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THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF GENEROSITY IN DESCARTES AND ASTEMELL

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Abstract: For Descartes, the passion of generosity—defined as legitimate self-esteem—appears to be egocentric, the result of an agent’s contemplation of their nature. Yet, Cartesian generosity is also intended to serve as the foundation for other-regarding passions, attitudes, and dispositions. This paper examines this tension as it is addressed in the writings of an early Cartesian feminist, Mary Astell. We uncover the social dimension of generosity in Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul* and demonstrate how Astell extends the Cartesian concept in her *Serious Proposal*. We argue that while there is an internal relationship between Cartesian generosity and good will towards others, Astell’s work recognizes that generosity can only be fully actualized under equitable social conditions. We thus provide a deeper analysis of the role that this master passion plays in Descartes’ ethical thought as well as a greater appreciation of the impact of Cartesian ethics on early modern feminism.

Keywords: Descartes, Astell, generosity, self-esteem, passions, social dimension, equality, dignity, Somers

1. Introduction

In a satirical letter to *The Tatler* in 1709, Mary Astell (1666–1731) is depicted as “*Madonella*,” the founder of “a College for young Damsels; where, instead of Scissors, Needles, and Samplers; Pens, Compasses, Quadrants, Books, Manuscripts, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, are to take up the whole of their Time” (*The Tatler*, [2]).¹ The object of the satirist’s ridicule is Astell’s “serious proposal to the ladies” that they undertake in their formative years a religious retreat—to throw off the shackles of custom and learn through a rigorous program of education and reflection on the Christian religion, to exercise command over themselves in accordance with the “dignity of their natures” (*SPL* 57, 111). Permeating Astell’s metaphysical picture of human nature are central Cartesian themes—that human beings are unities of rational soul and body, that the rational soul is the noblest part of the union, and that the rational soul contains a divine element, the absolute freedom of the will, from which differences of body or circumstance cannot detract. As it is for Descartes, for Astell, our highest good or perfection “in this life” consists in the achievement of *generosity*, virtue grounded in the recognition of the absolute value of the free will and the resolution to use it well. But whereas Descartes has little to say about the kind of society in which a person can come to the realization of their highest good, Astell places great emphasis on the essential role that a certain kind of community performs in the development of generosity. Young women need a “Monastery” or “Religious Retirement,” where they may look at themselves “out of temptation’s way” (*SPL* 73), and develop their intelligent souls through education to guide their wills in the service of their “real interest and perfection” (*SPL* 78–80).

Even those not inclined to ridicule Astell’s idea might wonder at the necessity she places on the retreat from male company in order to acquire the knowledge and self-control over volition that are characteristic of Cartesian generosity. *Prima facie*, Cartesian generosity

should be wholly within an individual's power—requiring only time for reflection and practiced self-control²—whereas Astell speaks of the generosity of women as having been so thoroughly “corrupted” by custom such that nothing short of removing themselves from the influence of male society will enable its development. For Astell, generosity can only be fully realized in a society of equals, and this is not the situation in which young women generally find themselves.

Our first task in evaluating Astell's “serious proposal to the ladies” is thus to examine what there is in the Cartesian concept of generosity that would warrant this kind of extension, this politicizing of the conditions under which it can be realized. In the next section, we explore the possibilities for recognizing a social dimension within Cartesian generosity. In the following section, we explore Astell's contribution to this Cartesian theme, showing how for her questions of whether and how generosity can be fostered within a social group are very much contingent on the kinds of social condition that obtain. While this may not warrant a complete withdrawal from society as Astell suggests, we suspect that Astell is right that equitable social and political conditions are necessary for an equal distribution of the virtue of generosity.

2. Cartesian Generosity and Good Will Towards Others

A relatively unacknowledged feature of Descartes' account of generosity is its social character.³ The idea that generosity has a social dimension might seem surprising given that neither of the two definitions of generosity offered—one by genus and differentia, the other by compositionality—refers to anything extrinsic to the individual subject. The first definition construes generosity as a species of wonder—esteem—that is ‘legitimate’ because it is directed at the divine aspect of the self, the free will (art. 153, AT XI.445–6/CSM I.384).

Since there are forms and grades of self-esteem that are not legitimate, including vanity and abjectness, strictly speaking, generosity is a subspecies of self-esteem. The second compositional definition defines generosity in terms of an intellectual component—the knowledge that “nothing truly belongs to oneself but the freedom to dispose one’s volitions and that one should be praised or blamed according to whether one uses the will well or badly”—and a volitional element—a “firm and constant resolution to use the will well,” that is, “never to lack the will to undertake what one judges to be best” (art. 153, AT XI.445–6/CSM I.384).⁴ Although the second definition may seem to imply a dependence on others—those who praise or blame us for how we use our wills—there is no indication that being subject to praise or blame is constitutive of generosity.⁵ Acts of praise and blame are conditional upon the capacity each of us has to use the will well or badly and thus are secondary to generosity.⁶ Given the somewhat ethereal way in which generosity is described in both definitions, it may well seem to be a wholly individual achievement. It “renders us in a certain way like God by making us masters of ourselves, provided we do not lose the rights it gives us through timidity” (art. 152, AT XI.445/CSM I.384). The more generous each of us becomes, the closer we come to God, and primarily, it seems, through the exercise of individual self-control and increasing rejection of the value of things external to ourselves.

Generosity is the cornerstone of Descartes’ ethics: to exercise generosity is to “pursue virtue in a perfect manner” (art. 153, AT XI.445–6/CSM I.384). One would expect it, then, to clarify our moral obligations or duties towards others. But the inwardly looking and individualistic characterization of generosity makes this difficult. Very quickly after the concept is introduced, however, we are told that generosity entails both a recognition of the moral equality of others (art. 154, AT XI.446–7/CSM I.384) and a preference for serving others’ interests above one’s own (art. 155, AT XI.447/CSM I.385). The *généreux* “esteem

nothing more highly than doing good to others” (art. 156, AT XI.447–8/CSM I.385) and “it is part of generosity to have good will towards everyone” (art. 187, AT XI.470/CSM I.395). All this is very puzzling. How does a form of *self*-esteem serve not only as the basis for esteeming *others* but indeed for *preferring* their good above one’s own? Is the claim that good will towards others is “part” of generosity indicative of a constitutive relationship or something weaker—a causal relationship perhaps? The connection between generosity and altruism is not in any way obvious.⁷

