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# Mary Astell's Ironic Assault on John Locke's Theory of Thinking Matter

*E. Derek Taylor*

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Mary Astell (1666-1731), most famous today for her call for the establishment of Protestant nunneries in *Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part I* (1694) and for her acute *Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700), has lurked for years at the edges of that infinitely contentious category "feminism," but she is only now beginning to receive her rightful inheritance as a theological and philosophical thinker, probably the title she would most have preferred.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that Astell's Christian-Platonism has been ignored. In her 1986 biography Ruth Perry gave cogent expression to the centrality of Astell's idealist Christianity to all aspects of her thought<sup>2</sup> and in the same year, Bridget Hill thoughtfully warned her readers against attempting to force Astell, a religious conservative, "into some preconceived idea of what late seventeenth and early eighteenth century feminism ought to have been."<sup>3</sup> More recently, Patricia Springborg has written two significant essays that rely in part on Astell's more neglected theological-philosophical works, *Letters concerning the Love of God* (1695), a collection of Astell's correspondence with John Norris of Bemerton (1657-1711), and *The Christian Religion, As Professed by a Daughter of the Church of England* (1705; 3d edition 1730), far and away her most developed theological-philosophical

<sup>1</sup> This essay was researched and written with the help of an award from the Aubrey Williams Research Travel Fund (American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies) for which I give thanks. Astell's *Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part I* and *Part II* (1694; 1697) were reprinted in 1970 by Source Book Press; all of *Part I* and excerpts from *Part II* were included in Bridget Hill's 1986 collection of Astell's "feminist" statements, *The First English Feminist* (New York, 1986), 139-79. References are to Patricia Springborg's definitive edition of *Part I* and *Part II* (London, 1997), hereafter cited as *SPI* and *SPII*. *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), the lead piece of Hill's study, has been reprinted several times, most recently in Springborg's *Mary Astell (1666-1731): Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> See Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago, 1986), especially ch. 3: "The Self-Respect of a Reasoning Creature," 56-97.

<sup>3</sup> Hill, 53.

statement.<sup>4</sup> Despite these important forays, however, both *Letters* and *Christian Religion* continue to be largely ignored, as is suggested by the relative dearth of scholarly work on either text and the short shrift each receives in anthologies of Astell's works.<sup>5</sup> Despite the great popularity of *Letters* throughout the eighteenth century and despite the fact that, as Springborg points out, Astell considered *Christian Religion* "her *magnum opus*," neither text has found new life in a modern edition.<sup>6</sup>

This omission creates a rather vexing problem for would-be scholars of Astell's philosophical and theological ideas. The major primary texts themselves not being available, we have little choice but to rely on the limited accounts of other scholars for our information. Over a decade ago, for instance, *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* published a long note by Kathleen M. Squadrito on "Mary Astell's Critique of John Locke's View of Thinking Matter," and hers has since been the standard (if not quite only) account of this historically fascinating and important philosophical comment in *Christian Religion*.<sup>7</sup> Squadrito wants, she writes, to "present a short account of [Astell's] work and her criticism of Locke's view of thinking matter."<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, Squadrito's account of Astell's "work" is significantly flawed, which leads her to serious mischaracterizations of Astell's "criticism" of Locke's hypothesis. Briefly put, Astell's "own philosophy" in *Christian Religion* does not, as Squadrito claims, emerge "as an attempted reconciliation of the views of Norris and Locke"<sup>9</sup>; because she supposes it does, however, Squadrito is able to present Astell's critique of Locke's theory

<sup>4</sup> See Springborg, "Mary Astell (1666-1731), Critic of Locke," *American Political Science Review*, 89 (1995), 621-33; and Springborg, "Astell, Masham, and Locke: Religion and Politics" in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. Hilda L. Smith (Cambridge, 1998), 105-25. Mary Astell and John Norris, *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (London, 1695); and Mary Astell, *The Christian Religion as Professed by a Daughter of the Church of England* (London, 1730<sup>3</sup>), hereafter cited as *CR*.

<sup>5</sup> In Hill's *English Feminist*, for instance, Astell and Norris's *Letters* and Astell's *Christian Religion* are each afforded 5 pages.

<sup>6</sup> Springborg ("Astell, Masham, and Locke," 110) laments the lack of a modern edition for either *Letters* or *Christian Religion*, arguing that "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."

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen M. Squadrito, "Mary Astell's Critique of Locke's View of Thinking Matter," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), 433-39. Both Perry in the biography (95-96) and Springborg in her edition of *SP* (xxix-xxxiii) offer brief but useful synopses of Astell's response to Locke's hypothesis. In the first edition of *Christian Religion* Astell's criticisms of Locke's works are spread throughout, but in the second (1715) and third editions Astell has moved all of her *explicit* criticisms of Locke, including the critique of Locke's materialist hypothesis, to an appendix. One could interpret these changes in myriad ways, but perhaps Astell liked the idea of concentrating her important critiques of Locke into a single section, where before they had languished through dilution among her criticisms of the anonymously published *Ladies Religion* (1697).

<sup>8</sup> Squadrito, 433.

<sup>9</sup> Squadrito, 435.

of thinking matter as a respectful, even-handed philosophical analysis, a theoretical bridge, as it were, between the Platonism of Norris and the Empiricism of Locke. As we shall see, Astell's critique of Locke's hypothesis actually amounts to a bitterly ironic assault, wherein Astell does not so much build bridges as burn them. Just why Astell in *Christian Religion* decided not to strike a middling position between Locke and Norris, and how this decision invigorated her attack on Locke's materialist hypothesis, are the primary questions this essay seeks to answer. In order to arrive at such answers, however, it is necessary first to examine the text in which Astell *does* attempt to carve out a position between Locke and Norris, namely Astell and Norris's *Letters*.

