



Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists
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Education of Women in Mary Astell (1666–1731)

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Mary Astell was one of the first women in Britain to take as a matter of personal interest the education of women, and this she did in her well-known work *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*. Her idea of establishing educational institutions for women that would subject them to a rigorous curriculum might be regarded as more radical than it was, but the difficulty with Astell's thought is that she was a committed Tory, and almost all of her writings express what today would be regarded as extremely conservative views on matters. In other words, Astell sees women's education as a way of bringing out their special virtues so that they may be better subjects and marital partners—indeed, she seems to see life's trials as a way for women to make their particular virtues manifest. As she herself wrote, in the New Testament there is not a “word of Inequality or Natural Inferiority.” We may applaud Astell's views today, while still being somewhat perplexed at her devotion to the Crown.

Primary Sources:

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