Descartes does little to address this problem directly. The notion of generosity is introduced in part three of *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), Descartes’ “little treatise” on the passions. That it is a species of esteem is significant. As a species of wonder, esteem plays a crucial role in fixing our attention on objects we need to investigate and on objects of extraordinary greatness, such as God.⁸ Unlike wonder *per se*, which is value-neutral, esteem presupposes an estimation of value worthy of our continued admiration and attention. The opposite of esteem, contempt, implies an estimation of low or negative value. Typically, these estimations of value are the product of positive or negative experiences of objects (art. 54, AT XI.373–4/CSM I.373). When we ourselves are the object of experience (reflection), we can be led into self-esteem or self-contempt, depending on the better or worse opinion of ourselves that that experience affords (art. 151, AT XI.444–5/CSM I.383). These opinions, in turn, can be subjected to rational evaluation, and it is here that questions of legitimacy take hold. Where we know ourselves well—the “principal part of wisdom”—and can exercise control over our volitions, our self-esteem is appropriate (art. 152, AT XI.445/CSM I.384). Self-satisfaction—“the sweetest of all the passions”—moreover, ensues (art. 63, AT XI.377/CSM I.351–2). The feeling that we have when we esteem ourselves for the right reasons, and resolve to continue to use our will in the service of right reason, is the passion of

generosity. When we become habituated to act from generosity, the passion of generosity may be classified as a virtue and our highest good in this life. Virtue is tied to the actions and thoughts that issue from generosity at the instigation of the will, but the passion and movement of spirits which sustains it remains, and the two are mutually reinforcing (art. 161, AT XI.453–4/CSM I.387–8). There is no suggestion that the virtue of generosity could be achieved in the absence of a sensing body.⁹

Descartes is explicit that generosity presupposes attitudes about the moral equality of others and that this is the reason why the *généreux* never have contempt for anyone:

Those who possess this knowledge and this feeling about themselves [i.e. generosity] readily come to believe that any other person can have the same knowledge and feeling about himself, because this involves nothing which depends on someone else. That is why such people never have contempt for anyone. (Art. 154, AT XI.446–7/CSM I.384)

The movement from valuing oneself to valuing others equally appears to depend on the following chain of reasoning. What I recognize as most valuable in myself is my capacity to use my free will well. I have that capacity in virtue of being the kind of thing I am—a rational human being. I then recognize that any other human being has that same capacity by virtue of being human. Hence, what I value in myself is equal to what others have and thus I value them equal to myself. Patrick Frierson objects that Descartes does not prove that valuing one’s own free will entails valuing others in the same way, but just gives “a reasonable psychological description of the process.”¹⁰ But this objection mistakes the subject of generosity with the reason for and source of the passion of generosity, namely, the free will. The free will is the reason for my admiration, not the fact that *I* am the one who happens to be free. That Frierson conflates these two is the root of his confusion that Descartes’ account

of generosity is, from a metaphysical perspective, irremediably egoist. But this is not a confusion of which Descartes himself is guilty.

The only thing that could block the inference from the recognition of one's own value to the equal recognition of the value of any other human being would be if reason and the free will were not equally distributed. But this Descartes repeatedly denies. The will is a divine element within the soul and an essential aspect of reasoning.¹¹ It is only distinct "by reason" from reason and reason is equally distributed. Even madmen have a rational soul from which nothing can detract.¹² This does not mean that everyone uses their reason or will equally well—there are differences in how intelligence is distributed, and sin and error are possible because people allow their wills to exceed the judgements of their intellects.¹³ But the distribution of intelligence and other inequities do not affect the fundamental capacities of human nature for which each of us is to be valued.

These considerations bring out the extent to which generosity is an essentially comparative exercise. It is an essential part of being generous that one values oneself neither too much nor too little in comparison with others, and failures to do so produce defective versions of self-esteem. Generosity relies upon "rendering to each person that which belongs to him" including "the honour and respect due to him according to his position and authority in the world" (art. 164, AT XI.456/CSM I.389).¹⁴ It is also an essential part of generosity that one has the right estimation of one's worth relative to God, exercising both due reverence and humility (AT XI.455–6/CSM I.389). Failure to do so is the Devil's problem—the Devil esteems himself too highly before God. The *généreux* avoid this problem by being at one and the same time aware of the supreme perfection that consists in the capacity to dispose their wills in accordance with reason, while recognizing the infirmities of their own nature relative

to God. It is thus a presupposition of Descartes' picture that the *généreux* triangulate themselves as equal to others and as lesser beings compared to God. They consider themselves neither inferior to others with greater wealth, honor, intelligence, knowledge, beauty, or other perfection, nor superior to those whom they surpass in such goods.

For all these things seem to them to be very unimportant, by contrast with the virtuous will for which alone they esteem themselves, and which they suppose also to be present, or at least capable of being present, in every other person. (Art. 154, AT XI.448/CSM I.384)

Having this attitude towards others is practically beneficial. The *généreux* have the right degree of humility towards others—they reflect on the infirmity of their nature and the wrong they have either done in the past or are capable of doing; they do not prefer themselves above others; and they think others equally capable of using their free wills as well as they do (art. 155, AT XI.447/CSM I.385). These habits of thought, in turn, help them to attain “complete command” over their other passions—especially their desire for things they cannot control; envy and jealousy for goods outside them; hatred, because they esteem everyone equally; fear, because of the self-assurance their virtue gives them; anger, because they “never give their enemies any advantage by acknowledging that they are injured by them” (art. 156, 203, AT XI.448, 481/CSM I.385, 400–1); vicious pride, evoked by flattery; and shame, from fear of being blamed (art. 204, AT XI.482/CSM I.401). They fear no evil and are beyond the power of fortune; yet, they have compassion for those who suffer misfortune and lack the strength to forebear it (art. 187, AT XI.469–70/CSM I.395). Underwriting these practical benefits is the generous person's understanding of the moral equality of all human beings and an acceptance of the providential order established by God (art. 198; AT XI.476–7/CSM I.398–9).

