which John Wesley hyperbolically claimed in a 1756 letter to Samuel Furley, 'every paragraph of [it] must stand unshaken (with or without the Bible) till we are no longer mortal'.[50] This work, which Astell praised in *Serious Proposal, Part I* as an indispensable educational guide,[51] was dedicated to yet another intellectual woman and correspondent of Norris, Damaris Masham (1658–1708), daughter of Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, and personal friend and patron to Locke.

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[48] Most commentators on Astell have made this point; see Joan K. Kinnaird, 'Mary Astell'; Smith, *Reason's Disciples*; Bryson, 'Mary Astell'; Jacqueline Broad's *DLB* entry; and Perry, 'Radical Doubt' and *Astell*, chap. 3.

[49] Margaret J. M. Ezell aptly explains the interrelationship of these three women in her introduction to *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, xxx: 'It appears from Elizabeth Thomas's correspondence that Chudleigh and Astell knew one another personally. A friendship seems plausible, given the location of Chudleigh's Sydenham relatives in Chelsea where Astell lived. Elizabeth Thomas, who herself wrote a poem lauding Almystrea [an anagram of Mary Astell], was, on the other hand, apparently snubbed by Astell. Even though the contact between Thomas and Astell was made through a mutual friend, John Norris of Bemerton, Astell's behaviour led Thomas to write to Chudleigh for an explanation of Astell's attitude towards her. On this occasion, Chudleigh was able to assure Thomas that Norris, at least, was "very much your Friend"'. For Thomas's description of Astell's rejection and for Chudleigh's reply, see *Pylades and Corinna*, 2:81.

[50] Such praise may explain why this particular work was still being reprinted as volume 30 of Wesley's *Christian Library* in 1819.

[51] Astell writes: 'It is not intended that our Religious shou'd waste their time, and trouble their heads about such unconcerning matters, as the vogue of the world has turn'd up for Learning, the impertinency of which has been excellently expos'd by an ingenious pen [**Mr. Nor. Conduct of Human Life*], but busy themselves in a serious enquiry after *necessary* and *perfective* truths, something which it *concerns* them to know, and which tends to their real interest and perfection, and what that is the excellent Author just now mention'd, will sufficiently inform them …' (*Serious Proposal, Part I* 21–22).

Masham's association with Locke, it turned out, would eventually lead her to become a most vociferous critic of both Astell and Norris, but she was still very much Norris's friend during the years before the appearance of *Letters*; indeed, it was at her behest that Locke performed a significant intercession on Norris's behalf in 1692, successfully requesting for Norris the gift of the rectory at Bemerton from the Earl of Pembroke.[52] Norris's respectful public recognition of an intelligent woman, his evident willingness to encourage her educational pursuits – his incipient feminism – emboldened Astell to initiate a correspondence, secure in the knowledge, as she put it in her opening letter to Norris, that whatever 'some morose Gentlemen' might believe to be 'the proper Employments as they fancy of a Womans Life', she could expect 'better things from the more Equitable and Ingenuous Mr. *Norris*, who is not so narrow-Soul'd as to confine Learning to his own Sex, or to envy it in ours' (*Letters* 69.9–13).

Norris and Astell As Correspondents

In writing to Norris, Astell launched herself into an argument Norris had been developing since the beginning of his authorial career. He had already argued, as early as 1683 in 'An Idea of Happiness', his neoplatonic conviction that God is 'the Proper and Principal end of Man, the Center of our *Tendency*' and 'the Object which alone can satisfy the appetite of the most Capacious Soul' (*Miscellanies* 409).[53] He had already conceived of human beings as inherently amorous creatures whose souls are drawn by a '*Moral Gravity*' toward God; he had already developed his Thomist distinction between Love as *desire*, '*A simple Tendency of the Soul to good*' which necessarily implies self-love and indigence, and Love as *benevolence*, a selfless desire for the good of others; and he had already argued for God as the proper object of desire, human beings as the proper objects of benevolence (*Theory and Regulation of Love*, 11–12, 14, 31, 50–51, etc.).

Most significant to the genesis of *Letters*, however, was his 'Discourse Concerning The Measure of Divine Love, with the Natural and Moral Grounds upon which it stands', the opening discourse in his third volume of *Practical Discourses* (1693), wherein Norris, following Malebranche's lead, had linked his arguments for the love of God to his Occasionalist understanding of the nature of human experience.[54] Taking Matthew 22:37 as his subject – 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy mind' – Norris urged a literal and unqualified understanding of the scriptural admonition to love God entirely by emphasizing God's role as the 'Efficient Cause' of all 'Sensation' (46). Occasionalism, Norris argued, belied '*Sensible Logick*', that 'Prejudice of the Senses' that leads us mistakenly to ascribe to material objects the ability to raise sensations in the immaterial soul (49, 56). '[']is not the Sun that enlightens us', Norris insisted, 'but God by the Sun. 'Tis not the Fire that gives us Heat, but God by the Fire. 'Tis not the most delicate Fruit, or the richest Perfume, that delights either our Tast or our Smell, but 'tis God alone that raises Pleasure in us by the Occasion of these Bodies' (55). God alone causes our pleasure; thus, God alone does us good; thus, God alone is lovely; thus, God alone deserves our love. '[I]f ever Philosophy were a Hand-Maid to Divinity', Norris mused with satisfaction, 'it is now' (57).[55]

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[52] On April 14, 1692, Norris wrote to Locke in gratitude for his 'great generosity', explaining that he had only recently been 'inform'd how much I was endebted to your Interest for my Lord Pembroke's late Favour to me'. Locke responded graciously on June 6 of that same year; he and 'a Lady' (Masham) both thought Norris 'deserved a better station in the world', and Locke jestingly wonders that 'a philosopher' like Norris should be surprised at Locke's magnanimity; see *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 4:443–44, 459–60. Acworth, 267, quotes much of Norris and Locke's pleasant exchange.

[53] First published separately in 1683, the essay was included in Norris's *Miscellanies* in 1687 (391–430), and hence often reprinted.

There was, however, a glaring logical inconsistency in Norris's argument, and Astell took direct aim in her first letter. If, as Norris allowed in his 'Discourse', God is the efficient cause of both pleasure *and* pain, then is not God necessarily the object both of our Love, as the cause of our pleasure, and 'of our Aversion', as the cause of our pain? Must we not, according to Norris's own principles, in equal parts tend toward and away from God, as 'it is as natural to avoid and fly from Pain, as it is to follow and pursue Pleasure' (*Letters* 70.12–13)? Astell precisely *does not* disagree in this letter with either of Norris's fundamental premises; she explicitly affirms her agreement with Norris both '*That* GOD *is the Efficient Cause of our Sensations*, Pain as well as Pleasure: *And that he is the only Object of our Love*' (70.14–15). Her point is incisive, but it is made in the spirit of assistance, not dismissal; though she is Norris's interlocutor, she is also his supporter. To stress Astell's 'disagreement with some of [Norris's] arguments' as the impetus for her first letter is to risk seriously mischaracterizing the spirit of her enterprise.[56]

Indeed, Astell wants above all to convince Norris that his theory can be salvaged – and that she knows just how to proceed. Far from offering any serious criticism of his philosophical arguments, Astell proposes an extension of them: 'If nothing be the Object of our Love but what does us Good', she submits to Norris, 'then something else does us Good, besides what causes Pleasure' (70.19–20). Norris's initial response is fumbling, and reads mainly as an exercise in avoidance; in a 'Postscript' to letter 2, however, he sets aside his previous rebuttals and grasps the line Astell had subtly thrown him: 'If as to the present Life, the pain that *GOD* inflicts upon us here, is only Medicinal, and in order to our greater good, and consequently from a Principle of Kindness … there will be no more pretence for not loving or hating *GOD* for this, than for hating our Physician or Surgeon for putting us to pain in order to our Health or Cure' (75.37–76.3). We should love God fully, Norris now realized, not because he is the author of our pleasure, but because he is the author of our Good.