The basic history of *Letters* is well enough understood. Mary Astell, a well-read young woman of significant perspicacity, first wrote in 1693 to the already famous Platonist (and disciple of Nicolas Malebranche [1638-1715]) John Norris with a question about Norris's thesis that God, as the efficient cause of all our good, should be the only object of our love; her letter initiated the correspondence later published in 1695. The text went through three editions (1695, 1705, 1730) and gained Astell a modicum of popularity. Sarah Chapone, one of novelist Samuel Richardson's mid-century correspondents, considered *Letters* Astell's "most sublime work."<sup>10</sup> She lent George Ballard her copy for his work on *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), where, in his entry on Astell, Ballard notes that her "letters have been much applauded for their good sense, sublime thoughts and fine language"; and he concludes, "if there was nothing more remaining of this worthy gentlewoman's performances, this alone would perpetuate her memory to latest posterity."<sup>11</sup> Nor does Ballard appear to have been hyperbolizing terribly much on this point, at least from his own perspective: the first work mentioned in Astell's obituary in the 29 May 1731 edition of *The Daily Journal* 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."<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to deciding just what *Letters* tells us about Astell, however, scholars have found much on which to disagree. Why, for instance, did Astell write to Norris? Perry suggests that she was "looking for a [philosophical] mentor." Springborg, on the other hand, argues that Astell came to Norris as her "preacher." Hill, taking a different approach entirely, offers an intensely personal—and sensational—reason for Astell's decision to write Norris (a known respondent, Hill believes, for the *Athenian Mercury*): her "passionate love" for Lady Catherine Jones led her to question Norris's insistence on an all-subsuming love for the Creator.<sup>13</sup> One finds a similar range of views regarding Astell's

<sup>10</sup> Perry, *Astell*, 488, n. 8.

<sup>11</sup> George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*, ed. Ruth Perry (1752; Detroit, 1985), 383.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Perry, *Astell*, 324.

<sup>13</sup> Perry, *Astell*, 81; Springborg, "Astell, Masham, and Locke," 110; Hill, 8-10, 38.

impression of Norris and his thought during their correspondence. Squadrito explains that Astell's letters "ranged from criticism of [Norris's] extreme Calvinism to criticism of his metaphysical views." Hill too underscores Astell's "disagreement with some of [Norris's] arguments." Perry, on the other hand, argues that, initially at least, Astell "agreed with Norris that as God was the cause of all thought, sensation, and feeling, one ought to try to love the Creator rather than his Creatures." Springborg, for her part, seems to suggest not only that Astell agreed with Norris's arguments but that Astell was something of a philosopher *sui generis* on this point; she refers to "her [Astell's] thesis that God is the only efficient cause of all our sensations and therefore the only worthy object of our love."<sup>14</sup>

In my view Perry's account of Astell and Norris's correspondence remains by far the best. For one thing, it accurately reflects Astell's movement in *Letters* from incisive interlocutor, to fervent supporter, to slightly embarrassed hedger. Furthermore, Perry avoids the historical errors and dubious interpretations that occasionally surface in the other accounts. Astell, it should be noted, never accuses Norris of being a Calvinist, probably because Norris was not one if by Calvinist we mean one who believes that God predestines all human beings either for damnation or salvation regardless of their actions; indeed, Norris refers derisively in his first letter to "the falshood" of Calvin's "strange Hypothesis" that God creates certain "miserable creatures" who are "destin'd to Ruin."<sup>15</sup> Nor did Astell approach Norris as a "preacher." Springborg underestimates Norris's importance as a philosopher throughout her essays; and even in her edition of *Serious Proposal*, where she notes that Norris "published a full-scale exposition of Malebranche's philosophy and refutation of Locke in his *Essay Towards the Theory of the Idea[l][sic] and Intelligible World* of 1701," she introduces her discussion with the telling heading *Astell, Masham and Locke*.<sup>16</sup> In his own day, however, Norris's thought represented a legitimate alternative to Locke's empiricism, as suggested by John Dunton's introduction to his *The Life and Errors of John Dunton*: "PHILOSOPHY it self had never been improv'd, had it not been for *New Opinions*, which afterwards were rectified by abler Men (such as *Noris* and *Lock*)."<sup>17</sup> Norris is credited, in fact, with having published the first philosophical response to Locke's *Essay*, entitled *Cursory Reflections Upon a Book Call'd an Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).<sup>18</sup> Nor did

<sup>14</sup> Squadrito, 434; Hill, 49; Perry, *Astell*, 77; Springborg, "Astell, Masham, and Locke," 112.

<sup>15</sup> Astell and Norris, 20.

<sup>16</sup> See Springborg's introduction to *SP*, xv, xiv.

<sup>17</sup> *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* (1705; New York, 1974), "To the Impartial Readers."

<sup>18</sup> Norris's *Cursory Reflections* was published as an appendix to *Christian Blessedness; or Discourses upon the Beatitudes of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (1690), which went into its fifteenth edition in 1728.

Norris write for the *Athenian Mercury*. According to Richard Acworth, the mistaken association of John Norris with the “Dr. Norris” who worked on that journal “originated with John Bowyer Nicholls in his 1817 edition of *The Life and Errors of John Dunton*. Nicholls wrongly identified John Norris, to whom Dunton always referred as ‘Mr. Norris,’ with the ‘Dr. Norris,’ a physician (probably to be identified with Dr. Edward Norris ...), who was indeed, along with Dunton, Samuel Wesley, and Richard Sault, a regular contributor to the *Athenian Gazette*.”<sup>19</sup> This error is repeated, unfortunately, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, hence its proliferation. Norris’s essay on the possibility of friendship between a husband and a wife, it should be noted, which Hill quotes as an example of Norris’s work “as adviser to the publishers of *The Athenian Mercury*,” appears in Norris’s *Miscellanies* (1687), published four years before *The Athenian Mercury* came into existence.<sup>20</sup> Finally, it is unclear how Hill arrives at her “certainty” about Astell’s lesbianism. To say, as Hill must, that Norris somehow “missed” or “ignored” so astounding an admission on Astell’s part bends all bounds of credibility—and Hill never explains, for that matter, why Astell would agree to publish a work that, in Hill’s account, effectively “outed” her.<sup>21</sup>

Despite such disagreements, however, scholarly consensus has been achieved on at least one issue, which is that by the time Astell turns to her later work, specifically *Christian Religion*, she has long since discarded (or has continued not to share) the explanations for the realm of human experience Norris had proffered in *Letters*. Whether, like Hill and Squadrito, one sees Astell as primarily critical of Norris from the beginning or, like Springborg, one simply leaves him out of the “philosophical debate” between Astell, Locke, and Locke’s female protegee Damaris Masham<sup>22</sup> or, like Perry, one recognizes that Astell initially sympathized with Norris’s theories in *Letters* but ultimately rejected them—however one gets there, the conclusion remains the same: by the end of *Letters*, Astell had finished with Norris’s extreme brand of theocentric philosophy.