Although that for which we ought to value ourselves and others equally is intrinsic to our nature, it does not follow that the conditions for generosity are all intrinsic. It is for this reason that Descartes refers to the intrinsic conditions in ‘capacity’ terms. That one has complete command over the will does not mean that one automatically has the right kind of self-esteem that is constitutive of generosity. That the Devil could have. What we are suggesting is that there is also an *internal, constitutive* relationship between generosity and having the right esteem for oneself *relative* to others and to God, not merely a contingent, causal relationship. Thus our view is stronger than that of Cécile Nicco-Kerivel, who reduces the social dimension of Cartesian generosity to its “socializing effects,” regarding it as having a kind of “negative sociality” in that it instructs us *not* to have contempt for others, while falling short of requiring us to positively love others.¹⁵ This is sufficient, she considers, to motivate us to create social bonds with others. To make sense of why Descartes would make it *constitutive* of generosity and not merely one of its effects that we prefer to serve the interests of others above our own—that the *généreux* “esteem nothing more highly than doing good to others” (art. 156, AT XI.447–8/CSM I.385)—this negative sociality will not do. It is only if the comparative aspect of generosity is an internal condition of its realization that we can make sense of this aspect of Cartesian generosity.

Whether one has the right kind of self-esteem depends, moreover, on whether one is in circumstances that permit one to make such reasonable comparisons of one’s own and others’ worth. That Descartes thinks this is so is reflected in his treatment of defective forms of self-esteem: vanity and abjectness.

Unequal social structures are particularly obstructive to generosity because they valorize goods such as intelligence, beauty, wealth, and honors that are esteemed precisely *because*

they are inequitably distributed (art. 158, AT XI.449/CSM I.386). The vanity of those who have such goods, and the abjectness (vicious humility) of those who do not, fester in such contexts. Vanity is most vicious when, fueled by flattery and unjust praise, the vain think that merit is unimportant (art. 157, AT XI.448–9/CSM I.385–6). Vanity and abjectness are, moreover, mutually reinforcing. Since the vain get to be vain by humiliating others and the abject, abject by believing that they “cannot subsist on their own or without the things that depend on others,” vanity and humility are intrinsically related to each other and to the chance events that produce inequitable distributions of external goods (AT XI.448–9/CSM I.385–6). Abjectness involves a feeling of weakness or irresolution, an incapacity to refrain from actions one knows one will later regret, and a lack of self-sufficiency (art. 159, AT XI.450/CSM I.386). The abject shamefully abase themselves before those from whom they seek some advantage or fear some evil, or lord it over those from whom they neither expect nor fear anything. Hence, the vain and the abject are each prone to veneration or scorn for the wrong reasons, depending on whether they judge others capable or incapable of doing them some favor or evil (art. 162, AT XI.454–5/CSM I.388). Since their self-esteem fluctuates according to their prosperity or adversity, as fortune dictates, there is no constancy in their sense of self-worth (art. 159, AT XI.450/CSM I.386). The *généreux*, by contrast, lead lives of choice, not chance.

This essential difference between legitimate and illegitimate forms of self-esteem lies in what traditionally would have been referred to as a difference in their ‘formal objects’—the types of objects that define the conditions under which a passion is appropriate or possible.¹⁶ Both forms of self-esteem are strengthened by the same movement of the animal spirits and differ only in the reasons upon which the “good opinion of ourselves” is based in each case (art. 160, AT XI.451/CSM I.386). As we have seen, the sets of reasons that differentiate

generosity from vanity and abjectness include a difference in attitudes towards others. Vanity and abjectness presuppose that the goods for which one values oneself cannot be shared by all; that others can either increase or diminish one's value; and that one is dependent on others for one's self-esteem. One's mood and whole demeanor fluctuate between sudden bursts of elation or sadness depending on fluctuations in how these goods are distributed. Generosity, meanwhile, presupposes a good that is common to all, that can be shared in equally; self-sufficiency for all; and that each person is able to enjoy a constant and uniform movement of spirits (art. 160–1. AT XI.452/CSM I.387).

All this emphasis on moral equality may seem only to reinforce the puzzlement generated by Descartes' comment that the generous person prefers to serve others above themselves. Should we not instead prefer ourselves and others equally? Descartes' treatment of this issue is scant, but we can say two things in clarifying what he might mean. First, because moral equality is implied by generosity, there is no rational requirement that in acting from one's legitimate self-esteem one must put one's own interests above all else. This is already a significant step towards legitimizing altruism. It does not follow, however, that self-sacrifice for the sake of others is always warranted. It takes the judicious use of reason and will to determine whether the advantage gained is worth it or not.¹⁷ That self-sacrifice has to be justified does not make it a contingent matter that generosity involves a comparative act of assessing one's value relative to others; on the contrary, it reinforces the idea that it is constitutive of generosity.¹⁸

The second point is that the answer to why preferring others' interests is part of generosity ultimately depends on where the boundaries of the self are drawn. The good father, Descartes writes, regards his children

as other parts of himself, and seeks their good as he does his own, or even more assiduously. For he imagines that he and they form a whole of which he is not the better part, and so he often puts their interests before his own and is not afraid of sacrificing himself in order to save them. (AT XI.389/CSM I.357)

The mechanism for the creation of such extended selves, which include families, communities, and nation states, is love (AT XI.387/CSM I.356), and again it is not irrational to suppose that one might put the preservation of the whole or even other parts of one's extended 'moral' self above the preservation of one's own 'metaphysical' self, a particular union of mind and body.¹⁹ Interestingly, a similar idea is found in Astell. Using the same kind of mereological language she finds in Descartes and the Stoic Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*,²⁰ Astell reminds her young women that we are all parts of one great whole and the body of Christ.²¹ They are reminded that "we were not made for ourselves" (*SPL* 76) and to actively contribute to society, in order to live up to the dignity of their nature as free and rational creatures.²²

Although generosity and vanity both involve the passions of wonder, joy, and love—both self-love and "love for the cause"—the cause is different in each case and the wonder gives rise to different effects. The type of wonder involved in vanity and in abjectness is surprise—the shock of the new!—whereas, in generosity and virtuous humility, wonder is more like the tranquil awe we experience in the presence of something marvelous and enduring, like God (AT VII.35–52/CSM II.24–36; art. 190, AT XI.472/CSM I.396). "Each time we consider [the causes of legitimate self-esteem] afresh," he writes, "they are a source of new wonder" (art. 160, AT XI.453/CSM I.387). In vicious humility or abjectness, sadness replaces joy and self-love is tinged with hatred for one's faults, giving rise to self-contempt and repentance for the acts that issue from it, whereas, in virtuous humility, we have only an accurate representation

of our infirmities as finite subjects and derive satisfaction from doing our best despite the inevitable uncertainty of the outcome (AT XI.452/CSM I.387). The pursuit of virtue in accordance with legitimate self-esteem yields a steadfast self-satisfaction that is “the sweetest of all joys, because it depends only on ourselves” (art. 190, AT XI.471/CSM I.396).

