

# A Natural Logic Proposed\*

Mary Astell

1697

As to the *method* of thinking, if it be proper for me to say anything of that, after those better pens which have treated of it already, it falls in with the subject I'm now come to, which is, that *natural logic* I would propose. I call it natural because I shall not send you further than your own minds to learn it, you may if you please take in the assistance of some well chosen book, but a good natural reason after all, is the best director, without this you will scarce argue well, though you had the choicest books and tutors to instruct you, but with it you may, though you happen to be destitute of the other. For as a very judicious writer on this subject (to whose ingenious remarks and rules I am much obliged) well observes, "These operations [of the mind] proceed merely from nature, and that sometimes more perfectly from those who are altogether ignorant of logic, than from others who have learned it."<sup>1</sup>

That which we propose in all our meditations and reasonings is, either to deduce some truth we are in search of, from such principles as we're already acquainted with; or else, to dispose our thoughts and reasonings in such a manner, as to be able to convince others of those truths which we ourselves are convinced of. Other designs indeed men may have, such as the maintenance of their own opinions, actions and parties without regard to the truth and justice of them, or the seduction of their unwary neighbors, but these are mean and base ones, beneath a man, much more a Christian, who is or ought to be endowed with greater integrity and ingenuity.

Now reasoning being nothing else but a comparison of ideas, and a deducing of conclusions from clear and evident principles, it is in the first place requisite that our ideas be clear and just, and our principles true, else all our discourse will be nonsense and absurdity, falsehood and error. And that our idea may be right, we have no more to do but to look attentively into our own minds, having as was said above, laid aside

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\*This is Section 4 of Chapter 3 of Part 2 of Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1697); original text from [Project Gutenberg](#); notes and modernized text by [Trevor Pearce](#).

<sup>1</sup>Arnauld & Nicole, *Logic, or, The Art of Thinking* (1662), [Preamble to Part 1]; Astell's note.

all prejudices and whatever may give a false tincture to our light, there we shall find a clear and lively representation of what we seek for, unsophisticated with the dross of false definitions and unintelligible expressions. But we must not imagine that a transient view will serve the turn, or that our eye will be enlightened if it be not fixed. For though truth be exceeding bright, yet since our prejudices and passions have darkened our eye-sight, it requires no little pains and application of mind to find her out, the neglect of which application is the reason that we have so little truth, and that the little we have is almost lost in that rubbish of error which is mingled with it. And since truth is so near at hand, since we are not obliged to tumble over many authors, to hunt after every celebrated genius, but may have it for enquiring after in our own breasts, are we not inexcusable if we don't obtain it? Are we not unworthy of compassion if we suffer our understandings to be over-run with error? Indeed it seems to me most reasonable and most agreeable to the wisdom and equity of the divine operations, that everyone should have a teacher in their own bosoms, who will if they seriously apply themselves to him, immediately enlighten them so far as that is necessary, and direct them to such means as are sufficient for their instruction both in human and divine truths; for as to the latter, reason if it be right and solid, will not pretend to be our sole instructor, but will send us to divine revelation when it may be had.

God does nothing in vain, he gives no power or faculty which he has not allotted to some proportionate use, if therefore he has given to mankind a rational mind, every individual understanding ought to be employed in somewhat worthy of it. The meanest person should think as *justly*, though not as *capaciously*, as the greatest philosopher. And if the understanding be made for the contemplation of truth, and I know not what else it can be made for, either there are many understandings who are never able to attain what they were designed and fitted for, which is contrary to the supposition that God made nothing in vain, or else the very meanest must be put in a way of attaining it: Now how can this be if all that which goes to the composition of a knowing man in the account of the world, be necessary to make one so? All have not leisure to learn languages and pore on books, nor opportunity to converse with the learned; but all may *think*, may use their own faculties rightly, and consult the master who is within them.

