

MARY ASTELL'S UTOPIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract. *This article retrieves aspects of Astell's philosophy that help us read it as an early modern undercurrent of thought, critical of possessive individualism and of its expansionist utopianism. The 17th century feminist utopian ideas of retreat that we examine here are singled out in their difference from Locke's expansionist utopia of childhood. Compared to Astell's utopias, Locke's utopianism of natural learning involves a much less consistent contractarian egalitarianism. At first sight, Astell's philosophy seems to be at the furthest remove from progressive thought due to her allegiance to the politically conservative mindset of the times. Yet, ironically, despite its own ambivalences, Astell's utopianism constitutes a radical switch of focus from colonial and patriarchal expansionism to an inclusive and critical universalism.*

Keywords: *Colonialism, Feminist Utopia, Universalism, Rationalism, Empiricism, Astell, Locke.*

Introduction

Despite renewed interest in utopian thought, some 17th century educational utopianisms remain philosophically under-theorized. For instance, though John Locke's liberalism has exerted a powerful hold on philosophy, his utopianization of childhood (Gregoriou and Papastephanou, 2013) has largely remained in the dark. As for Mary Astell, Locke's contemporary philosopher and critic, little of her work has surfaced in current utopian discourse. For many commentators, 'Astell is unquestionably a religious conservative, her high-flying Anglicanism in conflict with the latitudinarian moderation of the consummate Whig of the period, John Locke' (Ellenzweig, 2003: 380). Her Tory commitments are said to compromise the significance of her feminist utopianism (Rodrigues, 2011). And the contest between Astell and Locke has taken proportions of a 'compelling

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postmodern melodrama' (Goldie, 2007: 65) that has not helped utopianism¹ attract due feminist attention as a point of divergence.

The article aims neither to solve scholarly issues concerning whether Astell's conservatism tarnishes her proto-feminism; nor to compare Astell and Locke in a standard fashion (Squadrito, 1987; Springborg, 1995; Derek Taylor, 2007; and Goldie, 2007). Instead of exploring Astell's reading of Locke, we examine their diverging utopianisms. Our contrast does not presuppose that Astell had 'Locke permanently in her sights' (Goldie, 2007: 65). It unravels divergences between Astell and Locke that reflect tensions beyond Astell's authorial intentions and representational control over them. We begin with Locke's politicization and utopianization of the childhood of the male and noble natural learner and its connection with colonial expansionism. Then, we introduce Astell as Locke's historically neglected potential interlocutor, who offers an alternative utopian vision; and we indicate paths to utopian and feminist critique that scholarship on the history of European political philosophy has not yet explored.

In neglecting critical explorations of early modern educational utopianism of men and women philosophers, political philosophy misses important links between progressivism and expansionism. Elsewhere (Gregoriou and Papastephanou, 2013), we reveal such a link between Locke's ideas of the child as an inquisitive natural learner, on the one hand, and of the 'natural state' of the colonies, on the other. To ease the contrast of Locke's educational utopianism with Astell's we first sum up work that sets the stage for drawing connections between natural learning and colonial expansion. Then, Astell's philosophy allows us to register a case of feminist representation of female learners that challenges patriarchal and colonial constructions of childhood. Against Locke's ambivalent utopianism, Astell's utopianism, as a counterfactual possibility of early Enlightenment, contravenes those visions that serve imperial rationalizations of expansion.

The article does more than retrieve neglected, pioneering female figures of utopian thought. It shows why an interest in Astell is more than just historically rewarding or worthy of feminist-discursive attention. The interest in Astell is also fertile in illustrating complex political theorizations of the natural and the cultural toward an exploration of early modern thought that unveils rich, ambivalent and multiple utopianisms. Current complexities of feminist thought require analyses that illuminate 'overlapping structures of gender, sexuality, and race with those of class, culture, and postcolonial imperialism' (Allen, 2015: 520). The article contributes to the illumination of how gender issues intersected with class and empire in early modern philosophers such as Astell and Locke.

Natural Learning and Colonial Expansion

Political discourse in early modernity 'became increasingly secularized, as appeals to nature replaced appeals to Scripture'. But, simultaneously, its anthropological substratum became more explicit, 'as it appealed to human

¹On why utopianism includes utopias and dystopias (but certainly not anti-utopias), see Papastephanou (2009).

nature' (McCrystal, 1993: 190). Secularized politics entailed that what was sought was no longer a city of God but rather an earthly, new political configuration, a precursor of the liberal democratic state. The vision of such a new (and expanding) state, that would give all the male citizens of the imperial metropolis access to wealth and power, was an as yet no-topos to be effected in the future. As utopian vision, this state reflected revolutionary confidence and faith in the educational plasticity of humanity. To be effective in its role, educational utopianism had to vindicate philosophically-anthropologically that human nature raises no serious obstacles to educational reforming tasks preparing the advent of the new state.

