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## **Women on Liberty in Early Modern England**

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**Abstract.** Our modern ideals about liberty were forged in the great political and philosophical debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but we seldom hear about women's contributions to those debates. This paper examines the ideas of early modern English women—namely Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell, Mary Overton, 'Eugenia', Sarah Chapone, and the civil war women petitioners—with respect to the classic political concepts of negative, positive, and republican liberty. The author suggests that these writers' woman-centred concerns provide a unique historical perspective on these much-discussed ideals of freedom from external interference, freedom as self-determination, and freedom from domination.

The history of the concept of liberty is a history of ideals that have been shaped and informed by the thoughts of privileged gentlemen of the early modern era—men such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, for example. In the standard intellectual histories, we rarely hear about the opinions of early modern women, a social group that experienced significant legal, cultural, and institutional constraints compared to its male counterpart. In the past few years, however, scholars have demonstrated that several early modern English women did articulate sophisticated ideas about liberty in their writings—in order to highlight the injustice of their lack of education, their

disadvantages as widows and spinsters, and their ‘slavish’ dependence as wives and mothers. In this paper, I draw on this latest research to provide an overview of these women’s ideas about *negative liberty*, or freedom from external constraint; *positive liberty*, or freedom as self-determination; and *republican liberty*, or freedom from arbitrary domination. By using this tripartite division, I do not wish to suggest that early modern women themselves were aware of such categories, or that they observed clear distinctions between these concepts in their writings. On the contrary, as we will see, these women’s concerns about liberty in the early modern period *do not* fit neatly into the present-day categories. Herein, I think, lies their interest. The writings of early modern women point to ways in which our thoughts about freedom might be informed by historical feminist and woman-related concerns.

### *1. Negative Liberty*

To appreciate the historical-conceptual background, let us begin with a brief imaginative exercise. Let us imagine for one moment that you are a married gentlewoman living in early modern England (*c.* 1640-1740). During this period, as you would well know, your husband was essentially your legal guardian and protector. You were not supposed to leave the house without his permission, you were dependent on him for any money for personal expenses, and he was legally permitted to discipline you, if necessary.<sup>1</sup> Now let us suppose that one night you would like to go and visit a female friend, but that your husband has expressly forbidden you. Let us suppose that, when you try to leave the house, he cuffs you about the ear, confiscates your purse, and locks you in your room. In doing so, he exercises a right that every husband of the period was perfectly entitled to exercise. Would we wish to say that he deprives you of your freedom?

The advocates of negative liberty would say yes, of course your husband has deprived you of your freedom. According to Isaiah Berlin's famous definition in his influential essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (1958), negative liberty is the freedom to do as you will, without outside interference by others (122-31). Historically, this kind of liberty has been most closely associated with the philosopher Thomas Hobbes. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes defines natural liberty as the absence of external impediments that deprive the agent of her power to do, or refrain from doing, what she would like to do. When living creatures are 'imprisoned, or restrained, with walls, or chayns', he says, then naturally we say that 'they are not at Liberty' (146). True liberty consists in the agent's unimpeded power to act in accordance with the last determination of her will.

What do early modern women have to say about this notion of freedom? Let's begin with Hobbes's contemporary, Margaret Cavendish, the duchess of Newcastle (1623-73). Scholars have noted that, in her writings, Cavendish frequently uses the concept of liberty in Hobbes's negative sense of freedom from external interference.<sup>2</sup> Her key prose pieces on women and liberty are her 'Preface to the Reader' in *The Worlds Olio* (1655), her address 'To the Two Universities' in her *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), several speeches in her *Orations of Divers Sorts* (1662), including her well-known 'Female Orations', and letter no. 16 in her *Sociable Letters* (1664). According to Hilda L. Smith, in some of these works Cavendish takes a remarkably positive view about the extent of women's freedom in early modern society (Smith 154). In *Sociable Letter* no. 16, Cavendish observes of her fellow women that 'we are not tied, nor bound to State or Crown; we are free, not Sworn to Allegiance, nor do we take the Oath of Supremacy' (61). Strictly speaking, she says, there is no reason why women should be subject to political authority: if they are not