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[54] For the precedent Norris found in Malebranche, see *Search*, I.17.2.76–77: '*That only God is our good, and that no sensible object can make us feel pleasure*'.

[55] See New, *DLB*, s.v. Norris, for a fuller explication of the philosophical and theological argument of this discourse. Norris completes the 'Hand-Maid to Divinity' passage by adding, 'as furnishing us with a certain Ground for the most sublime and noble Conclusion in the World, the full, perfect and intire Love of God, which now appears to be … demonstrable in a clear and distinct Order of Reasoning' (57).

[56] We quote Hill, 49, but the approach is commonplace in Astell commentary; see, e.g., Broad's Astell entry in *DLB* for a particularly egregious example.

One can only imagine Astell's satisfaction at having an established philosopher accept the efficacy of her corrective. She admits in letter 3 that, indeed, her opening letter 'was principally designed in Favour' of precisely the idea Norris had arrived at in his Postscript – namely, 'that *GOD's* being the Author of our Pain, is [no] just Impediment to our entire Love of him' (77.8, 76.32–33). Norris's argument for the complete Love of God was now 'well establish'd' (76.13–14), Astell rapturously proclaims, her own corollary an indispensable part of the whole. It is worth noting that Astell had been right about Norris: his faith in the intellectual abilities of women was not just theoretical, for he had accepted correction from a woman in practice.[57]

This is not to say that in the main body of *Letters* Astell and Norris are always in complete agreement. Astell does, after all, call on Norris to rethink his theory in letter 1, while at the conclusion of letter 3 she expresses misgivings over the practicality of Norris's admonition to remove all desirous love from the creature and to direct it toward God, suggesting that it may be 'too nice for common Practice' (80.33–34). She explains that she herself has found it a 'very difficult thing … to love at all, without something of Desire' (80.13–14), particularly in her dealings with those of her 'Sex' whom she hopes to convince 'not wholly to lay out their Time and Care in Adorning their Bodies, but to bestow a Part of it at least in the Embellishment of their Minds' (80.19–21). (Again, it is worth remembering that Astell is writing this letter in the same year that saw the publication of *Serious Proposal, Part I*.) Though she has 'in some measure rectified this Fault', she continues to feel an 'agreeable Movement in my Soul towards her I love, and a Displeasure and Pain when I meet with Unkindness, which is a strong Indication of somewhat more than pure Benevolence' (80.27–30), and she requests from Norris a 'Remedy' for her 'Disorder' (81.2).[58]

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[57] Acworth writes, 'Norris's correspondence with Mary Astell is an excellent example of his willingness to learn from sympathetic criticism, and although in the course of it Mary Astell came to accept on every point Norris's analysis of the soul and its activities, yet on the essential point at issue it was Norris who accepted her insight' (173).

[58] Astell added a footnote, 80.36–43, to the second edition of *Letters*, retracting her guilt for feeling pain at having the 'Spiritual Good' she wishes her 'Neighbors' rejected; 'next to

Bridget Hill takes Astell's letter as a proclamation of lesbian desire, and Norris's reply in letter 4 – 'His only suggestion was more meditation!' – as indicative of his utter failure to see that Astell had confessed her 'passionate love for a woman', possibly Lady Catherine Jones, the object of Astell's 'fulsome' dedication (8–10). Perry, however, has reminded us that 'intense, spiritualized friendships with other women were not unusual' in Astell's culture (140), and one wonders why, if Astell's intentions are as transparent as Hill claims, Astell would have agreed to publication. Putting such speculation aside, what can be said with certainty is that however ineffectual Norris's advice might seem by present standards, it would appear to have had an impact on Astell, who, to take just two examples, in letter 9 expounds on the 'Necessity that lies upon us to cut off all Desire from the Creature betimes, to shut up all the Avenues of our Souls from created Good, even from those dearest Idols that bear the nearest Resemblance to our Maker …' (117.38–40); and in *Christian Religion* insists that notwithstanding the 'difficulty' of 'setting our Affections on things above and not on things on the Earth … yet it may be done' ('Appendix' 237.29–32). As with Astell's opening question to Norris, difference resolves into synthesis.

One would be hard pressed, in fact, to identify a randomly chosen paragraph from letter 3 through letter 12 as belonging definitively to either Astell or Norris. The two are generally in complete agreement regarding the major premise – the need to love God fully – and they often support it with the same sophisticated theosophical arguments. It was with good reason that each page of the first edition of *Letters* carried a running head reading 'Letters Philosophical and Divine'; and although it is somewhat misleading to treat these categories separately, it is possible to identify particular philosophical and theological strands of thought that, when woven together, form the whole of the argument.

Astell and Norris's major philosophical goal throughout *Letters* is to debunk materialist explanations of human experience or knowledge. They accept as a given, with Plato, that 'this World is a mere shew, a shadow, an emptiness!' (*Letters* 79.26), and that we know it not directly (or materially), but only through the immaterial soul's perception of it *via* similarly immaterial ideas and sensations. As Norris, following Descartes, explains, all of the 'Modifications' of bodies 'reduce themselves to Figure and Motion, or certain Relations of Distance' and thus cannot affect that 'which I call my Spirit' (96.9–12).

Their strongest refutations of materialism, however, rely unflinchingly on Malebranchean Occasionalism. In letter 4, Norris stresses the need 'to free our Minds of that early Prejudice that sensible Objects do act upon our Spirits, and are the Causes of our Sensations', so that we can recognize the 'grand Truth … that *GOD* only is the true Cause of all our Good' (86.31–36). Astell complains in letter

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Sorrow for our own Sins', such a rejection, she now reasons, 'is the justest, greatest, and most lasting Cause of Grief'.

9 that, forgetting ‘the true Cause and Sourse of all our Good, we take up with those occasional Goods that are more visible, and present to our animal Nature’ (117.9–11). So committed are Norris and Astell to refuting materialism, in fact, that each verges in places on *im*materialism. In letter 3, Astell protests, ‘so little Reason have our Pretenders to Wit to discredit every thing that is not the Object of Sense, that in right estimate Spirits are the only Realities …’ (79.26–28). For his part, Norris, by extrapolating from Occasionalism, could ‘easily conceive, that *GOD* can, if he pleases, raise the Sensation of Pain in [the soul] though no Change be made in the Body, nay though she had no Body at all’ (83.25–27). Neither Astell nor Norris actually doubted the existence of bodies – this logical extreme would soon enough find exponents in George Berkeley and Arthur Collier[59] – but each very much disputed the *importance* of bodies, both when thinking in strictly philosophical and in less rarified terms; this is the same Astell, after all, who would soon be admonishing women in *Serious Proposal, Part I* to transfer their attentions from ‘a corruptible Body to an immortal Mind’ (5). The philosophical argument Astell and Norris put forth in *Letters* for loving an immaterial God as the cause of all our good, in other words, is in part an expression of their general skepticism toward corporeality – hardly a mark of iconoclasm in a culture so thoroughly imbued with Christianity.