Ambivalences in conceptions of the humanly possible² made it easier for empiricist philosophers and educators such as Locke to imagine, plan and politicize a pragmatic progress. Yet, despite its moral touches, such progress was not accompanied with the consistent and radical transformation that would engulf critical, egalitarian and truly universalist potentials. Many eminent thinkers of the age that laid the seeds of progressivist colonial developmentalism were keen to imagine equality and affluence among male burghers. But they turned downright anti-utopian when more radical ethic-political claims, such as gender equality, were at stake. However, they were not anti-utopian when progress *qua* expansion was the issue. Unlike such thinkers, Astell voiced discontent about the attribute 'visionary' being employed pejoratively as an anti-utopian charge. She condemned those accounts of the natural that demarcated what was possible and relegated higher utopian demands of equality and spirituality to the sphere of the chimerical, unattainable and fanciful. In her words, 'but the Contemplation of Immaterial Beings and Abstracted Truths, which are the Noblest Objects of the Mind, is look'd on as Chimerical and a sort of Madness; and the studying to live up the pure Moral of the Gospel, is in their account Visionary' (Astell, 1717: 209)³.

Having 'no conception of progress other than spiritual' (McCrystal, 1993: 203), Astell directed her utopianism at cultivating equality and companionability against the 'selfish and asocial' (Perry, 1990: 448) spirit of the possessive individualism of the times. She did so against the backdrop of a nascent contractarianism, Hobbesian (Weiss, 2004) or Lockean, that excluded women from utopian subjectivity and citizenship. Locke occasionally assumed women's natural inferiority (Goldie, 2007: 82), whereas Astell saw the basis for gender equality in the rationalism of the philosophical circle in which she was a critical interlocutor rather than a foil (Gordon-Roth and Kendrick, 2015: 372). Unlike Locke, who 'set the philosophical terms for theorizing power in the state and in the family – and for disconnecting the two' (Perry, 1990: 450), Astell applied political language to domestic affairs (Richardson, 2005: 154). In so doing, she de-naturalized 'private versus public' divisions and challenged the separatist epistemologies that normalized inequality by assuming naturally asymmetrical rational ability of men and women.

² More broadly, on Locke's demarcation of the humanly and educationally possible and on further implications, see Gregoriou and Papastephanou (2013).

³ The implied opponents favour material and pragmatic change (e.g. prosperity), but turn anti-utopian when confronted with alternative, more spiritual and radical visions. For Astell, one such radical vision is gender equality.

But, how did the idea of the natural operate in utopian pedagogies that ultimately accepted the exclusion of women from the contract and rationalized colonial expansion? Locke's utopian pedagogy focused on the child as a natural learner and on the co-presence of natural curiosity and contaminability in childhood. At first sight, such emphases seem to mirror a naturalization of childhood and a universalization of learning that is disconnected from political purposes. Thought through, however, Locke's educational premises reflect not only a politicized framing but also a utopianized conception of childhood that proves his naturalism inconsistent and his universalism limited and profoundly exclusionary. Here is a brief summary of this argument.

Locke's educational vision attaches great weight to childhood as the stage of life where the natural manifests itself most visibly and beneficially. Curiosity and inquisitiveness are the instruments that 'Nature has provided' for the child to acquire knowledge (Locke, 1899: §118). As an empty slate (*tabula rasa*), the child's mind is inscribable. However, Locke combines the infinite capacity for learning of the *tabula rasa* (Locke, 1921: §2) with 'individual natural Tempers' that relativize the emptiness of the slate and make learning ability less universal. Thus: 'God has stamp'd certain Characters upon Men's Minds, which, like their shapes, may perhaps be a little mended; but can hardly be totally alter'd, and transform'd into the contrary' (Locke, 1921: §66). Some minds are less pliable, inviting an education for a different purpose in life. Though educators 'must not hope wholly to change' those original Tempers or the child's 'natural Genius and Constitution', due consideration of this manifestation of the natural indicates 'a right education' (Locke, 1899: §66).

What is Locke's 'right education'? His main educational recommendations relate exclusively to the 'English Gentry' (Locke, 1899: xii); his pedagogical advice to the lower classes comprises entirely different emphases (technical, vocational and moralist). This already politicizes education by adapting it to divisions of social stratification. The noble child must not be left to become 'a dull and useless creature' like those non-elite masses whose sense as rational beings cannot be trusted. To Locke, the masses 'can think of things no otherwise than as they find and feel them' (Locke, 1988: §223). Now, when the natural manifests itself not as a positive factor of betterment but as a hindrance of virtue, e.g. as 'some Byass' in the child's 'natural Temper', education undertakes to control its consequences (Locke, 1921: §139). If education fails, the inactive child, much like the un-cultivated masses, will be unable to re-enact a contractual relation to politics. Locke's 'elite-cueing' (Nacol, 2011), by which his contractarianism becomes attenuated, is deeply connected to his educational and anthropological ideas about the individualized and gendered degree of emptiness of the slate. Natural was not just curiosity and the impulse to learn; natural was also an inherent resistance to learning.

