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Recent Teaching

Undergraduate

Phil 303: (Early) Modern Philosophy

- Study of philosophy of Las Casas, Montaigne, Descartes, Astell, Hume, Kant, and the Tupinambá People (the latter via Viveiros de Castro); students also do semester-long individualized projects on non-canonical philosophers, traditions, and/or approaches to the study of philosophy done during 1500-1800 around the world.

Phil 520: Philosophy and Mysticism

- Study of how liberation theories and spiritual practices of 20th and 21st century prophetic activists—e.g., Rhonda Magee, Gloria Anzaldúa, Howard Thurman, Valerie Kaur—can be understood in relation to each other and the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard (especially his account of despair and faith).

Graduate Seminars

Phil 700: Philosophy of Human Nature—Friendship and Hostility

- Astell, Beauvoir, Fanon, Lugones, Anzaldúa, Thurman

Phil 795: Early Modern Philosophy (various topics different semesters)

- Exploring (Outside) the Early Modern Canon-- “Critical Canon Studies”
 - Slavery and Mary Astell
 - Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695); Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703-1759); Wolatta Petros (1592-1642); Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582); Benjamin Lay (1682-1759)
- Early Modern Individuation—Descartes and Spinoza on Individuation
- Mysticism and Early Modern—Henry More
- Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza
- Spinoza and Rationalism (*Ethics*, Books 3, 4, 5)
- Astell, Locke, and Descartes
- Liberty and Moral Conversion from Hobbes to Wollstonecraft

Phil 772: Seminar in Classical Author (various topics different semesters)

- Descartes and Mysticism
- Descartes and Bacon
- Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza

Phil 770: Seminar in a Classical School (various topics different semesters)

- Spinoza and Rationalism (*Ethics*, Books 1 and 2)
- Seminar in Cartesianism (Henry More)

Phil 896: Qualifying Exam

- Bartolomé de Las Casas
- Astell, Beauvoir, and Spinoza

Works in Progress

“Mary Astell and Analogies of Slavery,” invited contribution for an edited volume on early modern philosophy and slavery.

As Angela Davis explains, there is a long tradition of elite women who use the analogy of slavery to intensify their critique of the institution of marriage. Scholars often connect this discourse in England to writings by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792, William Thompson in 1825, and John Stewart Mill in 1859. In this paper, I discuss an earlier example of this practice in the writings of Mary Astell (1666-1731). Astell—known today for her philosophical discussion of women, education, and marriage—used the analogy of slavery to describe wives among England’s gentry and aristocracy as slaves even though some of these women were themselves enslavers and they all directly benefited from many forms of exploitation, including chattel slavery. I explain how Astell uses slavery metaphors to put forward what I call “the extreme position”: a husband can do more harm to his wife when he “render[s] [her] Life miserable” than he could if he was to deprive her of life (which the law permits him to do to the person he actually enslaves). My aim is not to condemn or exonerate Astell. Rather it is to explore how Astell used metaphors of slavery in her overall philosophy.

Mary Astell (single-author book; in contract with Routledge)

Mary Astell provides an introduction to the life and work of Mary Astell (1666–1731) via discussion of her philosophical spirituality. According to Astell, humans are made for each other, designed to share their love in genuine friendship. However, interconnected customs of misogyny, secularism, and materialism are corrupting cultural institutions, thus blocking people from this dignified vocation. Given this, Astell focuses on helping a specific subsection of people whom she knows well—White women of England’s gentry and nobility (like herself and her patrons). In doing so, she designs a philosophical spirituality that will protect these “Ladies” (as she calls them) from the dangers of becoming both *psychologically* “enslaved” to their own destructive thoughts and *maritally* “enslaved” by men of their rank and race. Ultimately, she teaches these women how to attend to the sacred, heal their souls, and practice piety, virtue, freedom, and wisdom. Along the way, she also critiques current social and political theories and practices about marriage, education, and social contract theory. I also examine limits to Astell’s positions. Astell remains constrained by feudal and colonial ideologies, and though she speaks on behalf of the women in her milieu, she does not advocate for the spiritual and philosophical growth for *all* women, for example, the women she and her social circle pay, indenture, and enslave to work for them.