Aside from being dependent upon certain attitudes towards others, it is reasonable to suppose that generosity is also dependent on certain social conditions obtaining. Social structures in which there is political inequality and an inequitable distribution of goods tend to make some people think that some groups are more or less human than others, attitudes which seem to legitimize the oppression of one group by another. At the start of his *Two Treatises of Government*, John Locke described slavery as “so vile and miserable an Estate of Man, and so directly opposite to the generous Temper and Courage of our nation” (*Two Treatises*, 141), making explicit the contradiction between generosity and political oppression. Descartes never suggests that a completely equitable distribution of all goods, including goods of the soul, is possible, but he is adamant that none of this makes a difference to the moral equality of all people. He claims, for example, that it is easy to believe that God puts into our bodies souls that are “not all equally noble and strong,” but none of this precludes the possibility of universal generosity. Still, the inequitable distribution of goods makes it easier to create inequitable social structures, which, in turn, inhibit generosity. Although a privileged background—a “good birth” (art. 161, AT XI.453/CSM I.388)—gives one a head start in the generosity stakes, a “good upbringing” can always correct for any deficiencies of birth. Education is essential for fostering social equality because it, more than anything else, creates opportunities for frequent reflection on the will and on the advantages of having a firm and constant resolution to use it well, in comparison with the “vain and useless cares of ambitious people” (art. 161, AT XI.454/CSM I.388).²³

3. Astell on the Social Conditions of Generosity

Given its emphasis on social equality, it is not surprising that the Cartesian conception of generosity would give rise to a feminist ethic emphasizing the equal dignity of men and women. Building on these Cartesian themes, the English philosopher Mary Astell thought through more clearly than Descartes himself the social and political implications of this key virtue. In this section, we turn to Astell's innovations with respect to the social dimension of Cartesian generosity.

There is compelling evidence that Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* had an impact on Astell's thinking about generosity in her first major work, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (part I, 1694; part II, 1697). Astell's personal copy of *Les passions de l'ame* (published by Elzevier in 1650) can be found in the Old Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge, replete with Astell's marginalia and handwritten table of contents, including a summative note on article 54, "Esteem & Contempt, Generosity, or Pride & Humility or Baseness."²⁴ Astell purchased this copy on November 17, 1696, a few months prior to the publication of her second *Proposal* in 1697. In the final chapter of that *Proposal*, she makes explicit reference to Descartes' *Passions* in an extended discussion "Concerning the Regulation of the Will and the Government of the Passions" (*SPL* 218, n.1). There are also several references to the Cartesian notion of generosity and defective forms of self-esteem throughout the first and second parts: Astell describes vicious self-esteem as "nothing else but Generosity degenerated and corrupted" (*SPL* 62); she refers more than once to a "Generous Resolution" (*SPL* 122, 140); and she highlights the value of generosity as a principle that promotes resilience in the midst of life's troubles (*SPL* 141).²⁵ In a 1714 letter to Ann Coventry, Astell also echoes Descartes' definition of the concept when she describes generosity as making "a

right use of our Liberty, endeavouring to do always what is best.” When she adds that the *généreux* “make an estimate of themselves and others by their intrinsic Value, and not by the measures that are commonly taken,” she reflects the way in which generosity relies on certain kinds of appropriate comparisons between self and others.²⁶

Scholars have examined the influence of Descartes’ conception of generosity on Astell’s moral and political philosophy.²⁷ They have focused on how Astell uses the priority of reason and will in Descartes’ ethics to argue that women are just as capable as men of generosity in virtue of possessing a rational soul, and that the moral advancement and happiness of women depends on their cultivating generosity.²⁸ Pulling on the threads of Descartes’ concept, Astell emphasizes the importance of focusing attention on the good use of the will as the ultimate source of value for women, and that doing so will help free women from vain desires, the vicissitudes of fortune, and the opinions of others who inhibit their self-esteem and render them dependent on men for their well-being and happiness (*SPL* 140, 233; see also Astell *Christian Religion*, §254). But scholars are yet to investigate Astell’s views on how generosity can consist in both a proper esteem for the self and an equal esteem for others. They have also given little attention to the internal relationship between the passion and virtue of generosity and the social conditions for its realization, which include not just egalitarian attitudes among those possessing generosity, but also social structures that enable all persons to attain the right kind of self-esteem. Generosity in the technical sense derived from Descartes’ analysis—as legitimate self-esteem—relies on favorable social structures and practices enabling women to value the freedom of the will above other inequitably distributed goods. The attainment of generosity, in turn, engenders the right concern and good will—‘generosity’ in the common sense of the term—towards others as moral equals because it entails neither over nor underrating ourselves relative to others (*SPL* 154).

Astell's regard for the social dimension of generosity is most apparent in the connection she draws between self-esteem and human dignity. Throughout her *Proposal*, she emphasizes that women must improve their minds, so that they can attain the dignity of rational creatures and avoid sinking to the level of animals (*SPL* 76, 126, 129). At the very start of her work, she announces her intention to help women "live up to the dignity of your Nature" (*SPL* 57), and by the end, she has identified the value of a certain "greatness of soul" that "consists in the living up to the dignity of our Natures, scorning to do a mean unbecoming thing" (*SPL* 111). In Astell's opinion, every woman is capable of living up to their natural dignity, because every woman is born with an "inbred self-esteem and desire of good" (*SPL* 63)—even the "Humblest Person that lives has some Self-Esteem" (*SPL* 233). Crucial to the attainment of self-esteem is a woman's recognition of her power to execute her freedom of will to pursue the best ends. A woman must acknowledge that her power to do good is entirely in her own hands; if she denies this, then she 'degrades' her nature by living like an automated machine rather than a morally responsible being (*SPL* 148).²⁹ A woman must also learn to develop *just* self-esteem—an esteem for something that truly belongs to the soul and brings it closer to God. A woman's value for herself must be grounded in its dignified status or its 'nobility'; the self must be regarded as a "particle of Divinity" within her (*SPL* 53). Thus Astell concludes that "she who considers in whose Image her Soul was Created ... cannot prize it too much" (*SPL* 146). On this basis, Kathleen Ahearn has interpreted Astell's notion of self-esteem as terminating in esteem for God rather than esteem for one's power of self-mastery.³⁰ While Astell does indeed write of the generous woman that "her Self-Esteem does not terminate in her *Self* but in GOD, and she values herself only for GOD's sake" (*SPL* 233), it is a mistake to think that the two kinds of esteem are mutually exclusive or that the generous person no longer esteems herself for a human quality. In that very same passage,