It is certainly true, as Perry points out in her biography, that Astell effectively abandoned the related doctrines of “occasionalism” and “vision in God” in her final letter to Norris, written, Perry notes, as a “disclaimer” to any share in his insistence on “deriving all things directly from God.”<sup>23</sup> In place of Norris’s

<sup>19</sup> Acworth, *The Philosophy of John Norris of Bemerton* (New York, 1979), 356–57, n. 30.

<sup>20</sup> Hill, 38. See Norris’s *A Collection of Miscellanies* (1687; New York, 1978), 450–55.

<sup>21</sup> See Hill, 8–10.

<sup>22</sup> Springborg, “Astell, Masham, and Locke,” 106.

<sup>23</sup> Perry, *Astell*, 78. Norris had come to these doctrines through his study of Malebranche, especially the *Search after Truth* (1679). As represented by Malebranche, “vision in God” and “occasionalism” are two distinct theories, the first explaining how human beings access ideas, which exist in God, the second offering a comprehensive theory of causality, by which all activity (most famously the human mind’s interaction with its body) resolves into God’s will. Neither Norris nor Astell seems to have been particularly interested, however, in the different

strictly dualistic account of the interaction between mind and body, which posited God as the only possible mediating influence, Astell suggests (quite literally) a middle-ground via Norris's earlier correspondent, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-87):

Why ... may there not be a *sensible Congruity* between those Powers of the Soul that are employed in Sensation, and those Objects which occasion it? Analogous to that vital Congruity which your Friend Dr. *More* (*Immor. of the Soul*, B. II. Chap. 14. S. 8) will have to be between some certain Modifications of Matter, and the plastic Part of the Soul, which Notion he illustrates by that Pleasure which the preceptive [sic] Part of the Soul (as he calls it) is affected with by good Musick or delicious Viands, as I do this of *sensible* by his of *vital Congruity*, and methinks they are so symbolical that if the one may be admitted the other may.<sup>24</sup>

Her conception of "*sensible Congruity*" leads naturally to Astell's "formulation that God produces our sensations '*mediately* by his Servant Nature' rather than 'immediately by his Almighty Power.'"<sup>25</sup> She thus salvages a direct purpose for the organs of sense, instead of following Norris in " 'render[ing] a great Part of GOD's Workmanship vain and useless' ";<sup>26</sup> in so doing, Perry notes, Astell hits on precisely the argument Locke would use in his own response to Norris: "if the perception of colours and sounds depended on nothing but the presence of the object affording an occasional cause of 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."<sup>27</sup>

In her final missive to Norris then, Astell does indeed attempt, as Squadrito puts it, a "reconciliation" of his views and those of Locke; one might well adduce this letter as justification for Squadrito's contention that Astell's "*Letters* are primarily critical of [Norris's] views concerning efficient causality."<sup>28</sup> The problem with these arguments, however, is that in each case, Squadrito is attempting to explain Astell's position in *Christian Religion*, not in *Letters*. Squadrito assumes, in other words, a harmonious relationship between Astell's views in *Letters* and her views in *Christian Religion*; her insertion of a reading

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ends of each respective hypothesis; for both, what mattered was that, taken together, the theories provided a philosophical understanding of a favorite Scriptural verse, Acts 17: 28, which they were fond of citing—"in Him we Live, Move, and have our Being."

<sup>24</sup> Astell and Norris, 280-81. Norris's epistolary debate with More over the source of human liberty was printed as an appendix to Norris's *Theory and Regulation of Love* (1688).

<sup>25</sup> Perry, *Astell*, 79; Perry is quoting Astell and Norris, 282.

<sup>26</sup> Perry, *Astell*, 79; Perry is quoting Astell and Norris, 278.

<sup>27</sup> Perry, *Astell*, 80. See Locke's "REMARKS UPON SOME OF MR. NORRIS'S BOOKS, Wherein he asserts P. MALEBRANCHE'S Opinion of our seeing all Things in God" in *Works of John Locke* (9 vols., 1794; London, 1997), IX, 247-59. Perry is quoting a passage from 249.

<sup>28</sup> Squadrito, 439.

of the first text in her explication of the second, however, constitutes a *legerde-main*—these are two works, not one, and the *via media* position Astell strikes between Norris and Locke in her concluding letter has been altogether abandoned ten years later in *Christian Religion*.<sup>29</sup>

We can take “efficient causality” as a case in point. Astell did indeed reject Norris’s views on this matter at the end of *Letters*; it would be difficult, however, to read the following passage from her *Christian Religion* as anything other than a defense of “occasionalism” as expounded by Norris:

Without controversy, it is for very good Reasons that [God] has *so* united a Corruptible Body to an Immortal Mind, that the impressions which are made on the former, shall be perceiv’d and attended with certain Sensations in the other, and this by ways altogether mysterious and incomprehensible, and only to be resolv’d into the Efficacy of the Divine Will.<sup>30</sup>

The same thinker who in her final entry in *Letters* had shied away from explaining the body-soul union by way of God’s “Almighty power” now embraces “the Efficacy of the Divine Will” as the “only” possible means of accounting for the interaction of mind and matter. Nor can Astell’s return to occasionalism in this passage be dismissed as a momentary lapse of concentration or a mistake in wording, for she appeals to this theory once again in her appendix to *Christian Religion*, this time in an explicit attempt to defend the major point of *Letters*, that one should, and could, only love God. In this instance, Astell explains how a human being may remain focused on love of God even while engaging in the sensual pleasures of the palate:

Having therefore upon your Mind that truly Rational and Sublime Pleasure, of approving your self to GOD and enjoying Him, you are not at leisure to attend the little poinancy [sic] of Meat and Drink, tho’ the health and soundness of your Constitution makes these as relishing to you as to any body. If meditation and a 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 Powers of GOD giving you divers modifications.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> That is, the time between *Letters* and the first edition of *Christian Religion*.