bound by the social contract, then they might enjoy their natural liberty to do as they please, unconstrained by the law. Of course, Cavendish adds, under the marriage contract wives *are* subject to their husbands. But, as Smith points out, Cavendish claims that married women are capable of overcoming this subjection through ‘usurpation’—namely, through seduction and flattery (Smith 154). ‘Nature be thank’d,’ Cavendish says, ‘she hath been so bountiful to us, as we oftener inslave men, than men inslave us’ (SL 61). She claims that through a subtle insinuating power, arising from their natural attractiveness to men, women actually govern the masculine sex. In her seventh and final ‘Female Oration’, this point is reiterated: nature gives women beauty, she says, so that ‘men are forced to admire us, love us and be desirous of us, insomuch as rather than not have and enjoy us, they will deliver to our disposals their power, persons, and lives, enslaving themselves to our will and pleasures’ (ODS 251). In sum, according to Cavendish, provided that their husbands love them and dote on them, married women are free to do whatever they like, without interference: ‘they have liberty to spend what they will, to keep what company they will, and to use their husbands and natural friends as they please’ (ODS 246).

In other writings, however, Cavendish shows a keen awareness of the fact that many early modern women *do* suffer from a debilitating loss of negative liberty in the patriarchal marriage state (cf. Broad and Green 220-2). In several texts, Cavendish likens the condition of married women to that of ‘slaves’ (WO A4<sup>f</sup>; ODS 226, 247, 248). Because men think that women are intellectually inferior, Cavendish says, they treat women ‘like Children, Fools, or Subjects’, and coerce, threaten, or force them into obedience (WO A4<sup>f</sup>). Men do not permit women to improve themselves through higher education, to control their own finances, or to interact freely with other women.

Men ‘endeavour to bar us of all sorts or kinds of liberty’, Cavendish says, they ‘would fain bury us in their houses or beds, as in a grave’ (ODS 248). In short, men deprive women of their freedom by externally impeding them from doing what they would like to do.

So what is Cavendish’s evaluative stance on this absence of negative liberty in women’s lives? To answer this question, Deborah Boyle appeals not only to Cavendish’s specific writings about women, but also to her mature works of natural philosophy, her *Philosophical Letters* (1664), her *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666), and *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668). Boyle argues that, in light of her explicit statements in these texts, it is possible to affirm that, for Cavendish, the limitations on women’s freedom are justified. The subordination of the female sex is warranted, according to Cavendish, because women *are* naturally inferior to men in terms of strength and understanding (Boyle 528).

In the preface to her *Worlds Olio*, Cavendish affirms this view when she says that ‘Nature hath made Mans Body more able to endure Labour, and Mans Brain more clear to understand and contrive than Womans’ (A4<sup>r</sup>). In her third ‘Female Oration’, she likewise says that ‘we have more reason to murmur against Nature than against men, who hath made men more ingenious, witty, and wise than women, more strong, industrious, and laborious than women’ (249). In another oration, she suggests that a married woman’s loss of liberty is a kindness to her because ‘liberty is an enemy to women’ (246). Without the strong protection and intelligent guidance of their husbands, she says, most women would rush headlong into moral and physical danger. By placing obstacles in their way, men help to prevent the ruin that results when women run wild.

Boyle points out that, according to Cavendish's natural philosophy, all the various parts of nature are free and undetermined, and so, strictly speaking, the nature of women is not fixed or unchangeable either; it might be altered through education and training, for example. Nevertheless, in Cavendish's view, it is better that women are educated to act in accordance with the 'norms of behaviour' prescribed to them by nature; to do otherwise might destabilise the natural peace and order of society (Boyle 520). For this reason, Boyle interprets Cavendish as saying that women should not aspire to have the same political freedom as men.