Astell makes the connection clear: the generous person, in contrast with the viciously humble or proud, does not prize herself on some imaginary excellency, but “because she is GOD’s Workmanship, endow’d by him with many excellent Qualities, and made capable of Knowing and Enjoying the Sovereign and Only Good” (*SPL* 233). Following Descartes, Astell regards the power of self-mastery—our freedom to dispose of our will—as a godlike, God-given power; a sign that we are God’s creatures, endowed by him with a special dignity and excellence above all other creatures. To esteem our power of self-mastery is to esteem God’s workmanship—but it is our own power, not God’s.

Astell’s ideas concerning self-esteem and dignity are likely indebted to *A Discourse Concerning Generosity*, a 1693 treatise now attributed to the English politician, John Somers.³¹ Astell is almost certainly referring to Somers’ work in her letter of 1714, in which she reports that a certain “Discourse” on generosity has been her favorite for the past twenty years.³² In the Preface to his *Discourse*, Somers acknowledges a debt to *The Passions of the Soul* (sig. A5r) and he also highlights an explicit connection between generosity and the notion of human dignity. On Somers’ reading, the generous man recognizes not only “a Man’s real Price” (Somers, *Discourse*, 41), his dignity in terms of his intrinsic worth as a free-willed agent, but also his “rank and order” in the creation (87), his dignified elevation above the animals, and his resemblance to God (44–5, 21). Astell incorporates these comparative ideas into her calls for women to live up to the dignity of their natures. Generosity or just self-esteem is like the shining or polishing of a woman’s “Crown,” she suggests (*SPL* 141); it is reflective of a woman’s natural nobility—her inherent worth and status as a human being.

These sentiments about dignity and self-esteem lie at the heart of Astell's ideas about generosity and the social conditions for its realization. The social dimension of generosity comes to the fore in Astell's argument for a "*Religious Retirement*" (SPL 73), her academic retreat for young women. In her *Proposal*, Astell calls for an educational institution that enables women to cultivate the virtue of generosity, so that they might avoid pride, vanity, and excessive humility, and use their freedom of the will for the best ends. Such institutional support is necessary, she says, for women to fulfil their moral potential: "For since GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them?" (SPL 80). Astell follows Descartes in her recognition of an internal connection between the idea of generosity and having good will toward others. In the context of appealing to the honor and virtue of men not to decry knowledge and ingenuity in women, she asks "What generous Spirit that has a due regard to the good of Mankind will not be forward to advance and perfect it?" (SPL 107). But she goes further than him by investigating what the cultivation of generosity requires for a *gendered, socially-situated* being, one who stands in important relations to others by virtue of her membership in a gendered social group.

In his *Discourse*, Somers casts doubt on the ability of women to obtain generosity. He claims that women and other "effeminate" types lack the strength of mind for this virtue (Somers, *Discourse*, 60–1). These "feeble Spirits" are inclined to comply with the dictates of others in order to avoid confrontation, sometimes even despite their better judgement (58). They have a certain "impotency of Spirit" that renders their reasoning powers useless to them (59, 58). Because they lack the resolution to use their reason well, they are forever changing their minds and lacking in consistency (59). They act, as it were, by chance, not reason (60). By contrast, the *généreux* cultivate a "manly" firmness, they have a "masculine" vigor in all their

judgements, and they develop a “manliness of Spirit ... or greatness of Soul” (104). Like Machiavelli’s man of *virtù*, Somers’ man of generosity is properly masculine insofar as he is resolute, decisive, and unflinching in the face of fortune.³³ In this regard, Somers fails to follow through on the egalitarian implications of his own adaptation of Cartesian ethics. He fails to see that, in denying generosity to women and others lacking in masculine vigor, he betrays his own belief that a man who has justified self-esteem has esteem for all human beings: “If he esteems himself for the Resolutions he makes to use his Natural Freedom rightly, he esteems other Men *equally upon that account*” (49–50; our italics).

By contrast, Astell explicitly recognizes the egalitarianism at the heart of Descartes’ ethical principle. On her reading, generosity entails an equal esteem for all persons, including women, because both sexes share the power to dispose of their free will and to resolve to do what is best and most becoming to the dignity of their natures. Astell analyses the equality of human beings in terms of goods that are equitably distributed—reason and the will—those noble, godlike capacities that raise them above the beasts. Similar to Descartes, her explanation for defective forms of self-esteem lies in how a person esteems themselves *relative to others* and on the basis of *extrinsic and inequitably distributed goods*.

To know our own Strength and neither to over nor underrate our selves is one of the most material points of Wisdom and which indeed we are most commonly ignorant of, else we shou’d not reach at all, how unable soever we are to attain it, nor make so many successless attempts and be forc’d to come off with that pitiful Apology, *I was mistaken, I did not think it*. But we can scarce duly estimate our Understandings till we have regulated our Wills, reform’d Self-love and a train of immortalized Passions. (SPL 154–5)

But Astell also underscores the fact that women require positive enabling conditions—such as education, female friendship, and the benevolence of others—to cultivate generosity, whereas early modern society offers only disabling conditions. With a critical eye, she observes that her society enculturates women to base their self-esteem primarily upon inequitably distributed goods, such as wealth and beauty. Women thus become prone to defective forms of self-esteem, such as pride, vanity, and excessive humility.³⁴ These vicious passions arise when value is placed upon the goods of chance or fortune that are neither constant nor equally shared.