<sup>30</sup> Astell, *CR*, 244.

<sup>31</sup> Astell, *CR*, 319-20.



Given the wide-spread assumption that Astell either broke with Norris on occasionalism or never agreed with him on this point to begin with, it is perhaps surprising to find her in *Christian Religion* offering Norris's occasionalist version of "efficient causality" (God's unimpeachable, differential power to produce "modifications" on the soul) as the technically "correct" way to "speak" of the "pleasing Sensations" of taste. It is perhaps equally surprising that she makes no mention of the "Lockean" compromise she had proposed in *Letters*, that is, a "sensible Congruity" to explain the effects of "delicious Viands."<sup>32</sup> By the time of *Christian Religion*, it would appear, Astell had good reason, in her own mind at least, to turn back to a hypothesis she had once renounced as impractical, and to turn away from her former Lockean compromise. But what reason?

One might conjecture that Astell's rejection of Norris's theocentric theories never actually came to fruition. Indeed, one often overlooked aspect of Astell's concluding demur in *Letters* is that it is not the conclusion at all—the text ends with Norris's response, and without doubt Astell had Norris's rebuttal very much in mind when she wrote her defenses of "occasionalism" in *Christian Religion*. In the first instance Astell, we have seen, explains the union of a "Corruptible Body" and an "Immortal Mind" as an effect of God, and resolves the ability of the latter to "attend" to "impressions which are made on the former" into "the Efficacy of the Divine Will"; Norris, in his final letter, had provided both the logic and the terminology for Astell's argument:

GOD has united my Soul to a certain Portion of organized Matter [which] I call my Body.... Other Bodies according to the Laws of Motion established in the World ... make different Impressions upon it [and] since as far as they respect the Preservation of the Machine, and the good of the Bodily Life ... it is fit they should be attended with sensations essentially different, such as Pleasure and Pain, which therefore GOD raises in the soul in Consequence of those general Laws of Union which he has established between it and the Body.<sup>33</sup>

Astell's second invocation of occasionalism, in which she describes the pleasures of eating as "the Powers of GOD giving you divers modifications," similarly echoes Norris's response to her dissent in *Letters*: "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

<sup>32</sup> Perry, in fact, cites the second passage from *Christian Religion* in her biography (90) without indicating any awareness that in it Astell effectively disclaims her "disclaimer" of occasionalism in *Letters*.

<sup>33</sup> Astell and Norris, 295-301.

Sensation.”<sup>34</sup> Astell, it seems clear, did not conceive of her final contribution to *Letters* as the last word on the subject of “occasionalism”; by the time she wrote *Christian Religion*, at least, she had carefully considered and accepted Norris’s reply.<sup>35</sup>

As much as Norris’s response appealed to Astell when she composed *Christian Religion*, however, it did not dissuade her from her middling course immediately in 1695—for a few years, at least, Astell pursued her attempt to carve out a position somewhere between Norris and Locke. Perry has called Astell’s *Serious Proposal, Part II* (1697) “a training manual for Norris’s brand of Christian Platonism,” and in its rationalism, its Platonic focus on the Good, and its skepticism toward the senses, the text supports Perry’s characterization.<sup>36</sup> But we should also note that Astell carries with her from her final letter to her *Serious Proposal, Part II* both a decided reluctance regarding Norris’s specific theocentric theories and a spirit of compromise regarding Locke. Astell deliberately distances herself from Norris’s “Notion That we see all things in GOD,” for instance, suggesting almost patronizingly (for lack of a better word) that whatever “may be as to the Truth of it, ’tis certainly very commendable for its Piety.”<sup>37</sup> On the subject of occasionalism, furthermore, Astell remains tellingly silent. She makes no mention of Norris’s theory of sensation, for instance, in her implicit critique of Locke’s attempt to render all knowledge a product of the senses: “in ... the several ways of Knowing, I have not reckon’d the Senses, in regard that we’re more properly said to be *Conscious* of than to *Know* such things as we perceive by Sensation. And also because that Light which we suppose to be let into our Ideas by our Senses is indeed very dim and fallacious, and not to be relied on till it has past [sic] the Test of Reason.”<sup>38</sup> While Astell, like Norris, denigrates the senses and their viability as a path to knowledge, unlike him—and like Locke—she does not hesitate to grant them a “power” to perceive of their own volition, and thus she continues her rejection of Norris’s occasionalist theory of “efficient causality.”

To my mind, Astell’s position in this instance is characteristic of her stance throughout *Serious Proposal, Part II*, where, even when she seems to have Locke

<sup>34</sup> Astell and Norris, 289.

<sup>35</sup> Acworth noted correctly, albeit ambiguously, that in *Christian Religion*, Astell “showed ... that she now accepted without reserve Norris’s views on occasionalism and on the importance of this theory for working out a theory of love” (178). Acworth’s study is referenced in none of the other studies of Astell and Norris cited in this essay.

<sup>36</sup> Perry, *Astell*, 83.

<sup>37</sup> Astell, *SPH*, 117. Springborg believes that Astell’s hesitancy here indicates that she accepted “Masham’s critique ... of the Malebranchean principle of ‘Seeing all things in God’, to which Astell had subscribed in her *Letters Concerning the Love of God*” (189, n. 93). But Astell had already backed away from this principle in her concluding letter, long before she encountered Masham’s critique. Springborg does correctly note that “in *The Christian Religion* ... [Astell] reindorses the Malebranche’s [sic] principle.”