Locke connects the 'natural' with the social as follows. It is distinctive about childhood that the child's mind is ductile. Learning occurs as inscription upon the (relatively) empty slate of the mind. The process of such an inscription is natural *qua* unforced. The child's malleability can be controlled and protected

from social contamination (Locke, 1899: §68) through private and individualized education. The importance of balancing the counter-effects of imprintability and contaminability in childhood can be explained by the importance that Locke attributes to childhood as a developmental stage that frames the rest of the child's life. Thus, if some educational failures are not then avoided, they will determine the life of the adult. Conversely, educational success, occurring in childhood and relating not only to enculturation but also to the preservation of natural tendencies or dispositions to learning such as curiosity, inquisitiveness and innocence, indelibly marks the future of the child as an industrious citizen and 'man of the world'. The political prospect for a proper social contract between the property owner and his state is connected with natural learning and the cultivation of the natural.

Having attributed superior rationality to the gentry and acknowledged its excelling in power and wealth (Anderson, 1992: 614), Locke renders it a utopian class, a collective subject able to fulfill a national-imperial promise (Locke, 1899: §70). Yet, Locke's utopian child, the noble natural learner, equally malleable and contaminable, must be protected from inscriptions that risk his future development and role. Therefore, the company of servants (Locke, 1899: §68), women's spoiling care (§151), conversation with ill-bred boys (§70), and the vices of lower strata that infiltrate the space outside the home are considered contagious and constitute a threat of bad inscriptions on the blank slate. Interestingly, whereas the closed space of home is valorized as the site of negative education, companionability in the domestic sphere is incriminated as a source of bad influence. Domestic companionship becomes rehabilitated only when utilized for political purposes of preserving the mother tongue (Locke, 1899: §163). In such cases, it staves off threats to imperial unity. Such threats lurk when learning foreign languages escapes the confines of transactions and functional communication and becomes over-inscribed in memory (§167).

Locke's politicization of sites of childhood and his negative pedagogy (controlling influences of women, the poor and the foreign on the child) reinforce one another and nourish his utopianization of natural learning: negative education as a gate-keeper, policing class and gender contact zones, facilitates the unobstructed surfacing of the natural. Simultaneously, it energizes the positive aspects of 'natural' inclinations (i.e. curiosity and inquisitiveness). Thus, attuned to the utopian outlook on education as formation of the desirable utopian citizen and preparation for the advent of the desirable world, negative pedagogy clears the path of the utopianized, adventurous traveler and settler as a curious and innocent 'child'. Contagious and harmful subjectivities will be limited to the domestic sphere (e.g. female presences) or relegated to a receptive 'terra nullius', to the colonial space which will be populated by the 'inactive' or 'ill-bred' 'children' that will find in such spatialities an outlet or a possibility of a new beginning as farmers and developers. Rather than contracting vices from them, the noble 'child' will make a contract with them, and both parties will undertake the task of converting the new acquisition (i.e. newly conquered imperial places) from empty to fallow and fertile land and the colonized 'other' from natural to civil man (Gregoriou and Papastefanou, 2013).

Locke naturalizes his utopia of childhood and its political significance, while politicizing the child's imprintability and contaminability. The *tabula rasa* encourages the 'view of the human subject as narrative' (Richardson, 2005: 164). But, when Locke connects the natural with the political, he utopianizes the narrative of specific subjectivities, namely, of educated, male colonial travelers, be they noble men or farmers (Locke, 1899: xii; 1988: §37). Assisted by the appropriate social transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy, such subjectivities are expected to realize the vision of individual freedom, industry and productivity across the Empire whose new acquisitions must be turned from 'vacant lands' to cultivated and profit-bearing colonies.

The strict demarcation of the politically permissible presupposes – and perpetuates – exclusions. Despite its universalist gloss, Locke's contractarian assumption that all men are free rests on deeper exclusionary operations that ultimately serve the particularistic utopianization of the English male citizen. For Locke, 'Conjugal society' and home are the same, and the goal is procreation (1988: §78). With marital contract regulating conjugal society, he sees nothing else in the home worthy of a philosophical comment, 'nothing being necessary to any society, that is not necessary to the ends for which it is made' (§83). That man and wife are tied to a longer 'conjunction' is attributed to pure natural necessity: 'the female is capable of conceiving, and de facto is commonly with child again, and brings forth too a new birth, long before the former is out of a dependency' (§78). Like the empty slate of the mind and the empty female vessels receptive of men's procreative power, the foreign and remote land, conceived as vacant (*terra nullius*), will be accommodating and inscribable, ready for cultivation and for the exercise of the colonists' natural right to property. The complex and ambiguous connection between the marital and the social contract effects the exclusion of women from Locke's political utopia (Pateman, 1989: 450) and reflects his commitment to an education of expansion rather than of retreat in ways that Astell was the first philosopher to notice and chastise.

Astell's Utopian Educational Retreat

Astell joined the 17th century debates on marriage and women's education by critiquing Patriarchal right/rule philosophically and politically. Her utopianism included not only ethical images of u-topian and eu-topian (the no-place that is good-place) alternatives to patriarchy but also dystopian descriptions of women's life (Weiss, 2004: 69). Her critique of the status-quo presupposed discontent with the world as it was and reflected vision of a world as it should be. Practically, Astell turned her utopian vision of a new design of women's education into a concrete proposal of retreat. She proposed the establishment of a feminine educational institution where women would refrain from day-to-day activities and trifle concerns and devote themselves to intellectual ventures, 'disinterested friendships' and religious life (Astell, 1970). Astell's design of the institution as a monastic retreat (minus religious vows) may be described, in Foucauldian terms, as an educational heterotopia and heterochrony, a counter-

site within society, 'a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites [...] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault, 2008: 3). As heterochrony, heterotopia's function is connected with the moment when people break with their traditional time (*Ibid*: 6). Such heterotopia/heterochrony presupposes a break with the hegemonic demarcation of the humanly possible. It also requires questioning what passes as a natural limit to change. In Astell's work, women's confinement and isolation by 'Conjugal Rule' is exposed, denaturalized, but also replaced with a revised image of privacy.