Women are not naturally prone to viciousness, however, but rather have, as a result of custom, their passions diverted from their natural and true objects to merely apparent goods:

Love and Honour are what every one of us naturally esteem; they are excellent things in themselves and very worthy of our regard; and by how much the readier we are to embrace what ever resembles them, by so much more the dangerous, it is that these venerable Names should be wretchedly abus'd and affixt to their direct contraries, yet this is the Custom of the World. (*SPL* 63)

All is not lost, however, for while vices such as pride and vanity are “very bad Weeds,” they are still

the product of a good Soil; they are nothing else but Generosity degenerated and corrupted. A desire to advance and perfect its Being, is planted by GOD in all Rational Natures, to excite them hereby to every worthy and becoming Action; for certainly, next to the Grace of GOD, nothing does so powerfully restrain people from Evil and stir them up to Good, as a generous Temper. And therefore to be ambitious of perfections is no fault, tho to assume the Glory of our Excellencies to our selves, or to Glory in such as we really have not, are. And were Womens haughtiness express'd

in disdain to do a mean and evil thing; wou'd they pride themselves in somewhat truly perfective of a Rational Nature, there were no hurt in it. (*SPL* 63)

Astell's conclusion is that women might therefore easily develop a well-founded self-esteem, provided that the external obstacles to its cultivation are removed.

The comparative judgements that are essential to developing the right kind of self-esteem in relation to others and God, are thus easily perverted under conditions of social inequality. It is not just how or how little women value themselves that is the root of their subordination, but how much disproportionately they value men. "We value *them* too much, and our *selves* too little," Astell says, "if we place any part of our worth in their Opinion, and do not think our selves capable of Nobler Things than the pitiful Conquest of some worthless heart" (*SPL* 55–6). Men themselves turn out to be among the inequitably distributed goods for which women compete. Astell hopes that a woman would esteem "a Man only as he is an admirer of Vertue, and not barely for that he is yours" (*SPL* 123). Admiring virtue is a good all can share in; possession of or being possessed by another is not. If a woman is admired for her virtue, she is admired for her participation in universal goodness rather than for some lesser good of fortune. Here, Astell recognizes the co-dependency between the vanity of men and the abjectness of women. It would be better for women to seek the "love and admiration of God and Angels" than "vain, insignificant men" (*SPL* 56). To live up to the dignity of their nature, women must esteem themselves according to their intrinsic worth, not in accordance either with how men happen to esteem them or with how much they esteem possessing a husband.

In Astell's analysis, women thus fail to satisfy both elements of Descartes' compositional definition of generosity. They wonder too much at men, and when they turn their attention to themselves, it is for the wrong reasons. They exhibit a "mistaken self-love" for objects of

pride like beauty and money (*SPL* 62). They are either ridiculously humble before men or vain about “Butter flies and trifles”—things that the “enchanted circle” of Custom makes them value about themselves (*SPL* 55, 66). Men’s manipulative flattery of women for qualities that contribute to their subjugation is, as Andreas Blank has argued, a principal mechanism behind their distorted self-esteem and inflated esteem for men.³⁵ As Astell writes:

She whose Vanity makes her swallow praises by the whole sale, without examining whether she deserves them, or from what hand they come, will reckon it but gratitude to think well of him who values her so much; and think she must needs be merciful to the poor despairing Lover whom her Charms have reduc’d to die at her feet. (*SPL* 63)

That men’s flattery has this inhibiting effect on women’s self-esteem lends further fuel to the idea that generosity has a social foundation.³⁶ Above all, women err because they are kept in ignorance of that in which their true worth lies, the good use of their rational will and the first component of generosity. Women fail to see that if

it be the property of Rational Creatures, and Essential to their very Natures to *Chuse* their Actions, and to determine their Wills to that Choice by such Principles and Reasonings as their Understandings are furnish’d with, they who are desirous to be rank’d in that Order of Beings must conduct their Lives by these Measures. (*SPL* 128)

It is not surprising, subsequently, that women do not demonstrate the second component of generosity—a “firm and constant resolution to use their wills well” (AT XI.445–6/CSM I.384). The good use of the will is a key element of prudence (practical wisdom), and the lack of prudence in women is not a defect of nature, but of custom (*SPL* 59, 61).³⁷ If women err, it is by letting their wills follow what is customarily prescribed for them rather than what their intellects, in more equitable circumstances, would tell them is best.

Where social structures reinforce an inequitable distribution of goods and power, transitioning from abjectness to generosity may simply not be achievable. Any proposal for the moral development of women must, therefore, include a proposal for challenging those social structures. There are two crucial players in Astell's proposal for social reform: *education* and the *Christian religion*. Since the root cause of all sin and error is ignorance, the advancement of women cannot occur without a rigorous program of education to release women from the ignorance and vanity in which they are "nurs'd" (*SPL* 61). One of the principal functions of education is to move women towards greater self-sufficiency, which, in turn, yields higher forms of self-satisfaction and self-esteem. It is important that this training take place outside of society, in a religious refuge, because

neither Prudence nor heroic Goodness are easily attainable amidst the noise and hurry of the World, we must therefore retire a while from its clamour and importunity, if we generously design to do it good, and having calmly and sedately observ'd and rectify'd what is amiss in our selves, we shall be fitter to promote a reformation in others. (*SPL* 105)

Astell encourages women to do good to themselves in retreat from society, so that they might do good to others upon their return (*SPL* 73). Her academy would include access to the right training of the will and understanding—a training in the Cartesian method, in particular, to avoid mistaken judgements (*SPL* 166, 176–9). But this training can only be effected in a withdrawal from patriarchal society, in an all-female institute of learning in which relations are founded on friendship, mutual esteem, and benevolence (*SPL* 74–100).³⁸ Women can acquire true generosity only in a social context, or within relationships, in which others wish well toward them and seek to promote their happiness.³⁹

An obvious difficulty with our analysis here is that Astell's proposal was directed only at "ladies of quality"—women of high birth and breeding.⁴⁰ In seventeenth-century texts, the adjective 'generous' commonly denotes those "of noble or aristocratic lineage; high-born" (*OED*). Astell stipulates that her students will be young women "whose Dispositions as well as their Births are to be Generous" (*SPL* 87). It is necessary that these future educators of the young are well-born, she says, because those of lower standing are "not like to form a generous temper in the minds of the Educated" (*SPL* 103). Once they have received their proper training, these high-born ladies will be able to "distinguish themselves from their Inferiors" by their good deeds (*SPL* 102). They will endeavor to "propagate Wisdom and Piety to all" within their sphere (*SPL* 105). By sharing their knowledge, they will "infuse a new Life into all Generous Tempers" in their neighborhoods (*SPL* 193). But this seems like a very limited sphere of influence, exclusive to a select group of society's members, reinforcing inequalities of class if not of gender. Astell's class prejudices thus cast doubt on her commitment to the idea that generosity depends on conditions of social equality. From this viewpoint, it would appear that social hierarchies still play a role in determining who will be the educators and who will be educated. True generosity appears to be attainable only among those whose birth and breeding is 'generous' in that second, archaic sense of the term.