<sup>38</sup> Astell, *SPH*, 103.

specifically in mind as her object of criticism, she refuses to attack him directly or to break completely with his philosophical methods. I thus disagree with Springborg, who sees basically the whole of *Serious Proposal, Part II* as an open assault on Locke—this despite the fact that the only *explicit* reference to Locke in the whole of Astell's text is both unabashedly laudatory and completely unironic: "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 [\**Lock of Hum. Und. B. 3, Ch. 7*]."<sup>39</sup> In other words, Astell may silently have laid the groundwork in *Serious Proposal, Part II* for her open attack on Locke in *Christian Religion*—but she has not yet begun to fight. Nor, at this point at least, has she returned to Norris's theories of "occasionalism" or "vision in God." However much she respects Norris's general perspective in 1697, her dissent from his theocentric extremism still holds. *Serious Proposal, Part II* suggests, then, that something other than Norris's reply to Astell in *Letters* instigated her return to his theological positions in *Christian Religion*.

That something, at least in part, was Astell's changing understanding of Locke's political, theological, and philosophical principles. In the first place, as Springborg has argued convincingly, sometime around 1700, Astell, a High-Church Tory, divined that Locke had written that great defense of Whig principles, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689).<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and in his well publicized trinitarian debate with Bishop Edward Stillingfleet (1635-99) Locke had aligned himself, in the eyes of devoutly conservative Anglicans like Astell, with Deism, Socinianism, and Dissent.<sup>41</sup> Finally, Locke's sense-based epistemology, which, if she hesitated openly to endorse it, Astell had always grudgingly respected, had emerged by 1700 as the launching pad for materialist arguments of all stripes and colors that threatened to subsume the very notion of "spirit" (and ultimately of God) altogether. By the time of *Christian Religion*, in short, Astell had come to see Locke as "a Socinian, an Epicurean, a party man, and a defender of liberty, property, choice, and Dissent."<sup>42</sup> Norris, an establishmentarian Tory, Platonist, and apologist for

<sup>39</sup> Astell, *SPH*, 139

<sup>40</sup> See Springborg, "Astell, Critic of Locke." Astell sums up her feelings about Locke's role in justifying the "glorious" revolution in a long compliment to Queen ANNE, made in the course of her explicit criticisms of Locke in the appendix to *Christian Religion*: while the Queen's "Royal Beneficence" will "embalm Her Majesty's Name to future Generations ... *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*" (321).

<sup>41</sup> Locke's pamphlet war with Stillingfleet over the theological implications of Locke's positions occurred between 1696-98. Though Astell may not, as Squadrito writes, directly accuse Locke of being a Socinian (435), there is little doubt that, as Springborg notes ("Astell, Critic of Locke," 630) she characterizes him as such through her sarcastic treatment of his religious principles in *Christian Religion*.

<sup>42</sup> Springborg, "Astell, Critic of Locke," 629.

Christian mystery, could hardly fail to cut a more appealing intellectual figure to Astell at this point in her writing career.

But something else had changed in Astell's understanding of Locke when she came to compose *Christian Religion*, namely, her sense of Locke as a person. In 1696 while Astell was in the midst of composing *Serious Proposal, Part II*, a mocking (and acute) response to Norris and Astell's *Letters*, entitled *Discourse Concerning the Love of God*, had been published.<sup>43</sup> Though the author of *Discourse* was Damaris Masham (1658-1708), daughter of the famous Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth (1617-88) and a former correspondent of Norris, Astell and Norris both suspected Locke of authoring the attack, and with good reason.<sup>44</sup> Masham was by this time Locke's financial patron and intellectual disciple, and with Locke in residence at her Oates estate, she had easy access to his thoughts on Norris and Astell's work.

Whether or not Astell "really" believed Locke had written *Discourse* has proved difficult to ascertain. Springborg believes that "Astell took Masham's *Discourse* to be the work of Locke—or at least pretended to, there being various unkind asides in her subsequent works to suggest she knew Masham's authorship quite well."<sup>45</sup> The only example of such "unkind asides" Springborg provides, however, is Astell's comment in *Serious Proposal, Part II* that "she who makes the most Grimace at a Woman of Sense ... is yet very desirous to be thought Knowing in a Dress, in the Management of an Intreague, in Coquetry or good Houswifry"; and this lacks any of the specificity one would expect if this were indeed a personal attack, and seems rather to be pointed at a general female character Astell had probably often encountered.<sup>46</sup> Like Springborg, Perry suggests that though Astell believed Locke had authored *Discourse*, she "surmised that Lady Masham also had a hand in [it] because she occasionally refers to the anonymous author as 'they' or 'them.'"<sup>47</sup> Astell often refers to "Men" in *Christian Religion*, however, when she means one man, Locke<sup>48</sup>; furthermore, Astell never once mentions "women" or "a woman" as possible antecedents for the pronouns in question. If Astell had wanted to direct a barb at Masham, in other words, she needed only to insert "(or she)" after "he" in her high-minded—and

<sup>43</sup> Damaris Masham, *Discourse Concerning the Love of God* (London, 1696).

<sup>44</sup> Norris had at one time numbered Masham among his closest philosophical allies, even dedicating his popular *Reflections Upon the Conduct of Human Life* (1690) to "the Excellent Lady, the Lady Masham."

<sup>45</sup> Springborg, *SP*, xvi.

<sup>46</sup> Astell, *SP II*, 179.

<sup>47</sup> Perry, *Astell*, 88.

<sup>48</sup> In *CR*, 209, Astell writes, for instance, "Most Men are so Sensualiz'd, 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." The plural "Others," of course, is a reference to the singular author of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

disingenuous—refusal to name Locke as the anonymous author of *Discourse*: “Whether [Locke] be the same Person who writ *A Discourse concerning the Love of GOD*, or who is the Author, is not my Business to enquire, since he has not thought fit to discover himself. Nor am I about to *complain* or make reprizals, whatever occasion might be given by that *Discourse*.”<sup>49</sup> Briefly put, whether or not Astell knew Locke was technically innocent of *Discourse* (and I do not believe she did), she approaches the man and the attack throughout *Christian Religion* in a way that makes it impossible not to associate the two—as Astell, either in reality or for purposes of rhetorical convenience, certainly did.