In a 2012 essay, however, Karen Detlefsen offers an alternative feminist reading of Cavendish's texts. Toward this end, Detlefsen highlights the significance of Cavendish's negative stance on matrimony in her plays, her *Youths Glory* (1662), *The Female Academy* (1662), and *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668). In these fictional works, Cavendish demonstrates how women's minds might flourish when they are removed from the dominating influence of men in marriage and placed in an all-female educational setting. The problem, Cavendish implies, is that in early modern society women are immersed in relations that inhibit their ability to think rationally and acquire a capacity for self-determination. A woman's freedom, she suggests, will increase depending on the extent to which she is free from such debilitating or disempowering relationships (namely, marriage), and the extent to which she has strengthened her capacity for reason (through education). Similar sentiments can be found in Cavendish's address 'To the Two Universities' and the fourth and sixth 'Female Orations' (249-50).

In short, Detlefsen emphasises that while there are similarities between Hobbes's and Cavendish's theories of liberty, there are also crucial differences. While Hobbes concentrates solely on the external obstacles that prevent freedom of

movement, Cavendish highlights the internal constraints that prevent rational self-determination, and the relational contexts that inhibit free agency (Detlefsen, ‘Margaret Cavendish and Thomas Hobbes’ 153, 158, 167).

On this interpretation, it might be noted, Cavendish addresses some of the evident shortcomings in Hobbes’s negative concept of liberty. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes claims that in civil society, provided that there are no external impediments to the actions they wish to perform, political subjects can enjoy their liberty, even if they are in a condition of dependence upon the arbitrary will of a sovereign. Likewise, Hobbes might have argued, provided that a woman is attractive and cunning, she, too, might enjoy her liberty in marriage, regardless of her husband’s power to interfere arbitrarily in her affairs. Intuitively, however, we tend to think that further conditions must be met in order for an individual to be free. The first problem is that, even if an early modern wife does not suffer from direct interference in her life, she is still utterly dependent upon her husbands’ good will. If she loses that good will, her husband might at any moment, like the husband in our earlier scenario, cuff her about the ear, take her money, and lock her away—all with impunity. The second problem is that Hobbes’s concept of liberty does not account for the fact that married women might be so meek and submissive that it never occurs to them to act in defiance of their husbands. Though these servile women might never attract any hostile intervention in their lives, we tend to think that they are not truly free because they are constrained *in their own minds*. In her fictional works, to a certain extent, Cavendish acknowledges these concerns.

## 2. *Positive Liberty*

This leads us to consider the merits of a seemingly different kind of liberty, one that

Berlin labels 'positive' in the sense that it is freedom *to* be someone or do something, rather than freedom *from* external impediments, obstacles, and constraints (131). To appreciate this concept, let us suppose once again that you are a married woman living in the early modern period. Let us suppose that you are quite typical in so far as your education has consisted in nothing but the feminine accomplishments of music, dancing, sewing, and the various domestic skills that you require as a wife and mother. You have received no education beyond an elementary training in reading and writing, and you have had no formal training in mathematics or logic.<sup>3</sup> In the course of your upbringing, you have been told repeatedly that you are less than fully rational and really 'only a degree above the beasts'. In the popular press, marriage counsellors advise you that your husband's will must be the sole 'directory' of your thoughts and actions (Sprint 6). A good wife, you are told, is 'like a Mirrour [*sic*] which hath no Image of its own, but receives its Stamp and Image from the Face that looks into it' (Sprint 7). As a result of imbibing these attitudes, you find that you are easily swayed by your husband's opinions, and that you swallow all his arguments without question. As a further consequence, you are completely lacking in moral courage. In such circumstances, we might ask, even when there is no direct physical interference in your life, are you really free?