To be fair to Astell, however, she makes her recommendations about the social status of her students with appeal to pragmatic considerations. She points to the fact that women of lower rank have neither the time nor the resources to educate the young and relieve the poor, hence "they whose Capacities and Circumstances of Living do not fit em for it, lie not under that obligation of extending their view which Persons of a larger reach and greater leisure do" (*SPL* 153). Ladies of quality are conveniently placed in circumstances that allow them to devote their energies to benefiting others. It does not follow that Astell's reflections on these

social inequalities cancel out her claims about the moral equality of all human beings. The circumstances that prevent low-ranked women from being educated, and from becoming educators themselves, are historical and contingent. With different social structures, they, too, might come to cultivate generosity and live up to the dignity of their natures. Commenting on Somers' *Discourse*, Astell affirms his view that generosity is "not unsuitable to the lowest Rank of Rational Creatures,"⁴¹ and when she ascribes "Excellencies of the Mind" to human beings, she ascribes them "to Human Nature in the Lump [i.e. as a whole]" (*SPL* 155). Even the "meanest" person, she says, "may Think, may use their own Faculties rightly," even if they do not have the leisure to pursue languages or devour books (*SPL* 168). While Astell's plans for educational reform are limited in scope and design, they are not necessarily elitist or exclusive by nature; in principle, they might be extended to suit different socio-political arrangements in different times and places.

Finally, Astell finds Christianity well aligned to her Cartesian program for it teaches women that they are judged by whether or not they make good use of their free will. She who is a "Christian out of Choice," she says, "requires a clear understanding and regular Affections to move the will to a direct choice of Good, and a steadfast adherence to it" (*SPL* 71). Focusing on the well-being and good use of one's immortal soul is the path to true happiness. Herein lies our perfection: that the true end of religion is to work our minds in a way so that we may become as much like God in "Purity, Charity and ... excellencies" consistent with the imperfection of a creature (*SPL* 72). This we shall achieve by perfecting our understanding, focusing it on those clear and distinct and eternal truths that derive from the immutability of God (*SPL* 154–5, 168–9, 171–2), and regulating our Wills through our "reform'd Self-love and a train of immortalized Passions" (154–5). These ideas echo those of the Christian Platonist, Henry More, the author of *An Account of Virtue* (1690), yet another treatise

inspired by Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*. Like More, Astell maintains that a thoroughgoing education in the use of reason and religion helps the moral agent to direct her wayward passions to their proper object: namely, the sovereign good, or to God himself (see *SPL* 219).⁴² In various passages, Astell repeats several key sentiments from More's *Account of Virtue*, including his claim that the passions can lead to happiness, provided they are fixed on goods which "relate to another World" (*SPL* 218). A combination of Christian Platonist and Cartesian ideas thus underlies Astell's proposal that young women need an opportunity to disengage from the social structures and pressures that prevent generosity, moral equality, and self-sufficiency from being achievable—to be able and equipped to see those structures for what they are, and to direct their wills towards their true object, love of, and ultimately, union with God. Above all, in regulating our wills, we must be guided by our love for God, for to love God is to will what God wills for us, and what God wills cannot be wrong.

4. Conclusion

We have traced a chain of inference in Astell's works from the Cartesian conception of generosity to a call for social reforms that will enable the cultivation of women's self-esteem—namely, equal access to education and a religious refuge from men—to the restoration of women's dignity, that is, to giving women their proper due as members of the human species. Women's propensity for generosity grounds Astell's calls for the recognition of women's dignity. We have seen how this chain of inference is conceptually grounded in a hitherto unacknowledged feature of Descartes' notion of generosity—its essentially social dimension. Astell innovates on Descartes' idea by showing that the inherently social nature of generosity implies that, for women to realize this virtue, certain social conditions must be met, and women must be properly esteemed both by themselves and by men on the basis of their moral equality with men. On these grounds, she calls for an all-female academy outside

of the trappings of wider society, and for a formal education in the Christian religion, to teach women the proper object of their passions beyond the world of mortal men. She thus, more so than Descartes himself, saw both the inherent interdependency of the good will and good will towards others, and the nearly insurmountable obstacles facing women seeking their attainment.⁴³

¹ Ruth Perry speculates that Jonathan Swift was the author of this piece (*Celebrated Mary Astell*, 229); while Patricia Springborg says that Richard Steele likely wrote it (“Introduction,” 15). The letter is signed “Tobiah Greenhat.”

² Descartes’ “general remedy” for disturbances of the passions is forethought and diligence by means of which we may “strive to separate within ourselves the movement of the blood and spirits from the thought to which they are usually joined.” Two strategies are offered for achieving this separation. The first, theoretical, suggestion is that we should “take heed and recollect that everything presented to the imagination tends to mislead the soul and make the reasons for pursuing the object of its passion appear much stronger than they are, and the reasons for not pursuing this object much weaker.” The second is more practical. It involves refraining from making any immediate judgement and distracting ourselves with other thoughts until the disturbance of the blood has subsided (art. 211, AT XI.487/CSM I.403). Neither strategy on its surface makes reference to external conditions for its realization.

³ An exception is Cécile Nicco-Kerinvel’s excellent discussion of the “socializing effect” of Cartesian generosity (“La générosité et l’amour”), which we discuss further below. On the social and political dimension of Descartes’ affect theory, see inter alia Barret-Kriegel, “Politique-(s) de Descartes?”; Shapiro, “Cartesian Generosity”; Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*, ch. 8; and Brown and Normore, *Descartes and the Ontology of Everyday*

Life, ch. 7. In twentieth-century scholarship, the focus of attention in Cartesian political theory was largely on whether or not the rational and temporal orders—history and reason—are distinct for Descartes, with, as James Schall argues, Maxime LeRoy on the negative side and Henri Gouhier, among others, arguing the affirmative (Schall, “Cartesianism and Political Theory,” 260–1). Descartes was often seen as distancing himself from humanism, according to which human beings can only realize themselves in society, favoring instead the idea that social reality is “exterior” to one’s own realization as a spiritual being (Del Noce, “Cartesio è la Politica,” 8–9; cited in Schall, “Cartesianism and Political Theory,” 278), or as serving to shore up individualism against totalitarianism, as Hess argued (Schall, “Cartesianism and Political Theory,” 260). Interestingly, the focus in such discussions is often on Descartes’ dualism and his mechanical, despiritualized philosophy of material nature, not on his account of generosity, which we suggest here places the social at the centre of moral development.