Much of Astell’s and Norris’s tendency toward theocentric, anti-materialist philosophy derived from a shared reverence for orthodox Anglicanism that is probably still most conveniently defined as ‘High Church’.[60] Norris had argued vigorously in

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[59] Though Berkeley (1685–1753) is the more famous philosopher, and deservedly so, Collier (1680–1732) appears to have devised simultaneously a similarly immaterialist philosophy without recourse to Berkeley’s *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710). See Collier’s *Clavis Universalis: Or, a New Inquiry after Truth, Being a Demonstration of the Non-existence, or Impossibility, of an External World* (1713). Collier explicitly links his arguments for immateriality to Norris’s philosophy; indeed, he charges ‘the Great and Excellent’ Norris, ‘for whose Writings and Memory’ he has ‘great Esteem’, with willfully refusing to acknowledge the implications of his own theosophy (123; see 123–30). Collier’s reference to Norris’s ‘Memory’ bolsters Robert Benson’s hypothesis, 16, that Collier and Norris, fellow clergymen whose residences were separated by only a few miles, were personally acquainted. Collier was the father of Jane Collier, a mid-century author who, with Sarah Fielding, published the philosophical dramatic fable *The Cry* in 1754; the influence of Neoplatonic thought in that work is palpable.

[60] Like so many labels of academic usefulness, ‘High Church’ is notoriously difficult to define, in large part because it was generally used in a highly charged arena of political (as opposed to theological) debate. As with ‘enthusiast’ or, to take a modern example from American politics, ‘liberal’, almost no one referred to him or her self as ‘High Church’ – that was done for them by those considered, in their turn, ‘Low Church’. A further problem, as Kenneth Hylson-Smith notes, is that the defining characteristics of the so-called ‘High Church’ movement – ‘opposition to Latitudinarianism’, an ‘alliance with Toryism against Whig and nonconformist assertions’ – might simply be ‘depicted as essentially central

Christian Blessedness against the Toleration Act of 1689 and the practice of Occasional Conformity by 'Dissenters and Separatists' (197);[61] when the act passed, he persisted, publishing *The Charge of Schism Continued* in 1691. Astell's own likeminded attacks on dissenters would not be penned until the first years of the next century when the next great debate over Toleration arose;[62] her early solidarity with Norris on these points is suggested, however, in *Letters*, when she cleverly laments of her society, '[we] put on our Religion as we do our Cloaths in conformity to the Fashion' (117.21–22).[63]

Anglicanism and not distinctively High Church' (xi). Nevertheless, Hylson-Smith and countless other scholars continue to put the phrase 'High Church' to convenient use as a way of characterizing the most conservative members of the Anglican establishment. That Astell's closest political and religious allies opposed toleration for dissenters (Norris), were nonjurors (Sancroft, George Hickes, Henry Dodwell), or were future Jacobites (Atterbury), would seem to demand a stronger appellation than 'central Anglicanism'. On the other hand, Norris's writings appealed in mid-century to the likes of Law, Richardson, and Laurence Sterne, none of whom could ever be characterized as 'High Church'; see Taylor, 'Clarissa Harlowe', and New, 'The Odd Couple'.

[61] See, e.g., 'Discourse the Seventh', based on Matthew 5:9: '*Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be call'd the Children of God*' (174–203).

[62] Astell composed three pamphlets defending and promulgating the High Church, Tory case against dissenters: *Moderation Truly Stated: or, A Review Of A Late Pamphlet Entitul'd, Moderation a Vertue. With A Prefatory Discourse to Dr. D'Aveanant, Concerning His Late Essays on Peace and War* (1704); *A Fair Way With The Dissenters And Their Patrons. Not writ by Mr. L——y, or any other Furious Jacobite, whether Clergyman or Layman; but by a very Moderate Person and Dutiful Subject to the Queen* (1704); *An Impartial Enquiry Into The Causes Of Rebellion and Civil War In This Kingdom: In an Examination of Dr. Kennett's Sermon, Jan. 31, 1703/4. And Vindication of the Royal Martyr* (1704). See Perry, *Astell*, chap. 7, 'In the Service of the Lord', esp. 182–210.

[63] It is telling that both Astell and Norris aroused the vindictive annoyance of the more 'latitudinarian' Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury. According to Ballard, Burnet squashed Astell's Protestant nunnery scheme by dissuading 'a certain great lady' from donating 'ten thousand pounds' toward the project: 'He immediately went to that lady and so powerfully remonstrated against it, telling her it would look like preparing a way for popish orders, that it would be reputed a nunnery, etc.' (383). Perry notes that Astell's friend Elizabeth Elstob was 'Ballard's informant in this matter' (*Astell*, 502, note 35). In *Christian Religion*, Astell bitterly insists that she had 'heard it generally complain'd of by very good *Protestants*, that Monasteries were Abolish'd instead of being Reform'd … tho' none that I know of plead for Monasteries, strictly so call'd, in *England*, or for any thing else but a reasonable provision for the Education of one half of Mankind, and for a safe retreat so long and no longer than our Circumstances make it requisite' (See 'Appendix' 235.8–13). As for Norris, the rectory at Bemerton is no more than two miles from Salisbury, where Burnet resided as Bishop. To Thomas Colburne's enthusiasm at seeing the 'great cathedral' of Salisbury while taking a walk, Norris is said to have replied wittily, 'it is all the prospect I have with respect to that cathedral' (Willmott 129). According to Passmore, Burnet was suspicious of Norris's mysti-

To be sure, neither Astell nor Norris had any sympathy with Calvinistic determinism, upholding instead the Arminianism central to Anglican doctrine. It is thus not at all clear how Kathleen Squadrito arrived at her suggestions that Norris was an 'extreme' Calvinist and that Astell attacked him as such (434); the two take turns, in fact, excoriating as 'irrational and absurd' (*Letters* 78.38) the 'strange Hypothesis' that '*GOD made Men on purpose to Damn them*' (73.37, 33–34). Socinianism, the theoretical precursor to the full-blown Deism popular among several prominent enlightenment figures of the eighteenth century, was equally abhorrent to both correspondents. Christ figures prominently throughout *Letters*, not only as 'a Pattern of every Virtue' – no Socinian would have balked at that description – but as 'our Saviour' who, indeed, 'was *GOD*' (101.37, 29–30). When Norris declaims against the 'eternal Contention and tedious *Chicane* about the *Trinity*' (56.22–23), this is not because he thought the doctrine indefensible from Socinian charges of unreasonableness, but because he considered its veracity, strictly speaking, a matter of reasonable faith, not of reason proper.[64]

But religion *is* reasonable, the authors of *Letters* insist; tellingly enough, next to 'Love' and 'God', 'Reason' is the most prevalent word in the text. Although their language in praise of God is, at times, undeniably baroque or 'enthusiastic' (e.g., Astell in *Letters*, 91.25–27: 'we may always contemplate and enjoy his Beauty; may always asswage our Thirst at this Fountain, and feast our hungry Souls upon his never-failing Charms'), so was that of most Anglican apologists of the day (to modern ears, at least), from prominent 'High Church' figures like George Hickes

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cal tendencies and resented his 'attack on toleration in *The Charge of Schism Continued* (1691)'. One 'zealous admirer' of Norris claimed, with evident hyperbole, that Burnet 'permitted [Norris] to starve within the sound of his cathedral bells' (Willmott 129).