According to the advocates of positive liberty, the answer is no, you are not free because you are not the one who is truly in control of your thoughts and actions. In this case, certain external forces prevent you from making your own choices, from taking responsibility for your actions, and from realising your own goals. In Berlin's words, positive liberty is the freedom to be your own master, to achieve some kind of self-control or self-determination in your actions, according to your true interests—the interests of your rational 'higher nature', he says (132). Such freedom is attained



in the absence of internal impediments, such as ignorance, the prejudices of the senses, excessive passion, and the imagination.

In the late seventeenth century, the Cartesian feminist Mary Astell (1666-1731) articulates a positive concept of freedom in her writings. In her best-known works, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (part I, 1694; part II, 1697) and *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), Astell argues that, with the right education, women can attain freedom of the mind, even in the most oppressive external circumstances. According to Patricia Springborg, Astell defines liberty not as the mere capacity ‘to do as we will’ in the absence of physical obstacles, but rather ‘the power to erect a principle of action and follow it’ (Springborg 5). In the first part of her *Proposal*, Astell suggests that this freedom can be attained through proper meditation and study in the friendly confines of an all-female college. In the second part, she puts forward several Cartesian rules for thinking for women to practise at home, in order to learn ‘*not to take anything for Truth, which we do not evidently Know to be so*’ (SP 178).<sup>4</sup> In both parts, Astell’s programme for female emancipation consists in the mind’s disengagement from irrational prejudices and custom, those psychological impediments that prevent women from living up to their natures as free and rational beings. According to Springborg, for Astell freedom is a purely spiritual attainment that ‘has no obvious political corollary in freedom from domination as freedom from a worldly master’ (Springborg 217). To combat their oppression, women do not need to resist external interference in their lives; they simply need to turn inward and bring about a different frame of mind through an act of will. Even if they are physically abused and held in captivity (like the woman in our initial scenario), they might still be free in their minds.

Needless to say, from a modern feminist perspective, this programme of so-called emancipation seems deeply problematic. Astell's response to male tyranny appears to leave those institutional structures that perpetuate the oppression of women completely unchallenged. We have already noted that, as an early modern woman, your husband controlled your money, your property, and your children. In the eyes of the law, he was also entitled to have sex with you whenever he liked, with or without your consent. If you refused, it was in his power to retaliate by taking your money, destroying your estate, and bequeathing your beloved children to strangers (cf. Chapone 17-20). Divorce, as we now know it, was not an option. And even if you did manage to separate from your husband and find employment, you were legally bound to hand over any earnings to your spouse. Faced with such potential misery, it seems likely that, given your vulnerability and insecurity, you would shut up and put up with your husband's maltreatment, for the sake of avoiding even worse hostile interference in your life. In such a condition of utter dependence, we might think, it would be difficult to muster the moral courage to assert your own will, make your own choices, and realise your own goals.

And so the question arises: does any early modern thinker acknowledge that a woman might enjoy freedom from external impediments, *and* mastery over her inner life, and yet still not be mistress of her fate due to certain prejudicial social arrangements? Does anyone conceive of liberty, in other words, in terms of security against domination or arbitrary interference?

### *3. Republican Liberty*

The answer is yes, some early modern women do appeal to such an ideal of freedom in their writings. In the past few decades, Quentin Skinner, Philip Pettit, and other

modern scholars have called attention to the prevalence of a ‘third’ concept of freedom in the early modern period. According to the republican concept of liberty, the absence of freedom consists in you being in the thrall of someone who has the power to deprive you of your property (your life, liberty, and estate) at their will and pleasure, without being accountable to the law. On this account, it is not necessary for someone *actually* to interfere in your affairs in order to impinge on your freedom; someone need only have *the power* to interfere arbitrarily in your affairs (Pettit 23). Liberty consists not in freedom from interference, but in freedom from arbitrary domination or dependence upon the discretionary power of others.