Selected Publications

Book:

Feminist Interpretations of Mary Astell, The Pennsylvania State University Press, co-edited by Alice Sowaal and Penny A. Weiss, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016.

Articles on Astell

“Mary Astell,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), First published 2005; revised 2008; revised 2015; revised with new sections 2023

“Mary Astell on Liberty,” *Women and Liberty: 1600-1800*, co-edited by Jacqueline Broad and Karen Detlefsen, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

“Mary Astell and the Development of Vice: Price, Courtship, and the Woman’s Human Nature Question,” *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Astell*, co-edited by Alice Sowaal and Penny A. Weiss, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016.

“The Emerging Picture of Mary Astell’s Views,” *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Astell*, co-edited by Alice Sowaal and Penny A. Weiss, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016.

“Mary Astell,” for *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon*, edited by Lawrence Nolan, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

“Mary Astell’s *Serious Proposal*: Mind, Method, and Custom,” *Philosophy Compass*, V. 2, 2007

Articles on Descartes

“Attributes,” for *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon*, edited by Lawrence Nolan, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

“Descartes’s Reply to Gassendi: How We Can Know All of God, All at Once, but Still Have More to Learn about Him” Accepted for publication in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19(3) 2011: 419–49.

“Idealism and Cartesian Motion,” *A Companion to Rationalism*, edited by Alan Nelson, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2005.

“Cartesian Bodies,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, V. 34, N. 2, 2004

Selected Recent Talks

“On Reading Mary Astell (1666-1731) Through the Lens of Liberation Theology,” Literature at Its Other Traditions, March 25, 2024, San Francisco State University

“Reading Louise Dupin via Christina Sharpe’s Concept of ‘The Weather,’” Invited Speaker, Center for New Narratives in Philosophy: Rethinking the Enlightenment, Rereading Rousseau: A Discussion of the First Translation of Louise Dupin’s *Work on Women*, March 23, 2024, Pacific APA, Portland

“Counter Pedagogies, Colonialism, and the Early Modern Philosophy Course,” philoSophia, March 2024, on Panel “Critical Canon Studies: What is ‘The Problem’ of Philosophy’s ‘Early Modern Canon’?”

“Limits to Mary Astell’s Philosophical Vision of Education, Misogyny, Slavery, and Poverty,” Western Society for Eighteenth Century Studies, February 16, 2024, University of San Francisco

“Why We Need to Return to Practices that Can Move Us Beyond Inadvertent Somatic Individualism,” with Diego Navarro at the *Quaker Theological Discussion Group*, Friday, December 1 2023 (Zoom)

“Mary Astell: Spiritual Direction and the Divinely Imbued Self” American Academy of Religion, November 18, 2023

“Mary Astell on Restoring Love: How the Spiritual Practice of Renunciation Can Heal a Culture of Hostility” for Political Theology Network Conference, September 7-10, 2023, (Pendle Hill Retreat Center, PA)

“Living into Quakerism as an Existentialist Philosophy” June 2023 Friends Association of Higher Education Conference: Quakers, Colonization, and Decolonization, June 12-15, 2023 (Haverford College, Hybrid)

“Critical Canon Studies: Early Modern Philosophy and Representation, Reparation, and Relevance” (Guest Expert for Canon Expansion and Change, University of Minnesota June 8, 2023)

“Listening into Relationship: Practices that Connect in the Secular Classroom” in the Friends Association for Higher Education’s Quaker Leadings in Higher Education Series, March 28, 2023

“Mary Astell: Contemplation, Truth, Relationships, and Resistance in *Serious Proposal*, Part I” at the Workshop on Astell’s Social Philosophy for the Friends of Astell on September 19, 2021 (*invited keynote*) <https://friendsofmaryastell.weebly.com>

(Revised 10 14 2024)