Astell's most cited critique of contractarian liberalism is found in her *Reflections upon Marriage*: "For if Arbitrary Power is evil in itself, and an improper Method of Governing Rational and Free Agents it ought not to be Practis'd anywhere; Nor is it less, but rather more mischievous in Families than in Kingdoms, by how much 100000 Tyrants are worse than one. What tho' a Husband can't deprive a Wife of Life without being responsible to the Law, he may however do what is much more grievous to a generous Mind, render Life miserable, for which she has no Redress, scarce Pity which is afforded to every other Complainant. It being thought a Wife's Duty to suffer everything without Complaint. *If all Men are born free*, how is it that all Women are born slaves?" (1706: x-xi).

Feminist scholarship highlights Astell's political attack on conjugal rule and its exception from political critique. But the connections between her utopias of retreating and her critique of Locke's empiricism remain un-theorized. Furthermore, some of her political arguments against Locke's ideas (or against ideas that echoed Locke) have been overshadowed by the framing of her politics as anti-Whig and Loyalist. This framing, though largely valid, obscures how Astell, instead of just holding onto Tory views, turned Locke's arguments against him through a sustained utopian politics of liberation. 'Designation', for example, takes up a meaning different than Monarchy's designation by God when a Proposal addressed to every woman designates 'a higher Design than to get her a Husband' (Astell, 1706: 52) and a duty, against the political authorization of her subjection, to improve her mind. Astell resorted to naturalization to invert the naturalistic prejudice that objected to women's capacities for abstraction and presented women as naturally inferior. In her inverted account of Providential design for women, retreat was proclaimed the proper site of theoretical science, since 'men were made for active life and women to be retired'; 'for this reason [women were] designed by Providence for speculation'. Therefore, she asserts that 'great Improvements might be made in the Sciences, were not Women Enviously excluded from this their proper Business' (Astell, 1717: 296).

Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* (1709) evokes a gender critique of Locke's program. Astell's Proposal is viewed as 'a blend of primarily Cartesian and admittedly some Lockean thought' (Bryson, 1998: 44). It recommended, *inter alia*, that women should start their study by reading Descartes, Malebranche 'and Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*' (45). Astell must have also been aware of Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education* when she was writing the

Proposal (Locke's *Thoughts* had reached its fifth edition by 1705); her denial to cite or openly discuss any of Locke's thoughts could be taken as an implicit critique of the masculine bias of his treatise. Her notion of a female mind that closes itself off against the 'parade' of a patriarchal discourse and devotes itself to contemplation resists Locke's empiricism and the idea of an 'open' mind. Simultaneously, figuring inwardness, withdrawal and retreat as acts of the mind (rather than as states of the mind and terms of natural necessity) renders inoperable the Lockean, rigid separation of public and private spheres, where the former involves action and the latter passivity.

Locke's ideal natural learner is the male child. Astell disrupts this discourse not by articulating girls' education as a dialectical opposite, but by bypassing childhood altogether: addressed to *the Ladies*, her *Proposal* focuses on adult female learners to whom she offers, as the subtitle of the text indicates, 'a Method for the Improvement of their Minds'. By marginalizing the problem of the child and its inherent vulnerability, Astell is able to develop metaphors for emulation, learning and growth such as the 'excited needles' that we explain later on. Such metaphors emphasize companionship and are not haunted by the anxiety of contamination and bad imprinting on the young learner's mind. She asks women to think of themselves not as the contaminable objects of a possibly inappropriate acculturation but as the subjects/agents of teaching and learning. In her articulation of new learning as copying or imprinting, she does not necessarily recapitulate the imperialist myth of a wild and pre-cultural *elsewhere* where natural learners perform their adventurous curiosity without encountering resistances that would spoil their innocence.

However, Astell was not totally silent about faulty childhood education. She considered it in order to urge adult women to obtain awareness of their educational intervention in the child's life, and not, as Locke did, in order to exclude women from the spectrum of desirable influences on children. When Astell urged women to be closer to their children rather than leaving their upbringing to 'ignorant wet nurses' and 'low-minded servants', she seemed, at first sight, to concur with Locke (minus, of course, his inclusion of mothers in the category of bad influences). For, she employed an argument that is impressively reminiscent of Locke's considering the years of childhood crucially formative and of his negative, class-exclusive and exclusionary pedagogy. She wrote that mothers should 'give such Form and Season to the Tender mind of the child as will shew its good effects through all the stages of life' (Astell, 1970: 38). Still, despite such ambivalences regarding the rigid effects of childhood on adulthood and slippages to low class incriminations, Astell placed equal, if not more, emphasis on the transformative effects of adult education on previous social constructions of the female self, i.e. those that occur early in life. 'Just as Descartes looked back at his classical education and rejected its formalism' (Kinnaird, 1979: 62), thus bringing the mature thinking self in a critical tension with the self formed in childhood, Astell favored the critical self-discovery that is possible beyond childhood and able to undo the latter's shaping of one's person. Thus, against Locke's emphasis on the lasting effects of molding childhood for

adult life, Astell promoted the break with faulty socialization and invited adult women to overcome the effects of childhood education.