[64] As Acworth puts it, Norris was 'committed to the principle of clear ideas and of evidence as well as being a believer in the mysteries of Christianity' (219). In *An Account of Reason and Faith* (see esp. chaps. 7 and 8), Norris distinguished between the moral certainty of faith and the scientific certainty of reason, insisting that nothing known with moral certainty could be against human reason, though it may very well be above it. Hence the possibility of unbelievers and skeptics: 'Certain articles of faith, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, were indeed in themselves necessary truths, but being in Norris's sense above reason they were known only through revelation, and revelation was contingent' (Acworth 228). Cf. Astell in *Serious Proposal, Part II*: '[T]here is not such a difference between Faith and Science as is usually suppos'd. The difference consists not in the Certainty but in the way of Proof; the Objects of Faith are as Rationally and as Firmly Prov'd as the Objects of Science, tho by another way. As Science Demonstrates things that are *Seen*, so Faith is the Evidence of such as are *Not Seen*' (103). It is important to note that in this matter, Norris and Astell were actually quite close to Locke: See *ECHU,* IV.18, especially sections 7 and 8, the headings to which read, '*Things above Reason. Or not contrary to Reason, if revealed, are matters of Faith*' (694). Locke would have resisted as unverifiable, however, Astell's contention that 'Objects of Faith are as Rationally and as Firmly Prov'd as Objects of Science'; Norris would have agreed without blinking.

and Francis Atterbury to famous latitudinarians like John Tillotson and Gilbert Burnet. Indeed, like most contemporary proponents of Christianity, Norris and Astell maintained that human reason was itself an aspect of Divinity.[65] A century of religious civil war had perhaps rendered this position a *sine qua non* for any sect interested in legitimacy, but with Methodism still a half century away, the emphasis on the 'reasonableness of Christianity' must be considered the defining characteristic of English Protestantism from, say, 1670–1740, that is, the years in which Norris and Astell thrived.

Of course, arguing for the exclusive love of God did set Norris and Astell somewhat apart from more moderate Anglicans, as they themselves seem to recognize at certain points in *Letters*. Norris's preface, wherein he is at some pains to align himself not only with popular mystics like St Theresa and Thomas à Kempis but with St Augustine and the respected Arthur Lake, Bishop of Bath and Wells (1569–1626), amounts to a preemptive strike against accusations of singularity; Norris even adds a 'Postscript to the Preface' to demonstrate yet one more coincidence between his thesis and the 'Judgment of a whole Society of great Men, no less than the illustrious *Port Royal* of *France*' – a telling marker of his continued anxiety on this point (68.16–17). As one would expect, no such protest could prevent charges of religious irrationality or enthusiasm – the contemporary canard of choice – from being leveled at Norris and Astell by critics, enemies, and satirists.[66] Nevertheless, however extreme their arguments for the exclusive love of God may have seemed to some, Astell and Norris were certainly not alone in attempting to check the growing tide of enlightened skepticism – 'this cold frozen Age of ours', Norris warns, has a 'great deal of Knowledge now adays and but little Love' for God (62.20, 27) – through literalist appeals to Scripture and traditionalist defences of Christian mystery; by the middle of the eighteenth century, Isaac Watts, John Law, and John Wesley, not to mention George Whitefield, would make the warmth of Astell and Norris a commonplace of religious commitment.

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[65] As mentioned above (13), the Cambridge Platonists popularized one such version of this idea by their frequent references to Proverbs 20:27 – 'The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord'. As Daniel Walker Howe explains, 'the mind, or reason, was the "candle of the LORD" because it was the divine light vouchsafed to guide humanity through the pitfalls of this life' (471). Norris equates human reason to the '*Candle of the Lord*' in 'The Christian Law Asserted and Vindicated' (*Miscellanies* 225).

[66] In a March 16, 1697 letter to Locke, Molyneux refers to Norris as 'an obscure enthusiastic man' (Locke, *Works*, 8:404). The irrepressible hack Thomas D'Urfey satirized the Platonic abstractions of Norris's *Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World* in his own *An Essay Towards the Theory of the Intelligible World Intuitively Considered* (1700; given the dates of Norris's work, 1701–4, this misdating may be part of the satire). Perry, *Astell*, 111, notes that Astell was represented in 1705 as 'the abstracted and pedantic Valeria' in Susanna Centlivre's comedy *The Bassett Table*. In 1709, Astell was twice mockingly portrayed in *The Tatler* – either by Steele or by Swift – as an otherworldly projector named Madonella; see nos. 32 and 63. For an excellent summary of the satire (and a persuasive if not compelling argument for Swift's authorship), see Perry, 228–30. As we shall see, Damaris Masham attacked both Norris and Astell as irrational enthusiasts at best, crypto-Catholics at worst, in her *Discourse Concerning the Love of God* (1696).

There was, of course, one contemporary figure who managed to encompass (or who was accused of encompassing) almost every position against which Norris and Astell stood in *Letters*: John Locke. Where Norris and Astell called on readers to disregard the 'fallacious Reports of [their] Senses' (*Letters* 122.12) in any search for true knowledge, Locke had proffered 'SENSATION' as one of the 'two Fountains of Knowledge' in his monumental *Essay* (*ECHU* II.1.3.105; II.1.2.104). Where Norris and Astell's philosophy relied on a combination of Malebranche's Occasionalism and St Paul's formulation that we have our being in God, Locke hesitated to endorse a literal understanding of Acts 17:28, and he responded with hostility to the 'absurdity' of Malebranche's and Norris's arguments in two posthumously published essays.[67] Where Cartesian dualism provided a philosophical *terminus a quo* for Astell and Norris, Locke had suggested ever so gently and haltingly in *Essay* the possibility that matter *could* – just maybe – think.[68] Like Astell and Norris, Locke was a professed Christian. But he was also possibly taking a Socinian posture – it certainly seemed so to his enemies – and, in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), he elaborated a Christianity trimmed of the mysterious elaborations that the authors of *Letters* deeply valued, a simplification that drew immediate fire from many who perceived, if nothing else, a lack of ardour in his faith. Locke, appropriately enough, stood opposite from Norris and Astell in the Toleration debate, another 'test' of religious ardour, as evidenced by his three *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1690, 1690, 1692).[69]

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[67] For Locke's uncertainty regarding the meaning of this verse, see *ECHU* II.13.26.179. Locke quotes 'the inspired Philosopher St. *Paul*' in the course of his argument that 'our *Idea* of *Space* is … distinct from that of *Body*'; he suggests that the expanse between objects might be the place of God, who undoubtedly 'fills Immensity' without being material (II.15.3.197). As John W. Yolton notes, for Locke, 'God is specially linked with space' (69).

For Locke's critiques of Malebranche and Norris, see 'An Examination of P. Malebranche's Opinion of Seeing all Things in God' (first printed, 1706), and 'Remarks Upon Some of Mr. Norris's Books' (first printed, 1720). Charlotte Johnston has demonstrated that both essays were composed in 1693, and share a common genesis in a hastily composed and unpublished critique of Norris written in 1692. In 1695, Locke pondered adding a chapter to his *Essay* that would lay open 'the vanity, and inconsistency, and unintelligibleness of that way of explaining Human understanding' (*Correspondence of John Locke* 5:287), suggesting that, at this time, as Heather Lawson has argued, he perceived in Malebranche and Norris a real threat to his own system. He decided against doing so, however, and by the time of his death in 1704, Locke had come to believe that Malebranche's 'opinion' was 'like to die of itself' (letter of October 25, 1704 to Peter King; quoted in Cranston 478).

