

*A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*  
**Mary Astell**

*Readability:* **Easy**

*Possible Applications:*

Philosophy of Mind (cognition, will, rationality, prejudice)

Social philosophy (women's equality, custom, prejudice, vice)

*Complimentary Texts/Resources:*

Alice Sowaal, "Mary Astell's *Serious Proposal*: Mind, Method and Custom"

Sowaal explicates Astell's view of cognition in order to better explicate and understand her position on the causes and remedies for women's inequality.

SEP article on Astell:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/astell/>

Women-philosophers.com on Astell:

<http://www.women-philosophers.com/Mary-Astell.html>

*Editions:*

Most easily available version is in Atherton's *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*:

<http://www.amazon.com/Women-Philosophers-Early-Modern-Period/dp/0872202593/>

But there are complete versions available. Patricia Springborg is the editor of the commonly-used editions:

<http://catalog.library.georgetown.edu/record=b2130592~S4>

<http://catalog.library.georgetown.edu/record=b2072189~S4>

<http://www.amazon.com/Serious-Proposal-Ladies-Broadview-Literary/dp/1551113066/>

*Thesis:*

Astell argues that women are not defective by nature, that is, that they are just as capable as men of understanding the world and (thereby) comporting themselves correctly in it. Only by removing themselves from society (in part I) or by developing basic knowledge of the world and God (in part II) can women free themselves of the pernicious prejudices of custom that take them to be incapable of learning (or virtue).

*Key Definitions:*

understanding: the faculty of the mind which seeks/ascertains truth, via its acquisition and inspection of its ideas

will: the faculty of the mind which seeks the good (i.e., God's will), and precipitates (voluntary) action

prejudice: an opinion or belief that is held without rational consideration, fomented by education, authority or (usually) custom

ignorance/vice: vice is the failure of the will to will regularly, ignorance is the failure of the will to grasp the truth (and thereby fail to properly regulate the will)

*Summary:*

*Class Activities:*