In combating empiricism and committing herself to Cartesian rationalism, Astell believed that she had found the philosophical heuristics for removing the skeptical predicament where women fall when they hold the 'Women's Defective Nature Prejudice' (Sowaal, 2007). Cartesian rationalism provided philosophical bases for women's inclusion in the universal category of those entitled to prerogatives of freedom, knowledge and independence⁴. In Bryson's words, 'what Astell sees in Descartes method is the opportunity for self-determination, a goal which any individual who feels her or his social group has been denied it would wholeheartedly embrace' (1998: 43). Such self-determination, which can be extended to colonized peoples, was implicitly denied to them by Locke's theoretical handling of conquered, vacant land in his political writings.

Locke's natural learning chimed with his metaphysical doctrines of 'thinking matter', 'material soul' and 'tabula rasa'. The apparently monist naturalization of thinking struck Astell not only as inconsistent and contradictory but also as providing evidence of the metaphysical foundations of Locke's misogyny. The limitations to women's learning that Astell's educational utopianism wished to overcome were attributable to ignorance and narrow education alone. In this way, they became de-naturalized. By contrast, in her view, Locke's philosophy allowed the idea that women were naturally intellectually inferior. In truth, educational-philosophical gender and class prejudices (and not a natural yearning for knowledge) entitled Locke's paradigmatic student to privileged access to unrestricted inquisitiveness and natural discovery. Against Locke's empiricism, Astell found in Descartes' dualism and in the idea of 'disembodied mind' the ultimate philosophical challenge to presentations of gendered educational asymmetries as natural. Within Cartesianism, felt Astell, the *corporeal extension* becomes 'nothing more than a meaningless dwelling place, with gender distinctions of less importance than the difference between a wood-framed and a brick house' (Bryson, 1998: 46).

Certainly, viewing the body as a dwelling place and the receptivity this entails invite a reading of Astell, both deconstructive and reconstructive, that goes beyond the scope of this article. Also beyond the scope of this article would be any attempt to adjudicate issues between rationalism and empiricism. But it is important that Astell's rationalist metaphors for learning present a utopian feminist alternative to the spatial utopia of Locke's inscriptions on empty mental slates and empty lands. For instance, in Astell's letters after the *Proposal*, learning resembles the magnetism of 'Excited Needles' (Johns, 1996), as the partners teach each other and excite each other's desire for learning in an emulating relationship. Metaphors such as Emulation and the magnetism of the 'Excited Needles' build on cooperative learning, instead of asserting an

⁴ For more on how Descartes' argument that 'reason was by nature equal in all men' was employed by Astell, see, Kinnaird (1979: 61).

autonomous program of nature-guided, self-motivated learning. The learners' imitation of, and learning from, each other become the essential pedagogical pattern at Astell's retreat. Imitation rather than originality, conversation rather than naming, retreating rather than discovering are alternative modes of learning that Locke's *Thoughts* forecloses and overshadows.

Finally, instead of following Locke in utopianizing the property owner as the emblematic figure of the citizen of a civil society, Astell levies the accusation against Locke that his 'doctrines of self-preservation and property acquisition are in direct conflict with one's Christian duty' (Bryson, 1998: 51). Whilst Locke's utopian citizen is the property owner, for Astell, property is a sin. Interestingly, in an essay that is 'sometimes attributed to Astell' (Goldie, 2007: 71), though many commentators attribute it to Judith Drake⁵, an analogy is drawn between the attitude of men toward their sense and toward their property: they treat the former as defensively as the latter (Drake/Astell, 1696: 136-7). Those 'Profitable Adventures' and 'Treasures' of conquest that reflect the imperialistic rendering of colonial utopias as supplementary and peripheral elsewhere that provide resources for the metropolitan center are mocked throughout the Drake/Astell essay. In a complementary sense, in rendering the elsewhere an educational retreat, the *Proposal* introduces a spacing *within* society (establishing a critical distance inwardly rather than by adventure and expansion) and, particularly, *within* female gender roles⁶.

Multiple Universalisms and Ambivalent Utopianisms

A more inward yet inclusive-universalist utopianism (a counterfactual, though not-pursued, possibility within Enlightenment) can be contrasted with a more outward yet deep-down particularistic utopianism of expansion. This section fleshes out and simultaneously queers Astell's position against Locke's expansionist 'universalism' and ambiguous utopianism by focusing on her own complex and ambivalent handling of universality and earthly utopia.