Assuming this association in her mind, it is understandable that the following thinly veiled attack on Astell in *Discourse* incensed her against Locke and raised her sympathies and rallied her defenses for Norris:

These Opinions of Mr. *N*. seem also to indanger the introducing, especially amongst those whose Imaginations are stronger than their Reason, a Devout way of talking; which having no sober, and intelligible sense under it, will either inevitably by degrees beget an Insensibility to Religion, in those themselves who use it, as well as others; By thus accustoming them to handle Holy things without Fear; Or else will turn to as wild an Enthusiasm as any that has yet been; and which can End in nothing but Monasteries, and Hermitages....<sup>50</sup>

By equating those associates of Norris “whose Imaginations are stronger than their Reason” with those who display an “Enthusiasm” for “Monasteries,” Masham left no doubt that she was thinking of Astell. Though Masham has referred by name only to “Mr. *N*” at this point in her *Discourse*—indeed, she never names Astell directly—Astell was right to take such attacks to herself.<sup>51</sup> To Astell, who had spent her adult life defending women’s inherent powers of Reason and chastising her sex for giving way to fancy, Masham’s charge must have been particularly galling, especially as it is coupled with a scoffing reference to her failed “Protestant nunnery” scheme.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, as much as Locke’s

<sup>49</sup> Astell, *CR*, 308-9.

<sup>50</sup> Masham, 120.

<sup>51</sup> Springborg blames Sarah Hutton for stating “categorically ‘The Book which occasioned [Masham’s] attack was a collection of letters by Norris and Mary Astell published as *Letters Concerning the Love of God*,’ ” countering “I can find no direct reference to the Astell-Norris correspondence” in *Discourse* (“Astell, Masham, and Locke,” 114-15, n. 34). But as Hutton and Astell well knew, Masham makes several explicit references to “*Letters Philosophical and Divine*” (*Discourse*, 20 e.g., where Masham cites a passage from p. 165 of *Letters*). The title Masham uses mirrors the half-title inserted just before the actual letters (i.e., after the preface), and is also printed as the running title of *Letters*. See Hutton, “Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham: Between Platonism and Enlightenment,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 1 (1993), 29-54.

<sup>52</sup> Astell did not fail to respond to <Locke’s> attack on her scheme, noting that “generous Designs for the Glory of GOD and the Good of Mankind, have been oppos’d in all Ages, (even

supposed sensualism, Socinianism, and political anarchism certainly bothered Astell, it will not do to typify *Christian Religion* as primarily a philosophical, or theological, or political response; for by the time of *Christian Religion*, Astell was bothered not only by Locke's "new way of ideas," not only by his religion, not only by his Whiggery, but by Locke himself. Astell's return to Norris's positions in *Christian Religion*, then, must be understood as a complex response to a host of impetuses, all of them stemming from her general sense that Locke's was company she no longer could afford to keep.

As support for this suggestion, one need only note the frequency with which Astell critiques Locke's various philosophical, theological, and political positions in *Christian Religion* by, on the one hand, defending Norris's doctrines in *Letters* and, on the other hand, sarcastically invoking particularly irritating passages from <Locke's> *Discourse*. For example, opposite the marginal heading "*That GOD is the sole Object of our Love, a Doctrine unreasonably oppos'd*,"<sup>53</sup> Astell defends the major point of *Letters* by cleverly turning an argument used by <Locke> in *Discourse* against the same "great" author of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: if as <Locke> had claimed in *Discourse*, "the affirming GOD to be the sole Object of our Love" can be rejected simply because "it is not a generally receiv'd opinion," then we must also reject "what a great Philosopher asserts when he tells us, that *Flame* is not *Hot and Light*, nor *Snow White and Cold*, nor *Manna White and Sweet*"—for "every *Man's experience confutes this every day*."<sup>54</sup> Astell again turns to a position in *Letters* she had formerly shared with Norris and to the assault leveled by <Locke> in *Discourse* in her response to Locke's perceived Socinianism. Under the marginal heading "*What Hypothesis best Answers the Cavils against Christ's Divinity*," Astell writes, "I will not *Conjecture* what makes some People so warm against the Hypothesis of *seeing all things in GOD*, nor why after so much discourse about Ideas, they are so hard to be reconcil'd to an Ideal World." Norris's Malebranchian "Hypothesis and what is built upon it," Astell insists, "gives a better answer than any Hypothesis I have met with, to the trifling and unreasonable Objections ... by the greatest pretenders to Reason, against the Divinity of the Son of GOD."<sup>55</sup> It was of course Locke, now labeled a great "pretender to Reason," who had proved so "warm" against the "vision in God" hypothesis in *Discourse* (at least, in Astell's mind), Locke who had provided "so much dis-

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by those who pretend to be the true Patriots)" (*CR*, 320). I use <Locke> as opposed to Masham and/or Locke in reference to *Discourse* in order to indicate, first, that Astell believed Locke had written it and, second, that he had not.

<sup>53</sup> This and other such polemical headings are absent from the discussions of Locke in the first edition of *CR*; Astell added them to the second and third editions in order to make even more explicit her disagreements with him. Marginal citations remain fairly consistent throughout the three editions.

<sup>54</sup> Astell, *CR*, 311. Marginal citation: "*Discourse concerning the Love of GOD, Preface. Also p. 15, 77, 19, &c; Ibid. p.25, 92; See Ess. Concerning Human Underst. B.2.c.8.*"

<sup>55</sup> Astell, *CR*, 309-10.

course about Ideas” in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* without accepting the Platonic doctrine of an Ideal World, and Locke whose Socinian tendencies amounted to “*Cavils against Christ’s Divinity*.”

