



Perception and Certainty in Mary Astell (1666–1731)

Jane Duran
University of California, Santa Barbara

Mary Astell held a somewhat unusual view of how our sensory perception might be deemed to provide us with knowledge, especially when we consider the influence of thinkers such as Locke on her time. Although aware of Locke, she was perhaps more influenced by John Norris and Cambridge Platonists in general—thus her biographer Ruth Perry notes that she placed faith in a primary position over reason, especially in religious disputes. She felt no need to argue for matters that seemed to her to be evident directly from faith; unlike Anne Conway, for example, she does not find it necessary to establish that the world is the result of a divine designer. Where she does feel that we need to use the evidence of our senses is in fighting against those who would destroy the Word of God as practiced by the established Church.

Primary Sources:

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