⁵ There is an essay that is 'sometimes attributed to Astell' (Goldie, 2007: 71), though many commentators attribute it to Judith Drake. It is the *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696). Many scholars consider this text Judith Drake's work. We employ this text as Drake/Astell (1696) with the productive ambivalence that the / accommodates. We do so because an exclusion of this text from the present discussion would elevate authorship to an absolute criterion for inclusion at the cost of overlooking the following: Drake was in the circle of Astell, sharing with her the set of ideas highlighted here; that the text has been attributed to Astell is no accident, since all its major ideas resonate with those in Astell's various works; making Drake join voices with Astell where there is evident textual convergence reveals a broader and more coherent world-view that united the female members of the rationalist circle. Also, the Drake/Astell text and its – at least until recently – undecided authorial status demonstrates that, against the tendency to depict women philosophers as isolated and disengaged thinkers [a tendency pertinently critiqued by Sandrine Berges (2015)], Astell and Drake agreed on a number of issues. Those issues reflected their thoughtful and critical participation in the rationalist circle in ways that led the premises of the circle through to radical political implications: reason as a universal human endowment and reliable source of knowledge undoes prejudices against gender equality and challenges the empirically grounded 'justification' of women's subjection through a supposedly natural inferiority. All things considered, inclusion of material of this text here is scholarly more enabling than its exclusion.

⁶ As Amy Allen writes, 'Heterotopias hold up a mirror to our form of life, opening up a fracture within that form of life that creates a kind of virtual distance between ourselves and our form of life' (Allen, 2015: 524).

Locke's educational utopianism comprised moments of inclusive universalism where the significance of radical change, creating educational supportive conditions for all human beings, was acknowledged. Locke's work included 'some utopian musings on the positive effects of allowing every man six hours of labor and six hours of study per day' (Anderson, 1992: 629). Yet, this egalitarian universalism succumbed to Locke's anti-utopian concession that such a utopian vision could not be realized because it required a redistribution of wealth and power that was politically impossible (ibid). That made his commitment to universalism rather nominal, since his view that only one class met the standards of human development led him to utopianize male noble individuality. Locke's anti-utopianism of political impossibility was complemented by his assumption that there were also individual, natural hindrances to learning (e.g. he could very well support through arguments about such 'natural' limits the assumption of women's intellectual inferiority for which Astell criticized him). Both anti-utopian tenets (political and natural) made his utopianization of childhood even more ambivalent, brittle, particularistic and exclusivist. They allowed him only to maintain the vision of the earthly utopia of the natural learner, the 'innocent' colonial 'child' whom education turns into a man of the world. This man of the world is prepared to encounter various obstacles to his triumphant march and to overcome them not quite through vociferous, macho action, but, rather, through an equally masculinized sense of industry, contrivance and performativity (Gregoriou and Papastephanou, 2013).

Astell's response to the male, global adventurer who justifies his supposed superiority on grounds of his mental and practical achievement is engagingly snide: "But how can a Woman scruple intire Subjection, how can she forbear to admire the worth and excellency of the Superior Sex, if she at all considers it? Have not all the *great Actions that have been performed in the World* been done by Men? Have not they founded Empires and overturn'd them? Do not they make Laws and continually repeal and amend them? *Their vast Minds Lay Kingdoms wast*, no bounds or measures can be prescrib'd to their Desires. War and Peace depend on them, they form Cabals and *have the Wisdom and Courage to get over all these Rubs which may lie in the way of their desired Grandeur*. What is it they cannot do? They *make Worlds and ruine them*, form Systems of universal Nature and dispute eternally about them; their Pen gives worth to the most trifling Controversie" (Astell, 1717: 55-6; emphases added).

To the standard utopianization of male action Astell opposes a dystopian depiction of male accomplished reality. Her utopia of retreat presupposes multiple utopianisms (involving utopianizations and dystopianizations). For instance, Astell gives a dystopian account of women's life within patriarchal societal structures. "To be yok'd for Life to a disagreeable Person and Temper; to have Folly and Ignorance tyrannize over Wit and Sense; to be contradicted in every thing one does or says, and born down not by Reason but Authority; to be denied ones most innocent desires, for no other cause but the Will and Pleasure of an absolute Lord and Master, whose Follies a Woman with all her Prudence cannot hide, and whose Commands she cannot but despise at the same time she obeys

them; is a misery none can have a just Idea of, but those who have felt it” (Astell, 1706: 4).

Thought through, the Cartesian tenet that all humans are endowed with reason (Amor’s, 1994) allows the attribution of subjection to custom and the depiction of the lives of the colonized and enslaved as dystopian. The dystopian conditions of women’s lives in East and West are likened to those of the slaves in the colonies, thus establishing an existential and political connection between women and the ‘others’ of the Western man, i.e. all those excluded from Lockean utopian-contractarian promise. “As the World grew more Populous, and Mens Necessities whetted their Inventions, so it increas’d their Jealousie, and sharpen’d their Tyranny over us, till by degrees, it came to that height of Severity, I may say Cruelty, it is now at in all the Eastern parts of the World, where the Women, like our Negroes in our Western Plantations, are born slaves, and live Prisoners all their Lives. Nay, so far has this barbarous Humour prevail’d, and spread it self, that in some parts of *Europe*, which pretend to be most refin’d and civiliz’d, in spite of Christianity, and the Zeal for Religion which they so much affect, our Condition is not very much better” (Drake/ Astell, 1696: 22, *emph in the original*).