Had Locke accepted the theory of “vision in God” instead of ridiculing it, Astell implies, he would have found himself unable to support his Socinian heresy. Similarly, Astell insists, had Locke embraced and not attacked “occasionalism,” it might have provided the antidote to his dangerous political views. “FROM whence come Wars and Fightings ... or in our Modern expression *Struggles for Power*,” Astell pointedly asks the author of *Two Treatises of Government*, “but from our *Appetites*, our eager desires after Worldly things?” As she continues, her ire toward the author of *Discourse*—and her irony—heightens in intensity:

Certainly the way of using the World mention’d in the 378th Paragraph [see above, 511-12], is more like to restrain us from abusing it, than if we shoul’d say to our selves, why may not we *satisfy* our *natural cravings* with the *good things of this World*, which as we learn from the *Common Sense and Experience of Mankind*, as well as from the *Discourses* of Great Men, *were given to be enjoy’d*? And what need of troubling our selves with those *severe Precepts* which none but *heads cast in Metaphysical Moulds* can understand, and such as have *Privileges of Nature* can practice; which can’t be talk’d of but by those whose *Imaginations are stronger than their Reason*, who fly out in an *unintelligible* way of *Pompous Rhapsody* and *unpremeditated Raptures*...?<sup>56</sup>

Only by ignoring Astell’s hostility toward Locke and by missing her ironic quotations from <Locke’s> attack in *Discourse*, could Hill claim, as she does, that Astell’s critique of Locke in *Christian Religion* is “highly respectful” or that Astell came to take “sides” against Locke “reluctantly.”<sup>57</sup> Similarly—and this is where we can finally turn to the issue announced in the introduction to this essay—only by making the same contextual elisions or mistakes can Squadrito claim that in *Christian Religion*, Astell is still attempting to reconcile “the views of Norris and Locke,” a contention in which she grounds her entire examination of Astell’s critique of Locke’s theory of thinking matter.

Nowhere in her analysis does Squadrito suggest that Astell’s critique of Locke’s theory is anything other than *sang-froid*, or that there is anything peculiar about her use of Locke’s *Essay* as the cornerstone of her argument. Put in the context of the preceding passages already quoted from *Christian Religion*,

<sup>56</sup> Astell, *CR*, 322-23. Marginal citation: “*Discourse of the Love of GOD*, p. 35. p. 35; p. 120; p. 27.”

<sup>57</sup> Hill, 51, 49.

however, Astell's introduction to her specific discussion of Locke's hypothesis strongly suggests a level beyond the coolly philosophical:

As to Matter's being capable of Thought, a Famous and Ingenious Author, who does *neither say nor suppose, that all Matter has naturally in it a Faculty of Thinking, but the direct contrary\**; does also say, that *it is possible, i.e. involves no Contradiction, that GOD shou'd if He pleases give to some parcels of Matter a power of Thinking*.<sup>58</sup> And if so, then for ought we know, or can prove to the contrary, our Minds may be nothing else but certain *parcels of Matter* to which GOD has given this *power*. I wou'd not presume to charge this Great Writer, for whom I have a due Esteem, with Contradiction, he being such a Master of Thought and Language, but if the *strength of my Imagination* does not deceive me, there is something like it in some of his Works. Tho' doubtless it will be thought the *weakness of my Reason*, and not want of Consistency in him, that makes me *Imagine* it!<sup>59</sup>

Clearly, the annoyance Astell displays with Locke throughout *Christian Religion* holds for her discussion of this particular issue as well; indeed, by citing once again <Locke's> charge in *Discourse* that she has a strong "*Imagination*" and weak "*Reason*," she directly tells us that she is writing and that we should continue reading in the same rankled spirit. If Astell had *not* included <Locke's> charge in her final falsely obsequious denial, it might be possible to accept her protestations of "Esteem" for Locke; by heavy-handedly underscoring his infuriating assault on her intellectual abilities, however, Astell implies that neither her praise for the "Great Writer" and "Master of Thought and Language" nor her repudiation of intellectual ability can be read as genuine. She *is* charging Locke with a pervasive contradiction, after all, and she knows that she is, and she assumes that we will understand the irony of her construction.

Indeed, Astell's desire to point out Locke's propensity for contradiction explains her use of his *Essay* throughout her attack. Under the marginal note "*His Argument for Matter's being capable of Thought destroy'd by his own Principles*," Astell points out that in the *Essay* Locke argues that God cannot change essences (for example, God cannot make the angles of a triangle add up to those of a square, or, Astell notes, superadd qualities such as the ability to eat or to speak onto said triangle, without vitiating its essence). Striking again a feigned pose of unassuming intellectual modesty—and again citing <Locke's> attack in *Discourse*—Astell pointedly asks, "shou'd I with my *weak Reason* and *strong Imagination* affirm, that *GOD may give to this Triangle the Property of includ-*

<sup>58</sup> Marginal citation: "*\*Mr. Locke's Third Letter to the Bishop of Worcest. 409; Ibid. 430.*"

<sup>59</sup> Astell, *CR*, 326.



ing no Space, or of being equal to a Square.... Shou'd I also add ... that all the difficulties rais'd against a Speaking or Eating Triangle, and one that is equal to a Square, are rais'd only from our Ignorance or narrow Conceptions, but stand not at all in the way of the Power of GOD ... wou'd not that Great Master of good Sense, despise such sort of Discourses as the *Rhapsodys* and *strong Imaginations* of a silly Woman?"<sup>60</sup> Only in a world that "pays a greater deference to Names than Things" would such inconsistent argumentation "pass any where as the *Philosophical Disquisitions* of a free Thinker, and a Lover of Truth"; but as Locke's burgeoning popularity and the relative decline of Norris's and Astell's hold on the public had taught her, Astell's was just such a world.<sup>61</sup> Astell uses "Mr. L's Arguments, even his very Words, only putting Triangle in place of Matter," then, partly because she believes that arguing from her own positions will allow the "World" too easily to dismiss her critique.<sup>62</sup> Astell has another reason as well, however, one more immediately gratifying: by underscoring Locke's own contradictions, she effectively levels at "that Great Master of good Sense" precisely the charge he had directed at her.<sup>63</sup> In positing the potential existence of "thinking matter," Locke unreasonably contradicts his own positions, and imaginatively creates a bastard intellectual sibling for Astell's fatuous "Speaking [and] Eating Triangle."