[68] Locke writes, 'We have the *Ideas* of *Matter* and *Thinking*, but possibly shall never be able to know, whether any mere material Being thinks, or no; it being impossible for us, by the contemplation of our own *Ideas*, without revelation, to discover, whether Omnipotency has not given to some Systems of Matter fitly disposed, a power to perceive and think, or else joined and fixed to Matter so disposed, a thinking immaterial Substance: It being, in respect of our Notions, not much more remote from our Comprehension to conceive, that GOD can, if he pleases, superadd to Matter a Faculty of Thinking, than that he should superadd to it another Substance, with a Faculty of Thinking; since we know not wherein Thinking consists, nor to what sort of Substances the Almighty has been pleased to give that Power, which cannot be in any created Being, but merely by the good pleasure and Bounty of the Creator' (*ECHU* IV.3.6.540–41). Astell will ridicule Locke unmercifully for offering this suggestion in her 'Appendix' to *Christian Religion* (2nd ed.), reprinted here in Appen-

Nevertheless, *Letters* does not constitute a direct assault on Locke; not once is he mentioned by name or by direct reference. This apparent lacuna is probably largely the result of timing. Astell and Norris were writing, it should be remembered, in 1694. *The Reasonableness of Christianity* had yet to be published; Locke's debate with Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester, over the theological implications of Locke's philosophy, conducted in a series of open letters between 1696–99, had yet to occur. Springborg has demonstrated Astell's knowledge, perhaps as early as 1700, of Locke's authorship of the Whig manifesto *Two Treatises of Government*, published anonymously in 1690 ('Astell, Critic of Locke'). Even at this, Astell – always a true blue Tory, eventually a significant political pamphleteer in the service of her party – was years away from her discovery of Locke's political cravenness (in her eyes). Norris, we might recall, ended his *Cursory Reflections* on Locke's *Essay* cordially in 1690; even four years later, neither he nor Astell seems to have realized the magnitude of the sea-change the *Essay* constituted in all matters of human inquiry. Norris, furthermore, had been enjoying the fruits of Locke's intervention with the Earl of Pembroke (the living at Bemerton) for only two years; and though he and Locke had, in fact, recently fallen out over a strictly personal matter, the strain in their relationship has no apparent bearing on Norris's letters to Astell. He may have considered Locke an annoyance, but he did not perceive him as a nemesis – nor, for that matter, did his correspondent.[70]

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dix Three. For a good discussion of the many other hostile responses Locke elicited on this point, including ones by Bayle, Stillingfleet, Clarke, and Watts, see chap. 1 of Yolton's *Thinking Matter*, 'Locke's Suggestion' (14–28). Yolton does not mention Astell.

[69] Locke's theological thought has come under extensive study in recent years, including two fine editions of *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, first, for the Clarendon Edition of Locke's Works, ed. John C. Higgens-Biddle, and second, by Victor Nuovo, in *John Locke: Writings on Religion*. We have cited Nuovo's text herein because it is priced for the common reader, and because he includes in his volume Locke's *First Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), referred to several times by Astell in her attack on Locke (Appendix Three).

[70] In late 1692, Locke came to the conclusion that Norris had opened a letter he had agreed to deliver from Damaris Masham to Locke; Norris's protestations of innocence were greeted with increasing sarcasm. See *Correspondence of Locke*, 4:577–78, 595, 631, 644–45. Johnston connects Locke's anger over this event to his initial outline for a philosophical

Nowhere is this fact more evident than in the two-letter 'Appendix' to *Letters*, instigated, as with the main correspondence, by a query sent to Norris from Astell. Written just prior to publication, the exchange constitutes, to use Perry's word, Astell's 'disclaimer' to the stringent Occasionalism she and Norris had proffered in what was to become the main body of the text. Though she had formerly 'conceded' Norris's point '*That* GOD *is the only efficient Cause of all our Sensation*', she now worries that Occasionalism 'renders a great Part of *GOD*'s Workmanship vain and useless' (*Letters* 131.19, 23–24). Why not steer a middle course, Astell wondered, between the Scylla of materialism on the one hand, the Charybdis of immaterialism on the other, as had the Cambridge Platonists, among them Norris's 'Friend Dr. *More*' (132.5)?[71] If, for example, one allowed a '*sensible Congruity*' (132.3) to exist between the soul and the bodies that determine its sensations, one could protect, at the same time, the 'Majesty of *GOD*', who alone could create a self-contained system of material causes and immaterial effects, and the importance of 'his Servant Nature', which now would have a purpose for existing (132.19–20). The need to love God fully in this system remained, for whatever 'Power' creatures have to affect us 'is not originally from themselves' (133.13). Unlike in their first exchange, Norris this time gave no ground, insisting that Occasionalism is a 'Proposition of the most incontestable and philosophick Evidence', and pointing Astell to the materialist implications of her 'middle Way' (133.32, 134.39ff.).

It is worth noting that Astell never mentions Locke by name in this letter of compromise. Nevertheless, her argument, as Perry has noted (*Astell* 79), is altogether Lockean, if unwittingly; what Hill claims of Astell's 'last letters' (49) is an apt description of the spirit, at least, of her last *letter*: 'In her last letters to Norris she was at some pains to reconcile his views with those of Locke'.[72] The evident pleasure Astell took in appearing (even anonymously) in print with an established intellectual whom she personally admired overwhelmed any qualms she may have

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attack on Norris, likewise penned in 1692; Lawson, however, has effectively argued that Locke's concern with Norris's philosophical challenge likely predated any personal misunderstanding, and strongly suggests the possibility that Locke's philosophical reply – through surrogates – came first.

[71] Astell points to the primary reason Norris should not be considered a Cambridge Platonist – namely, his refusal to compromise a strict understanding of Cartesian dualism. See above, note 28.

[72] In his 'Remarks Upon Some of Mr. Norris's Books', Locke writes: 'how will [Norris and Malebranche] reconcile to this principle of theirs, on which their whole system is built, the curious structure of the eye and ear; not to mention the other parts of the body? For if the perception of colours and sounds depended on nothing but the presence of the object affording an occasional cause to God Almighty to exhibit to the mind the idea of figures, colours, and sounds, all that nice and curious structure of those organs is wholly in vain' (*Works* 9:249).

had about Norris's proposal for publication – indeed, her initial coyness at first seems little more than the obligatory reticence, expressed with the usual (for the time) baroque courtesy and polity. She was not, however, ready to align herself in public completely with Norris's unflinching devotion to Malebranchean theocentrism. At least, not yet.

Norris and Astell After *Letters*

As the seventeenth century drew to a close and the eighteenth century began, Norris's commitment to the principles of *Letters* continued unwavering. At the same time, Norris grew more and more suspicious of Locke, whose insistence on tracing all knowledge to individual experience, he increasingly worried, was not only philosophically wrong, but also theologically and morally dangerous. In compiling the arguments of *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696), arguably the opening salvo of English Deism, John Toland relied heavily on Locke's *Essay*. Despite Locke's quick rejection of Toland, he was attacked as a partner in crime by defenders of orthodoxy like Bishop Stillingfleet; and Norris published his own reply to Toland, *An Account of Reason and Faith, In Relation to the Mysteries of Christianity*, in 1697.[73] While in *Cursory Reflections*, his first critique of Locke, Norris had claimed that Locke's *Essay* deserved 'the most publick Honour and Respect', by the time of his final sustained comment on Locke's philosophy in 1704, the *Essay* had become, in Norris's mind, 'consistent with *Atheism*' (*Theory of the Ideal World* 2:553).[74] Ballard, writing in 1752, strikes the appropriately antipodal balance between the two figures: '[Norris's] divinity and philosophy is well known to differ very much', he laconically notes, from that of Locke (332). There would be no reconciliation; Locke died in the same year that Norris published this final damning appraisal, and Norris moved on to other debates, most importantly with Henry Dodwell over the natural immortality of the soul in 1708–9.[75]

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[73] Young notes that, his sympathies with many avowed Socinians notwithstanding, Locke 'had no time for those, such as John Toland, who had seen in his theological pronouncements the high road to a Christianity purged of Mystery and Trinitarian dogma' (27). Cf. J. C. Biddle, 'Locke's Critique', 422, which Young cites; Biddle writes, 'although Toland and later Deists drew heavily upon his philosophy, Locke seems not to have been an intentional party to their emphasis on reason and natural religion. Rather, as an opponent of the Deists and a defender of revelation, he sought a simple, moral Christianity based on faith'.