More generally, Astell’s (1717: 56) multiple utopianisms involve the dystopian depiction of the world as it was shaped and ruled by men. The curious, inquisitive traveler of such a world does not escape the rationalist attack (Drake/Astell: 1696: 97). Unlike the conqueror, the curious traveler (in the figure of the botanist) may not visit places ‘for that sordid end that other Men usually do, viz. gain’ (98). But his trivial adventures aim to render him a Master of nature: ‘His Travels are not design’d as Visits to the Inhabitants of any Place, but to the Pits, Shores and Hills; from whence he fetches not the Treasure, but the Trumpery’. Pushed further to its implications, this passage chimes with Astell’s insights: ‘innocent’ inquisitiveness leads the male adventurous natural learner to a conquering and mastering relation to nature hardly obscured by the triviality of the relevant ventures, while his curiosity does not extend to learning from other people. His visiting other places does not involve any ‘excited Needles’ experiences but only ‘natural’ moments of excitement that reflect back upon him as tokens of power. ‘He is ravish’d at finding an uncommon shell, or an odd shap’d Stone, and is desperately enamour’d at first sight of an unusual markt Butter-flie, which he will hunt a Whole day to be Master of’ (97).

Astell not only proposes a retreating and inward sense of growth but she even mocks Locke’s extrovert education of the noble male child: “A young Gentleman, as a celebrated Author tells us, ought above all things to be acquainted with the State of the World, the Ways and Humours, the Follies, the Cheats, the Faults of the Age he is fallen into, he should by degrees be inform’d of the Vice in Fashion, and warn’d of the Application and Design of those who will make it their Business to corrupt him, shou’d be told the Arts they use and the Trains they lay, be Prepar’d to be Shocked by some and caress’d by others [...]. He shou’d be instructed how to know and distinguish them” (Astell, 1706: 60ff).

Within the liberal fantasy of expansion, as it unfolds in Locke, the Other that the noble male confronts in the outside world is largely threatening and harmful; with a remarkable twist, Astell contrasts the above to the learning that a woman requires if she is to avoid the snares of a threatening and harmful alterity none other than the noble and learned male himself. "A Woman cannot be too watchful, too apprehensive of her danger, nor keep at too great a distance from it, since Man whose Wisdom and Ingenuity is so much Superior to hers! condescends for his Interest sometimes, and sometimes by way of Diversion, to lay Snares for her. For tho' all Men are *Virtuosi*, Philosophers and Politicians, in comparison of the Ignorant and Illiterate Women, yet they don't all pretend to be Saints, and 'tis no great Matter to them if Women who were born to be their Slaves, be now and then ruin'd for their Entertainment" (Astell, 1706: 61).

Hence, to Astell, not marrying is much more than just 'a sensible option' (Lister, 2004: 700) for women. Given the framework of Astell's thought, not marrying is a utopianized retreat from contractarianism. Being in nature equal to men, women can maintain freedom by remaining in a pre-contractual 'state of nature', a Golden Age of simplicity and equality. Her utopianism reaches its most earthly possibilities through a female education either for liberation from the contract and pursuit of spiritual ventures through retreat or for melioristic improvement of a woman's life through a cautious relationality to appropriate men on better contractual conditions.

Yet, for Astell, women's education is not particularistic *qua* dependent on the figure of man either as a threatening other or as an adjacent being in the common space of marriage. Women's education is ultimately universalist in presupposing the rationalist assumption of the educative potential of, and task for, all human beings. Generally, instead of preparing the self for politics as management and for a world order, the education that Astell favors reflects a perfectionist, universalist ideal of the soul. This could have led her to even more radical claims for an earthly utopia of world transformation. However, instead of pursuing this possibility, Astell resorted to education as preparation of women (and all the oppressed) for citizenship in celestial utopia.

Let us unpack this point first through reference to Astell's well-known homology argument. The homology argument refers to 'her use of the parallel between the state and the family to expose the double standard whereby principles of equality and justice demanded in the social contract are not accorded in the marriage contract' (Goldie, 2007: 67). However, another homology is missing in the relevant literature (which thus bypasses fertile ground for a deeper politicization of Astell's thought) – Astell's homology between the subjection of women to men and the subjection of nations to conquerors: "But what says the Holy Scripture? It speaks of Women as in a State of Subjection, and so it does of the Jews and Christians when under the Dominion of the Chaldeans and Romans, requiring of the one as well as of the other a quiet submission to them under whose Power they liv'd. But will anyone say that these had a Natural Superiority and Right to Dominion? that they had a superior Understanding, or any Pre-eminence except what their greater Strength acquir'd?" (Astell, 1706: ix).