⁴ See also Descartes’ *morale par provision* from the *Discourse on the Method*, III (AT VI.28/CSM I.125).

⁵ As Frierson notes, this would be a very weak argument (“Learning to Love,” 323). It is not because others value me for my free will that my free will is valuable; rather, it is the other way round.

⁶ The connection between voluntary action and praise is clarified through the notion of authorship at Principles I, art. 37. Our “supreme perfection” lies in that we act voluntarily, for it makes us in a special way the author of our actions and judgements. Only where something acts freely is praise warranted; we do not praise automata who act from necessity.

⁷ See Frierson, “Learning to Love”; see also Marshall, *Descartes’s Moral Theory*, 152–6; Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*, 203–5. For studies of Cartesian generosity more generally, see Shapiro, “Cartesian Generosity”; Alanen, *Descartes’s Concept of Mind*, ch. 7;

Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*, ch. 8; Tilmouth, “Generosity and the Utility of the Passions”; Parvizian, “Generosity, the Cogito, and the Fourth Meditation.”

⁸ See the Third Meditation, AT VII.35–52/CSM II.24–36; see also articles 53, 70, 75 in *Passions of the Soul* (AT XI.373, 380/CSM I.350, 353).

⁹ Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*, 203.

¹⁰ Frierson, “Learning to Love,” 333.

¹¹ See Principles I, art. 37, 62 (AT VIIIa.18–19, 30/CSM I.205, 214–15), and the Fourth Meditation (AT VII.52–62/CSM II.37–43).

¹² See Discourse V (AT VI.57–8/CSM I.140).

¹³ See Principles I, art. 33–5 (AT VIIIa.17–18/CSM I.204), and the Fourth Meditation (AT VII.52–62/CSM II.37–43).

¹⁴ “Authority” in this context refers to being the author of one’s own actions, representing oneself in word and deed, not to a position of relative political power.

¹⁵ Nicco-Kerinvel, “La générosité et l’amour,” 250–2.

¹⁶ Kenny, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 189.

¹⁷ See Descartes’ letter to Elisabeth, September 15, 1645 (AT IV.290/CSMK 265).

¹⁸ See Nicco-Kerinvel, “La générosité et l’amour,” 251–2.

¹⁹ Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*, 160; Brown and Normore, *Descartes and the Ontology of Everyday Life*, 218–24.

²⁰ Perry, *Celebrated Mary Astell*, 373.

²¹ See Broad, *Philosophy of Mary Astell*, 121–2.

²² We thank an anonymous referee for pressing us to clarify our thoughts about the basis for the claim in Descartes (and Astell) about the connection between generosity as legitimate self-esteem and having a preference to serve others’ interests above one’s own.

²³ How far Descartes himself would have gone in thinking universal generosity actually possible, given how entrenched class structures were at the time, is not something that can be settled on the basis of his texts. Our focus, however, is on the conceptual possibilities afforded by his analysis of generosity as a passion and a virtue.

²⁴ Descartes, *Les Passions de L'Ame*, in the Old Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, shelfmark H.9.19, lower endpaper 2r. We are grateful to Catherine Sutherland, the Deputy Librarian of the Pepys Library and Special Collections at Magdalene College, for bringing this item to our attention.

²⁵ For Astell's other references to generosity, see *SPL* 56, 87, 103, 105, 107, 111, 119, 120, 136, 193, 236.

²⁶ Mary Astell to Ann Coventry, July 26, 1714; in Badminton Estate, Badminton, "Family Papers: Lady Anne Coventry," FmT/B 1/3/2; printed in appendix C to Perry, *Celebrated Mary Astell*, 371, 370.

²⁷ See Sowaal, "Astell's *Serious Proposal*," 228, 232; Broad, *Philosophy of Mary Astell*, 95–101; Ahearn, "Astell's Account of Feminine Self-esteem," 45–9; Sowaal, "Astell and the Development of Vice," 64–8.

²⁸ See Broad, *Philosophy of Mary Astell*, 90–1.

²⁹ Among the marginalia of her copy of the *Passions*, around article 6, is a comment by Astell quoting Anne Dacier from "La Vie de Platon" in *Les Œuvres de Platon* (1699), that "death arrives when the machine [body] being used up, the bonds relax and give liberty to the soul, which sends forth from its prison with very great pleasure" (our translation), an indication of the importance to her of reading the *Passions* in this Christianized Platonist way.

³⁰ Ahearn, "Astell's Account of Feminine Self-esteem," 43.

³¹ The *English Short-title Catalogue* attributes this work to Somers; for further attributions, see Harrison and Laslett, *Library of John Locke*, 141; Rudolph, *Common Law and Enlightenment*, 192–3.

³² Perry, *Celebrated Mary Astell*, 370–1; see also 372.

³³ On Machiavelli and generosity, see Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*, 192–4.

³⁴ See Sowaal, “Astell and the Development of Vice”; Ahearn, “Astell’s Account of Feminine Self-esteem,” 48–9.

³⁵ Blank, “Astell on Flattery and Self-Esteem.”

³⁶ We thank an anonymous referee for drawing our attention to this connection.

³⁷ On Astell’s concept of prudence, see Broad, “Astell, Cartesian Ethics, and the Critique of Custom.”

³⁸ See Kolbrener, “Astell’s ‘Design of Friendship’.”

³⁹ Astell’s writings thus lay bare a kind of autonomy contained within the ideal of Cartesian generosity that is much more relational than has hitherto been acknowledged: a notion of self-determination that is essentially dependent on the presence of enabling social conditions and the absence of preventing ones. On Astell’s relational concept of autonomy more generally, see Broad, *Philosophy of Mary Astell*, 170–83; Detlefsen, “Custom, Freedom, and Equality,” 28–31; Forbes, “Mary Astell on Bad Custom,” 790, 796.

⁴⁰ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this point to our attention.

⁴¹ Perry, *Celebrated Mary Astell*, 370.

⁴² Broad, “Astell, Cartesian Ethics, and the Critique of Custom,” 174.

⁴³ We are grateful for the astute comments we received from two anonymous referees and the editorial support of Deborah Boyle throughout this process. Funding for this research was supported by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Grant (DP190100019)—*The philosophical foundations of women’s rights: a new history, 1600-1750*. We acknowledge the

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