[74] Norris's magnum opus never reached a second edition. This passage is quoted in Patrick Grant, 189.

[75] See Norris's *A Philosophical Discourse Concerning the Natural Immortality of the Soul … Occasioned by Mr. Dodwell's Late Epistolary Discourse* (1708) and his *A Letter to Mr. Dodwell, Concerning the Immortality of the Soul of Man* (1709; appended to *A Philosophical Discourse* in subsequent editions). The crux of Dodwell's argument is aptly summarized by its

There were also personal reasons for Norris's growing animosity toward Locke, ones relating directly to responses generated by the publication of *Letters*. Two dissenting replies appeared in 1696. Dr. Daniel Whitby, precentor of Salisbury 'and thus', Acworth notes, 'Norris's close neighbor' (175), attacked Norris in *Discourse of the Love of God*. In his 'An Admonition Concerning two late Books call'd *Discourses of the Love of God*', included in the fourth volume of *Practical Discourses* (1698), Norris admits his surprise at being 'so publickly assaulted by a Neighbour and a Friend' (393), but spends limited space (roughly thirty pages) defending himself from what amounts to caricatures of his actual positions[76]; that Norris was married did not, as Whitby contends, disprove his argument in *Letters* (127). However weak his criticism, Whitby had, as Norris acknowledged, at least treated him with a modicum of 'Civility and Respect' – which could not be said for the anonymous author of the second attack on *Letters*, entitled *Discourse Concerning the Love of God*.

Reading these works now, it is difficult to disagree with Norris that the second *Discourse* treats him with 'Disdain and Contempt' ('Admonition' 382). Norris's inducements for publishing *Letters*, according to its author, were 'Weakness' or 'Vanity' (*Discourse*, Preface, A2^{v}). No 'Intelligent' person could be drawn to his 'Visionary' scheme, which repeats the 'Fault of those in the Church of Rome' by elaborating 'idle, superstitious, and pompous Shows' in place of true religion (3).

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title: *An Epistolary Discourse proving from the Scriptures and the first Fathers, that the Soul is a Principle naturally Mortal, but immortalised actually by the pleasure of God … by its union with the Divine Baptismal Spirit* (1706). Like Samuel Clarke, who had the more famous debate with Dodwell, Norris argued for the natural immortality of the soul; unlike Clarke, who did so on strictly dualistic and essentialist grounds (i.e., the soul, being immaterial, must be immortal), Norris took the more rhetorically sophisticated route of agreeing with one of Dodwell's main premises in order to dismantle his full argument. The soul *is*, as Dodwell maintained, immortal because God renders it so by a positive law; but this is true for all creation, which, 'without the continu'd Influence' of God, 'could not subsist for one Moment' (*Philosophical Discourse* 47). The soul's immortality is superadded to its being according to God's natural order; but as created, it is immortal, and Dodwell's argument is rendered moot. Norris's responses are everywhere marked by his continued endorsement of Platonic and Malebranchean thought.

[76] Or, as Norris puts it, his two opponents fight, 'not with me, but with a shadow of their own' ('Admonition' 401). As Acworth notes, Whitby 'devoted most of his book to proving that one could legitimately desire one's food and drink and other earthly goods. However, Whitby used the terms "love" and "desire" in a much broader sense than did Norris, with the result that his book was spent labouring the proof of things that Norris never intended to deny' (176). Perhaps Whitby's most serious charge, however, is that Norris's fascination with Malebranche's 'spick and span new Philosophy' (Whitby 19) has created a rupture in his own thinking; he frequently quotes phrases from Norris's early works, in particular *Miscellanies*, in an effort to demonstrate that they contradict the theocentric theory of love presented in *Letters* (e.g., Whitby 70–72, 105, 111, 116, 118, 127, and *passim*).

His and Astell's 'Pompous Rhapsodies' show 'contempt' for God's 'Works' (27). Only a head '*cast in a Metaphysical Mould*' (35) is capable of believing that God's creatures have no efficient causality.[77] Such *ad hominem* attacks would have rankled Norris's sense of fair play whomever the author; but Norris presumes to know both the identity of his 'Adversary' – he is sure it is Locke – and Locke's reasons for venting his 'Spleen and Prejudice' on Norris: 'whatever shews of Zeal for Truth or Religion may swim at top, there is an old Grudge at the Bottom' (the 'opened' letter to Masham, no doubt [see note 70]). Locke had met with 'different Treatment' from Norris, Norris reminds him, 'upon a like public Occasion' ('Admonition' 382–85), clearly a reference to the *Cursory Reflections* on Locke's *Essay*.

Norris had good reasons for ascribing the anonymously published *Discourse* to Locke. In the first place, as Acworth notes, the book 'was printed for Awnsham and John Churchill, who were then Locke's publishers' (175). In the second place, the unspecified falling out with Locke allowed Norris to 'partly Guess' why he had 'used [Norris] thus' ('Admonition' 383). In the third place, and probably most importantly, the argument of *Discourse* is thoroughly Lockean.[78] In the *Essay*, Locke had insisted that all our ideas, even our idea of God, derive ultimately from the material world we perceive through our senses: 'the visible marks of extraordinary Wisdom and Power, appear so plainly in all the Works of the Creation, that a rational Creature, who will but seriously reflect on them, cannot miss the discovery of a *Deity*' (*ECHU* I.4.9.89). And again, in Book II: 'We are furnished with Faculties … to discover enough in the Creatures, to lead us to the Knowledge of the Creator' (*ECHU* II.23.12.302).[79] It is 'by the Existence of the Creatures', wrote the author of *Discourse*, that 'we come to know there is a Creator' (65). 'God is an invisible Being: And it is by his Works, that we are led both to know, and to love him' (62).

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[77] Masham, the anonymous author, is actually parodying Norris, who used the phrase as a quite serious description of the truly learned in a work he dedicated to Masham, *Reflections Upon the Conduct of Human Life:* 'unless he be of a *Notional Complexion*, and has his Head cast in a *Metaphysical Mould*', a person can never arrive, Norris there claimed, at true 'Clearness and Distinctness of Conception' (43). Interestingly enough, Whitby also incorporated this phrase into his attack on Norris and Astell: 'And so must all at present, whose heads are not cast in *Metaphysical Moulds*, [be] thought uncapable of this fine Speculation, and therefore [be] forced still to believe the Scripture …' (19).

[78] For an unconvincing defence of Masham's originality in *Discourse*, see Springborg's 'Astell, Masham, and Locke'; Springborg believes the fact that Masham 'reproduced none of Locke's arguments verbatim', only 'alluding to and developing his ideas' in 'some important instances', offers 'testimony to her independence of mind' (113).

[79] Locke is paraphrasing Romans 1:20, the common scriptural source for deriving God's existence, and bounty, from His creation: 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse'.