Subjection in no way entails the natural inferiority of the subjected; reason is universal, regardless of one's conditions of life. On the one hand, it is through recourse to religion that Astell de-naturalizes subjection: though both command that women submit to husbands, neither St. Paul nor St. Peter 'derive that Subjection from the Law of Nature' (1706: xi). On the other hand, the political homology of the subjection of women and of conquered peoples operates within the anthropological confines of her religion, which favored the utopianism of a city of God rather than the earthly utopia of the ideal city. This is the space that is demarcated for rethinking inequality and for understanding the pacifying political role that this rethinking eventually takes: "If Mankind had never sinn'd, Reason wou'd always have been obey'd, there wou'd have been no struggle for Dominion, and Brutal Power wou'd not have prevail'd. But in the laps'd State of Mankind, and now that Men will not be guided by their Reason but by their Appetites, and do not what they ought but what they can, the Reason, or that which stands for it, the Will and Pleasure of the Governor is to be the Reason of those who will not be guided by their own, and must take place for Order's Sake" (Astell, 1706: ix).

Astell's religious anthropology draws a vector from the utopian, pre-lapsarian, peaceful and rational egalitarianism, at the one end, to the dystopia of the 'necessary evil' of an externally imposed political order and hierarchy in a fallen state, at the other end. The conception of an earthly 'vale of tears' effected by the Fall accommodates an anti-utopian slippage that declares radical change an impossibility and relegates equality to the sphere of the beyond⁷. Ultimately, not only women, but all people who experience submission or oppression can obtain citizenship in celestial rather than in earthly utopia. This is how, in our view, Lister's remark that Astell values freedom and equality as virtues of the celestial realm (Lister, 2004: 49) can be driven home. As we see it, Astell inverts utopianism thus: she maintains a utopia of freedom and equality but, by projecting it to an *epekeina*, she asserts its impossibility in the earthly space of subjection and servitude. Therefore, the transition from the universalism prepared by her critique of lopsided contractarianism to compelling political liberation remains incomplete. Different theological views would 'soften Astell's pessimism about the prospects for justice in this world' and make her 'imagine much more dramatic social changes' (Lister, 2004: 71). Her religious anthropology of the humanly (im)possible leads her to a universalism that is not expansionist and inconsistent (as masculine, early modern 'universalism' was), yet is despondent enough politically to risk its own liberatory epistemology (of all people being rational and naturally free). For, such universalism becomes blocked by another universalism harbored in Astell's philosophy: her metaphysical commitments lead her to universalizing subjection. Just as women persevere in servitude and envision equality in the afterlife, likewise all men should persevere under the rule of a benevolent despot.

⁷ Still, though Astell considers radical change in the status of women impossible (despite its justifiability), her 'appeal to Queen Anne' for the materialization of her female academy and 'her various educational projects suggest, however, that she had real improvements for women in her sights' (Apetrei, 2008: 518).

Whereas Locke refrained from a truly universalist application of his educational program, Astell's utopianization of women's education, at least, involved an egalitarian universalism of single rather than double standards. For, she 'refused to bracket any part of life from political examination'; she 'insisted that political theorists use a single standard for personal autonomy in the family and in the state' (Perry, 1990: 457). That her universalism did not leave out of scrutiny important aspects of reality makes her ambivalent utopianisms and the tensions between the earthly and the celestial even more dramatic and, thus, edifying.

Conclusion

We have, by contrasting Astell and Locke, tried to make visible early modern utopian tensions that are much richer and more illuminating than the relevant scholarship has so far acknowledged. Astell may be presented, *inter alia*, as 'a conservative critic of Locke' (Lister, 2004, p. 45); but some of her ideas engulf a political potential that was far more radical in its feminist and other implications than Locke's utopianism.

Childhood utopia found in Locke an exemplary instantiation but was challenged by alternative and counterfactual, modern possibilities that are still under-theorized. That liberalism was rooted in expedient and expansionist spatial utopianization is typically forgotten in those current accounts of liberalism that associate it exclusively with anti-utopian postures or, at most, with crypto-utopianism or repressed utopianism (Papastephanou, 2009). Possessive individualism utopianized the education of the male, noble and natural learner in ways that privatized hope, paid lip service to universality, and rationalized colonial expansion.

By contrast, Astell's utopian vision of collective happiness challenged possessive individualism and involved a universalist ethical-political image of drawing everybody into something better: and then what a blessed World shou'd we have, shining with so many stars of *Vertue, who not content to be happy themselves alone*, for that's a narrowness of mind to much beneath their God-like temper, would like the glorious Lights of Heaven, or rather like him who made them, *diffuse their benign influences wherever they come* (Astell, 1970: 34, latter emphases added).

In this sense, it constitutes a very early critique of what contemporary utopianism also deplores as a privatization of hope and happiness (Papastephanou, 2009).

Counterfactual, Enlightenment possibilities of a radical critique of the existent, more radical than the Lockean critique that has, politically, been so overrated, were manifest in Astell's thought. Certainly, Astell's vision engulfed its own utopianist ambivalences and multiple universalisms, again, in ways different from Locke's. We hope that a study of such complexities sheds a different light on investigations of feminist utopianism from modernity onwards. It is potentially conducive to exploring universalism beyond Eurocentrism and to sharpening the critique of lasting, even if now subtler or repressed, (neo)-colonial outlooks. Seen thus, it instantiates 'a turn to the past for the purpose of critiquing the present' (Allen, 2015: 524).

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