A republican call for liberty can be found in women’s petitions of the English civil war era (c. 1642-49), including *A True Copie of the Petition of the Gentlewomen* (1642), Mary Overton’s *Humble Appeale* (1647), the anonymous *Humble Petition of divers wel-affected Women* (April 1649), and another *Humble Petition* of the same year (May 1649). In these works, the women petitioners highlight the fact that, like the men, they too suffer from the extreme insecurity that results when political authorities have an unlimited power over the lives of subjects—a power, that is, that is unregulated by laws that protect the interests of subjects (cf. Broad, ‘Liberty and the Right of Resistance’ 82-4). In her *Appeale*, Overton (fl. 1647) calls on the parliament of England to cease the house of lords’ ‘tyrannous, lawlesse arbitrary [*sic*] Power, and vassalage to the totall overthrow and irrecoverable losse and ruine of all our just Rights, and native Liberties’. ‘For what is tyranny,’ she asks, ‘but to admit no Rule of Government, but their wills?’ (10). She calls on the authorities to govern according to the fundamental laws of the land, and not according to lords’ private interests.

The female petitioners also highlight the fact that women have peculiar vulnerabilities of their own under such power—they are vulnerable to sexual violence, the loss of their husbands' protection, and the loss of reputation. They express their fear that the 'insolencies, and savage usage and unheard of rapes, exercised upon our Sex in Ireland,' will be exercised in England. They fear that they will see their 'Children dashed against the stones, and the Mothers milke mingled with the Infants blood, running down the streets' (TC 3). They fear that they and their children will starve to death when their husbands are unjustly separated from them, imprisoned at length, and unable to provide for them. In her *Appeale*, Overton highlights the idea that under arbitrary power women are also at risk of losing their reputations. She tells the story of her own imprisonment, in which she, several months pregnant and 'with her tender Infant in her armes of halfe a yeares age, was most inhumanely and barbarously dragged headlong upon the stones through all the dirt and the mire in the streets'. Along the way, the arresting officers verbally abused Overton by calling her 'the scandalous, infamous names of wicked Whore, Strumpet' (7). In his *Commoners Complaint* (1647), Overton's husband, the Leveller pamphleteer Richard Overton, recalls the same incident, complaining that this 'dishonourable infamous usage was a sufficient matter to blast her reputation forever and to beget such a perpetual odium upon her', that his wife could never walk the streets again without derision (19-20). Once a woman lost her good name, he reminds us, it was almost impossible to retrieve.

In sum, the women petitioners emphasise that their sex also experiences the fear of random persecution that accompanies arbitrary government. They suggest that a society in which a woman's property or 'that which belongs to her'—her husband, her children, her reputation, and her livelihood—can be taken away from her, at

someone else's arbitrary will and pleasure, is not a truly free political society. They call for the authorities to bring an end to their vulnerability to capricious interference, and they call for the security and reassurance that comes from being governed according to fundamental laws.

In the early eighteenth century, one or two English feminists take this reasoning a step further and call for the freedom of married women from the arbitrary power of husbands in the home. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Mary Astell has been hailed as one of the first writers to articulate this idea of freedom from male domination. Contra Springborg's interpretation, some recent scholars argue that Astell does recognise that women's utter dependence upon others (especially men) prevents them from attaining freedom (Broad forthcoming; Detlefsen forthcoming). Upon closer inspection, they point out, Astell acknowledges that a woman's external circumstances can severely limit her internal capacity for self-determination. In her *Reflections*, Astell observes that a wife is subject to the absolute power and arbitrary will of her husband. She can have no legal redress for any injury or injustice done, and she has no safeguard or security for her personal or real property (51). When a woman is thus dependent on the good will of her husband, Astell says, she 'must follow all his Paces, and tread in all his unreasonable steps, or there is no Peace, no Quiet for her' (47). She must 'submit her enlightned [sic] Reason, to the Imperious Dictates of a blind Will, and wild Imagination, even when she clearly perceives the ill Consequences of it' (50). The marriage state therefore encourages a woman to acquire a pliant disposition of mind, and, at the same time, discourages her from exercising her own judgment.