The author of *Discourse* also makes ingenious use of Locke's discussion of '*Mixed Modes*', or complex ideas (*ECHU* II.12–13). According to Locke, all complex ideas – God, for instance, but less weighty concepts like 'theft' as well – arise as individuals reflect on and extrapolate from the simple ideas they acquire through their senses. Thus, the author of *Discourse* argues, the complex 'Idea of Love' must come from 'the first Objects of our Love', which even Norris and Astell admit is not God, but 'the Objects that surround' and 'please us' (63). Far from creatures depleting the love that rightfully belongs to God, then, it is only by first acquiring the idea of love from His creatures that we can ever apply that idea to the Creator. Thus, 'if any could be without the Love of the Creatures, they would be without the Love of God also' (63–65). Norris and Astell's argument is completely backward, according to the author of *Discourse* – and completely unreasonable. Indeed, were the positions outlined in *Letters* 'Preach'd by our Divines', they would drive away not only 'many who find Christianity a very Reasonable Religion', but even those who might at the very least become Deists instead of remaining 'Atheists or Sceptics' (71). Such backdoor approval of Deism suited perfectly, Norris assumed, the author of *Reasonableness of Christianity*.

Norris was wrong. Locke had not written *Discourse*; instead, its author was Damaris Masham, Locke's female disciple, at whose Oates estate Locke was then in residence.[80] Masham, it will be remembered, was formerly Norris's correspondent and friend, to whom he had dedicated both *Theory and Regulation of Love* and *Reflections Upon the Conduct of Human Life*. In *Reflections*, in an open letter to Masham, Norris refers to 'your beloved *Malebranche*', 'your excellent *Malebranche*', 'your Friend *M. Malebranche*' (36, 37, 83), implying that Masham was at least at the time of writing within the fold of English Malebrancheans. However true this may once have been – or was it merely wishful thinking on Norris's part? – it certainly was not true when Masham came to write *Discourse*. '*The extravagance*' and '*the weakness*' of Norris's arguments, Masham there writes, result from their being '*built upon the Principles of* Pere Malbranche [sic]' (Preface A3$^{a\text{-}b}$); it was from his 'Oracle *Pere Malebranche*' that Norris came to favour the 'Popish Superstition' that truly to love God, 'it is then absolutely necessary to renounce the World' (124–25, 120).

What was even worse from Masham's perspective, Norris did not fall into his Catholic absurdities alone: 'These Opinions of Mr. *N.* seem also to indanger the introducing, especially amongst those whose Imaginations are stronger than their

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[80] Sarah Hutton explains that Locke and Masham had been correspondents for several years before Locke returned from exile in 1688 and took up residence at Oates, first as a 'guest', then as a 'permanent resident' (31). She believes, 41, that Masham reveals herself as 'Locke's disciple in philosophy' in *Discourse* and in *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life* (1705) – a response to Astell's *Christian Religion* – but she stresses Masham's intellectual independence in her letters to Locke, in particular her affinity for Platonism, as well as the thoughtfulness with which she adopts Locke's principles.

Reason', she warns, 'a Devout way of talking; which having no sober, and intelligible sense under it', will lead either to 'an Insensibility of Religion', or 'will turn to as wild an Enthusiasm as any that has yet been 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' (120). No one actually acquainted with 'Monasteries, and Religious Houses, (as they are call'd)' doubted that they contained as much 'Pride, Malice, and Faction' as the outside world – and 'very often as much licentiousness' (126).

This was, of course, a direct assault on Astell, who had corresponded in 'Devout' terms with Norris in *Letters*, and who had famously recommended the establishment of a Protestant '*Monastery*', or '*Religious Retirement*', as a means for women to escape a world of 'Pride, Malice, Faction' and 'licentiousness'. (That Masham had turned Astell's religious utopia into a bawdy house must have been particularly infuriating to the sexually restrained Astell.) Like Norris, Astell believed Locke had authored *Discourse*; she and Norris must have discussed the matter before 1698, for Norris mentions her forthcoming response as one reason for his not replying at length to 'Mr. *L*——'.[81] It thus appears that the seeds of Astell's comprehensive renouncement of Locke in *The Christian Religion* began to germinate between 1697–98, some seven years before the work would appear in print, and just *after* the printing of *Serious Proposal, Part II* (1697), where Astell continued to hold her middling position between Locke's empiricism and Norris's theosophy by avoiding either a direct rejection of the one or an unqualified endorsement of the other.[82]

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[81] Norris writes: 'I was inclining once to have made some Remarks upon the particular Arguments, together with other incidental Passages that run through the Bulk of their Discourses, but a Kind and Ingenious Hand has saved me that Pains [sic] in relation to Mr. *L*——' ('Admonition' 423–24).

[82] Perry has accurately called *Serious Proposal, Part II* 'a training manual for Norris's brand of Christian Platonism' (*Astell* 83); we should note, however, that Astell continues to distance herself in this work, as she had at the end of *Letters*, from Norris's specific theories. She makes no mention, for instance, of Occasionalism; and regarding the 'Notion That we see all things in GOD', Astell dispassionately writes that whatever 'may be as to the Truth of it, 'tis certainly very commendable for its Piety' (117). In her introduction and annotations, Springborg characterizes *Serious Proposal, Part II* as a full-fledged attack on Locke, but were this the case, it would be difficult to explain the enormous shift in tone and directness between that work and *Christian Religion* regarding Locke. It seems more likely that Astell is only rarely thinking specifically of Locke in the earlier text, if at all – probably because she had not yet read Masham's infuriating *Discourse* (which she took to be Locke's) when *Serious Proposal, Part II* went to press. Astell's one explicit reference to Locke in this work is actually quite commendatory: 'But this is not a place to say all that this Subject [i.e., the proper use of particles in speech and writing] deserves; they who wou'd have much in a little, may consult an Ingenious Author who has touch'd upon't'; the note indicates Locke, *ECHU*, III.7. See Taylor, 'Mary Astell's Ironic Assault'.

It is impossible to say precisely what prompted Astell finally to take sides against Locke in *Christian Religion*, but it is clear that, by 1705, Locke had become abhorrent to Astell in every possible way – theologically, politically, philosophically, and personally.[83] *Christian Religion* takes the form of an open letter to Lady Catherine Jones in response to the anonymously published *The Ladys Religion* (1697), a terse simplification of Christian doctrine aimed at Astell's putatively weak-minded sex, but with a covert, indeed insidious intent in her eyes: 'the *Ladies Religion* seems to be little else but an Abstract of the *Reasonableness of Christianity*' ('Appendix' 229.32–33); she thus sees no reason not to intersperse criticisms of Locke throughout her text.[84] Astell mocks Locke's indirect response to charges of Socinianism, for instance, noting that 'it agrees better with some Men's *Logick and Grammar* to *ask themselves the question, what if I shou'd say I am no Socinian?* than to say in plain terms, that they are not *Socinians*' (223.6–8),[85] and she pounces on Locke's unwillingness to subscribe explicitly to Trinitarianism in *Reasonableness of Christianity*.

Locke's appeal to social contract theory as a justification for the revolution of 1688 in *Two Treatises of Government* likewise elicits Astell's ire; in a particularly biting apostrophe to the Tory-leaning Queen Anne, whose victories are 'truly Glorious in that they do not dispossess a Rightful Owner', Astell envisions a time when '*the Name of the Wicked* who dispossess Lawful Sovereigns, who destroy *GOD*'s Heritage, and root up the Order and Government of His Church, *shall Rot*' ('Appendix' 235.28–31). And though the world deems Locke a 'great Philosopher', his scope, she finds, is severely limited by his materialism.[86]

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[83] Cf. Springborg's comment that in *Christian Religion*, Astell considers Locke 'a Socinian, an Epicurean, a party man, and a defender of liberty, property, choice, and Dissent' ('Astell, Critic of Locke' [629]).