Nevertheless, to the end, Squadrito continues to see Astell's treatment of Locke as unironical and admiring, as evidenced by her quotation of Astell's concluding thoughts: " 'Having so good authority as the *Essay of Human Understanding* on my side, I will presume to affirm,' says Astell, 'that it is impossible for a *Solid Substance to have Qualities, Perfections, and Powers, which have no Natural or Visible Connection with Solidity and Extension*; and since there is no Visible Connection between Matter and Thought, it is *impossible for Matter, or any Parcels of Matter to Think....*' "<sup>64</sup> A more complete quotation of the passage leaves us with a quite different sense of Astell's final feelings toward Locke and his hypothesis:

Tho' it were too much for me to be *Positive* on the force of my own *Imagination*, yet having so good Authority as the *Essay of Human Understanding* on my side, I will presume to affirm, that it is impossible

<sup>60</sup> Astell, *CR*, 327-28. Marginal citation: "405 [in reference to Locke's *Third Letter to the Bishop of Worcest.*]."

<sup>61</sup> By 1705 Norris and Astell must have sensed that they were more and more outside the secular-empirical *zeitgeist* beginning to dominate England. *Christian Religion* did not sell particularly well, while Norris's own *magnum opus* and response to Locke, *Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World* (1701-4), never went into a second edition.

<sup>62</sup> Astell, *CR*, 329.

<sup>63</sup> Hill insistently writes "that Mary Astell respected Locke 'that Great Master of good Sense' there can be no doubt" (50). As I am suggesting, one need only read this phrase in its immediate context to see that, given the irony of her label, Astell no longer respected Locke at all.

<sup>64</sup> Squadrito, 437.

for a Solid Substance to have Qualities, Perfections, and Powers, which have no Natural or Visible Connection with Solidity and Extension; and since there is no Visible Connection between Matter and Thought, it is impossible for Matter, or any Parcels of Matter to Think ... . So that, in fine, I utterly despair of meeting with a Triangle equal to a Square, and that can Eat and Discourse; and I find it equally impossible for Body to Think.<sup>65</sup>

By dropping the opening and closing phrases of this passage, Squadrito finds in it support for her view of Astell as a thinker whose respect for Locke leads her to cite his good philosophy approvingly against his errors. When they are restored, however, Astell's defensive frustration with Locke and her penchant for irony again shine through. <Locke's> attack on Astell thoroughly colors her attack on him, much as Locke's personal annoyance with Norris prefaced his bitter *Remarks upon Some of Mr. Norris's Books*, published posthumously in 1720, as demonstrated by Charlotte Johnston in this journal over forty years ago.<sup>66</sup> Philosophers, it would appear, have feelings too.

And what of Norris? Astell makes no direct appeals to him in her critique of Locke's view of thinking matter. Her various defensive and offensive employments of his positions throughout *Christian Religion*, however, should not disappear from view as we read this final rebuttal of Locke; for it was through resubscribing to Norris's theocentric theories and concomitantly by repudiating the Lockean compromise she had offered in her final contribution to *Letters* that Astell enabled herself to blame Locke for conflating mind and matter. In *Discourse* Astell had found (to her horror) the following all-too-familiar corrective of Norris: "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*]."<sup>67</sup> The very thinker who Astell now found politically dangerous, theologically heretical, philosophically contradictory, and personally offensive had offered a precise restatement of Astell's dissenting argument to Norris in *Letters*. To continue in *Christian Religion* to support her former compromise, in other words, would require Astell to agree with the infuriating author of *Discourse*.

Furthermore, Astell would have recalled that in his concluding letter, Norris had pointed his correspondent's attention to the dangerous theoretical precedent set by her attempt to mediate the distinction between spirit and matter. "I am

<sup>65</sup> Astell, *CR*, 331. Marginal citation: "*Ib.* 405; 406 [in reference to Locke's *Third Letter to Stillingfleet*]."

<sup>66</sup> See Charlotte Johnston, "Locke's *Examination of Malebranche* and John Norris," *JHI*, 19 (1958), 551-58.

<sup>67</sup> Masham, 26.

inclined to think," Norris wrote, "that this [Sensible Congruity] may justly be used as an Argument *a Posteriori*, to prove that [bodies] do not [cause our Sensations] mechanically and involuntarily as you represent it, but rather knowingly and designedly, since it is impossible that any thing but a *thinking Principle* should be productive of any *Thought*, as all Sensation certainly is."<sup>68</sup> If God could create matter so that it had a natural ability to elicit sentiments in the soul, one may as well say, Norris had observed, that matter causes thought; and to cause thought, from Norris's Cartesian perspective, matter would necessarily have to think. And if matter thinks, why distinguish between matter and spirit? What then of the soul's immortality, or even its existence? With her attack on Locke's hypothesis in *Christian Religion*, Astell signaled her recognition that Norris had been correct: to merge soul and body via a "Sensible Congruity" amounted to taking the first step down a slippery slope that led to Lockean conclusions regarding God's ability to bestow "Efficiency" onto matter. Astell's resubscription to Norris's thought, then, was not simply a defensive reaction to the personal attacks of <Locke>; it was also a calculated—and philosophically enabling—theoretical move. By returning to Norris's theories, Astell accomplished two ends crucial to her critique of Locke's view of thinking matter: first, she protected the essential distinction between mind and matter while allowing that they could interact, and second, she distanced herself from her own previous flirtation with Lockean materialism.

I believe it is clear that we cannot read Astell's critique of Locke's view of thinking matter accurately without bringing to bear a considerable nexus of textual and personal relationships that affected its composition. Placed in this context, Astell's mature philosophical and theological thought, as found not only in this one specific critique of Locke but in the whole of the final edition of *Christian Religion*, reveals not a deferential figure demurely straddling the intellectual fence between Norris and Locke, but a thinker who has willingly joined the former in a battle against the latter, one she probably knew they would lose. The reasons for her final choice of allegiances were, as we have seen, philosophical, political, theological, rhetorical—and personal.

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<sup>68</sup> Astell and Norris, 310. Cf. Norris's argument in *Practical Discourses Upon Several Divine Subjects* (London, 1693), III: "Bodies have not in themselves any Quality resembling the Sensations which we feel at their Presence, because this would oblige us to allow them capable of *Thought*, which in Reason we cannot do" (30). We know Astell had read this text carefully—it was the occasion of her first letter to Norris in 1693.