To appreciate why Astell thinks this is wrong, we must turn to her explicit statements about liberty in her longest work of philosophy, *The Christian Religion*

(1705). Here she does not define liberty as simply ‘the capacity to embrace a principle of conduct and follow it’, as Springborg says (99). Rather, Astell states that liberty consists ‘in making a right use of our reason, in preserving our judgments free, and our integrity unspotted’, not in a bare power to do what we will (CR §249; cf. also §§46, 256-7, 288). Astell maintains that, in order to live up to the dignity of her nature as a human being, a woman requires not only the power of free will and the capacity for reason, but also *independence of judgment*—the unimpeded ability to use her will and her understanding to make her own decisions about how to live. In the patriarchal marriage state, Astell suggests in her *Reflections*, this independence is severely compromised because women are immersed in relationships that actively encourage them to defer to the judgments of others. Not surprisingly, Astell therefore urges women to educate themselves before marriage—and seriously to consider not marrying at all (cf. Lister; Broad forthcoming).

Along similar lines, in *The Female Advocate* (1700), the author known as ‘Eugenia’ observes that the submission expected from married women is ‘a Tyranny ... that extends farther than the most absolute Monarchs in the World’ (28). In her view, reason and common sense point to the injustice of giving any human being unlimited power over another. To substantiate this claim, she highlights other dominant-subordinate relationships in early modern society, those of masters and servants, lawyers and clients, doctors and patients (14). In such cases, she suggests (in a highly ironic passage), if the relationship becomes dysfunctional—if the master abuses his servant, or the lawyer cheats his client, and the doctor maltreats his patient—we think that it is reasonable for the inferior party to complain and seek redress for any wrongs inflicted. By implication, women should not be expected to

endure abuse without complaint, she suggests; there should not be ‘boundless Limits’ to a husband’s authority (6).

Eugenia’s ‘plea for the just liberty of the tender sex’ highlights a particular point about freedom as non-domination. For Eugenia, the evil of domination does not reside in the mere fact that there is a dominant-subordinate relationship between husbands and wives, or does not result *simply* because husbands have the capacity to interfere arbitrarily in their wives’ affairs. To use Eugenia’s doctor-patient analogy, we might allow that a doctor in a psychiatric ward should have the capacity to interfere arbitrarily in her patient’s life, in order to save that patient from harm. In this case, the doctor’s capacity to interfere arbitrarily is not an evil in itself.<sup>5</sup> The evil of domination results when the dominant party has the capacity to interfere arbitrarily *against* the subordinate’s best interests and *with impunity*. Evil results when the dominant party might potentially trample on the interests of the subordinate, and the subordinate has no way of calling the dominant party to account.

Sarah Chapone (1699-1764) is noteworthy for taking this line of argument to its logical conclusion and calling ‘for an Alteration or a Repeal of some Laws, which ... put us [married women] in a worse Condition than *Slavery* itself’ (2). In her anonymous 1735 work, *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives*, Chapone draws on an ideal of freedom from domination to ground her arguments in favour of just and reasonable safeguards for a married woman’s personal property and property in her children (cf. Todd). She draws attention to the fact that, in eighteenth-century England, the laws permit husbands to hold their wives captive, to psychologically and physically abuse them, to deprive them of their property, and to keep them from seeing their children, all without being accountable to any earthly authority whatsoever. This, she argues, is unjust and unreasonable.

To support her argument, Chapone draws material from several well-publicised legal cases of her day, such as the case of a woman whose husband imprisoned her in a garret without fire or proper clothing, and another involving a woman whose husband spent her vast fortune, while she subsisted on the bare necessities. In response, Chapone observes, it might be objected that these cases are few and far between and that the majority of wives have no reason to complain. ‘Tis true,’ she says, ‘these are rare Instances, but the Law is nevertheless hard, which gives every Husband *the Power* of exercising such Cruelties’ (20; my italics). In Chapone’s view, every married woman must acknowledge that ‘she is in the Condition of a Slave, tho’ she is not treated as such’ (46). This is because a state of slavery exists whenever any man has it in his power to make a woman do his bidding, even though he does not actually crack the whip over her, so to speak. As members of the English community, she points out, women ought to be afforded the rights of all free-born English subjects. Chapone thus calls for an institutionalised guarantee of safety and security for married women—for freedom from the unlimited power of ‘domestick Lords’ (49).