[84] All of Astell's criticisms of Locke are present in each of the three lifetime editions of *Christian Religion* (1705, 1717, 1730), but most of them have been gathered together and relocated in a final 'Appendix' of fifty-three numbered sections in the second edition (reprinted without significant alteration for the third edition). See 'Editor's Note' to Appendix Three.

[85] Astell is quoting Locke's *Vindication of The Reasonableness of Christianity, &c. From Mr. Edwards's Reflections* (1695). John Edwards (1637–1716), whom Nuovo describes as 'an Anglican divine of moderate Calvinist outlook but intemperate disposition' (*Locke: Writings on Religion* li), had attacked Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Several Causes and Occasions of Atheism, … With Some Brief Reflections on Socinianism and on A Late Book Entituled 'The Reasonableness of Christianity'* (1695). Locke's second *Vindication* appeared in 1697, as did Edwards's second attack.

[86] In a passage Astell elected not to move to her 'Appendix', but that is clearly aimed at Locke's philosophy, she laments:

> IT is the misery of our Deprav'd Nature to be too fast ty'd to Sensible things, to be strongly, and in a manner wholly affected with them… . Most Men are so Sensualiz'd,

Furthermore, his hypothesis of thinking matter is contradictory even on his own terms; Astell can as readily prove a triangle could be a square as Locke can demonstrate that matter could think – but if she did, 'wou'd not that Great Master of good Sense, despise such sort of Discourses as the *Rhapsodys* and *strong Imaginations of* a silly Woman' (239.21–22)? Astell's sarcastic quotation of Masham's appraisal of her in *Discourse* (Astell, it should be remembered, believed she had been attacked directly by Locke) is characteristic of the sardonic note of personal offence that runs throughout *Christian Religion*, particularly in the many references to Masham's text. Perry notes that Astell's 'indignation at the insulting phrases of the *Discourse* seems quite fresh after nine years' (*Astell* 88). In a sense, the insults *were* fresh; as Norris's reference in 1698 to Astell's forthcoming response to *Discourse* indicates, *Christian Religion* developed over the course of years, not months. It is as if Astell were all that time patiently gathering evidence, even when distracted by important events like the death of the Duchess of Mazarin in 1699[87] and the pamphlet war over Toleration in 1704, for one final devastating critique of a thinker she had come completely to reject.

With Astell's repudiation of Locke came a renewed commitment to the theocentric positions outlined in the main body of *Letters* – precisely those positions from which Astell had attempted to distance herself in her final letter to Norris. Springborg suggests that with *Christian Religion*, 'Astell brings her theology full circle, back to the point at which she began *Letters Concerning the Love of God* in defence of Malebranche' (*Serious Proposal, I and II*, xxxiii). 'Theosophy' is probably a more accurate word, Norris probably the more direct object of her defence. Astell resubscribes to Occasionalism, for instance, in terms strikingly similar to those Norris had employed in his response to Astell's final dissenting letter. Norris had explained that 'the Bodies that are about us are not the true Causes of those Sensations which we feel at their Presence, but … *GOD* only is the Cause of them, who being the Author of our Beings has the sole Power to act upon our Spirits, and to give them new Modifications. I say *Modifications*, for that well expresses the general Nature of Sensation' (*Letters* 133.33–37). In answer to those who 'write *Discourses* to persuade us, that we are under no necessity of taking our Affections off the Creature to place them solely on the Creator' ('Appendix' 233.38–39),

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> that they take nothing to be Real but what they can Hear and See, or which is some way or other the Object of their Senses. Others, who wou'd seem the most refin'd, make Sensation the fund of their Ideas, carrying their Contemplations no farther than these, and the Reflections they make upon the operations of their Minds when thus employ'd… . But the Contemplation of Immaterial Beings and Abstracted Truths, which are the Noblest Objects of the Mind, is look'd on as Chimerical and a sort of Madness; and the studying to live up to the pure Morals of the Gospel, is in their account Visionary. (*Christian Religion* 209)

[87] The Duchess's marriage to, and inability legally to separate from, her monstrous husband served as the impetus for Astell's *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700).

Astell silently invokes Norris's argument in order to prove that a person may engage in such 'material' pleasures as eating and drinking without removing any of her love from God:

> If meditation and a just disquisition of Truth has carry'd you beyond the prejudices of sense, you are convinc'd that GOD is the True Efficient Cause of all our Good, of all our pleasing Sensations, and that without any reflection on the Purity of His Nature. You look thro' the Creature to the Creator as the Author of all your Delight, and thus every morsel gives a double Pleasure, considering the hand that feeds you, or to speak more correctly, the Power of GOD giving you divers modifications. (234.36–42)

If in *Christian Religion* Occasionalism trumps Locke's misguided fixation on the physical senses, 'the Hypothesis of *seeing all things in GOD*' proves equally valuable as a response to his Socinianism, because it provides, Astell writes, 'a better answer than any Hypothesis I have met with, to the trifling and unreasonable Objections … against the Divinity of the Son of GOD' (229.36–230.1). And where Norris had warned that Astell's attempt to pose a middle-way between mind and matter 'may justly be used as an Argument *á Posteriori*' to prove that matter thinks (*Letters* 138.30–31), Astell now found herself using Norris's Platonic version of Cartesian dualism to prove that Locke's suggestion of thinking matter relied on a perverse confusion of essences. One may as well suppose, Astell wryly insists, a triangle could speak (see esp. section 33, '*His Argument for Matter's being capable of Thought destroy'd by his own Principles*' ['Appendix' 238.30ff.]), her compromise between spirit and matter – and between Norris and Locke – having been utterly abandoned.[88]

The relationship between the authors of *Letters* is best characterized as dialectical, not antagonistic – to their own detriment, according to the old historical model. If, as was argued for most of the twentieth century, the liberal, secular, Whig agenda amounted to an enlightenment juggernaut, the unstoppable ascension of which culminated in the nineteenth century, then Norris and Astell's *Letters* might indeed be said to hold 'little but historic interest' (Hill 8) – which means, one assumes, that since they 'lost' the debate with Locke, their ideas amount to extinct lines in an evolutionary branch. Recent scholarship has begun, however, to suggest the strength of the undercurrents against the secular wave of 'enlightenment', and just how many seminal figures of the eighteenth century kept one foot in the light, one in the shadows, so to speak. George Cheyne, William Law, Isaac Watts, Samuel Richardson, John Wesley, Laurence Sterne, Samuel Johnson, Elizabeth Carter – are these enlightenment figures? Counter-enlightenment figures? Both? The ‘historical interest’ of *Letters* lies in recognizing how frequently such questions, and such figures, lead us back to a correspondence, both literal and figurative, ‘*Between the Author of the Proposal to the Ladies and Mr. John Norris*’.

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[88] As Taylor has argued elsewhere ('Mary Astell's Ironic Assault'), Astell must have been horrified to find in Masham's infuriating *Discourse* a precise restatement of the position Astell had adopted in the appendix to *Letters*; Masham writes, 'that we do receive all our good from the Hand of God, is equally acknowledged whether we believe the creature receives an Efficiency from God to excite pleasing Sensations in us; Or that God himself exhibiting part of his Essence to us, at the presence of the Creature, is himself the immediate Author of those Pleasing Sensations: Which is the Hypothesis proposed [in *Letters*]' (26).