What might we conclude from this brief survey of women’s views about liberty in early modern England? On the whole, it would appear that from the perspective of this socially disadvantaged group, neither positive nor negative liberty alone adequately captures its imagined ideal of freedom. In their thoughts about freedom, early modern women frequently articulate both a negative ideal of what must be absent—including external and internal preventing conditions, as well as (in some cases) the mere *power* to bring about those conditions—and a positive ideal of what this absence brings about, such as self-determination or a sense of security and invulnerability.<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising that for some of these women, such as Chapone,



Overton, and the civil war petitioners, the republican concept of freedom as non-domination presented such an attractive alternative, one that ostensibly took into account the conditions required for freedom from arbitrary interference *and* the freedom to be one's own master. It is worth highlighting, however, that for Astell the realisation of a political ideal of non-domination alone would not have sufficed for female emancipation. For her, true freedom also necessarily required a woman's liberation from that 'mass hypnosis' or the internalised presupposition that, as a member of the female sex, she was morally incompetent or naturally inferior to a man. For Astell, it was not so clear how mere freedom from absolute power or arbitrary interference by itself could have facilitated *that* kind of emancipation—certainly not in a society in which men were widely regarded as superior by nature. For her, this essentially negative ideal would need to be supplemented with a positive programme of mental emancipation for women, to give them the freedom *to* live up to their natures as fully rational beings.<sup>7</sup> With the right sort of education, according to Astell, women might learn to think for themselves *and* retain independence from the arbitrary sway of others—and thereby attain true self-determination in their moral choices and actions.<sup>8</sup>

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*To the Supream Authority of England The Commons Assembled in Parliament. The humble Petition of diverse wel-affected WEOMEN, of the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borrough of Southwark, Hamblets, and places adjacent.*  
[5 May 1649.]

*To the Supream authority of this Nation, the Commons assembled in Parliament: The humble Petition of divers wel-affected Women Inhabiting the Cities of London, Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, Hamblets, and Places adjacent.* [24 April 1649.]

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For these and other details about the legal status of married women in the early modern period, I am indebted to Staves *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Boyle 526; Detlefsen, ‘Reason and Freedom’ 161; Sarasohn 46; Rogers 187; Broad and Green 221. Cavendish knew Hobbes personally and was married to William Cavendish, the duke of Newcastle, an intermediary in the philosopher’s well-known dispute about liberty with John Bramhall (cf. Sarasohn 43).

<sup>3</sup> For these details about women’s education in the early modern period, I am indebted to Wiesner 117-45.

<sup>4</sup> Astell’s rules for thinking are indebted to those in Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole’s *Logic or the Art of Thinking* (first published 1662).

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<sup>5</sup> Marilyn Friedman makes a similar point in a recent critique of Philip Pettit's republicanism. She notes that Pettit does not 'acknowledge that some capacities for arbitrary interference in the lives of others are also capacities for benefiting others in ways that are necessary for their survival and flourishing' (Friedman 254).

<sup>6</sup> Here my conclusion confirms Lena Halldenius's recent findings in her work on liberty as non-domination. Building beyond Gerald MacCallum's critique of the positive-negative distinction (MacCallum 1967), Halldenius contends that all concepts of liberty will necessarily contain 'a negative idea of what must be absent and a positive idea of what that absence facilitates' (22).

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, we might think that Astell's views anticipate (to some extent) those of later historical feminists, such as Harriet Taylor Mill and John Stuart Mill, as well as present-day theorists, such as Nancy Hirschmann and Marilyn Friedman.

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