By ideas we sometimes understand in general all that which is the immediate object of the mind, whatever it perceives; and in this large sense it may take in all thought, all that we are any ways capable of discerning: So when we say we have no idea of a thing, 'tis as much as to say we know nothing of the matter. Again, it is more strictly taken for that which represents to the mind some object distinct from it, whether clearly or confusedly; when this is its import, our knowledge is said to be

as clear as our ideas are. For that idea which represents a thing so clearly, that by an attent and simple view we may discern its properties and modifications, at least so far as they can be known, is never false; all our certainty and evidence depends on it, if we know not truly what is thus represented to our minds we know nothing. Thus the idea of equality between 2 and 2 is so evident that it is impossible to doubt of it, no arguments could convince us of the contrary, nor be able to persuade us that the same may be found between 2 and 3.

And as such an idea as this is never false, so neither can any idea be said to be so, if by false we mean that which has no existence; our idea certainly exists, though there be not anything in nature correspondent to it.<sup>2</sup> For though there be no such thing as a golden mountain, yet when I think of one, 'tis certain I have an idea of it.<sup>3</sup>

But our ideas are then said to be false, or rather wrong, when they have no conformity to the real nature of the thing whose name they bear. So that properly speaking it is not the idea but the judgment that is false; we err in supposing that our idea is answerable to something without us when it is not. In simple perceptions we are not often deceived, but we frequently mistake in compounding them, by uniting several things which have no agreement, and separating others which are essentially united. Indeed it may happen that our perceptions are faulty sometimes, through the indisposition of the organs or faculties, thus a man who has the *jaundice* sees everything tinged with yellow, yet even here the error is not in the simple idea but in the composed one, for we do not mistake when we say the object appears yellow to our sight, though we do, when we affirm that it does, or ought to do so to others. So again, when the mind does not sufficiently attend to her ideas nor examine them on all sides, 'tis very likely she will think amiss, but this also is a false judgment, that which is amiss in the perception being rather the inadequateness than the falsehood. Thus in many cases we enquire no farther than whether an action be not directly forbidden, and if we do not find it absolutely unlawful, we think that sufficient to authorize the practice of it, not considering it as we ought to do, clothed with the circumstances of scandal, temptation, etc. which place it in the same classes with things unlawful, at least make it so to us.

Rational creatures should endeavor to have right ideas of everything that comes under their cognizance, but yet our ideas of morality, our thoughts about religion are

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<sup>2</sup>Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation Two (trans. Cress): "I now see a light, I hear a noise, I feel heat. These things are false, since I am asleep. Yet I certainly do seem to see, hear, and feel warmth. This cannot be false."

<sup>3</sup>A golden mountain was a standard example of something that exists only in thought: see Arnauld & Nicole, *Logic, or, The Art of Thinking* (1662), Part 1, Chapter 2.

those which we should with greatest speed and diligence rectify, because they are of most importance, the life to come, as well as all the occurrences of this, depending on them. We should search for truth in our most abstracted speculations, but it concerns us nearly to follow her close in what relates to the conduct of our lives. For the main thing we are to drive at in all our studies, and that which is the greatest improvement of our understandings is the art of prudence, the being all of a piece, managing all our words and actions as it becomes wise persons and good Christians.

Yet in this we are commonly most faulty; for besides the deceits of our passions, our ideas of particular virtues and vices, goods and evils, being an assemblage of diverse simple perceptions, and including several judgments are therefore liable to mistake, and much more so considering how we commonly come by them. We hear the word that stands for such a thing, suppose honor, and then instead of enquiring what it is at the fountain-head the oracles of God, and our own, or the impartial reason of the wisest and the best, custom and the observations we make on the practice of such as pretend to it forms our idea, which is seldom a right one, the opinions and practices of the world being very fallacious, and many times quite opposite to the dictates of reason would we but give ear to them. For what a strange distorted idea of honor must they needs have, who can think it honorable to break a vow that ought to be kept, and dishonorable to get loose from an engagement that ought to be broken? Who cannot endure to be taxed with a lie, and yet never think fit to keep their word? What do they think of greatness who support their pomp at the expense of the groans and tears of many injured families? What is their idea of heaven, who profess to believe such a thing, and yet never endeavor to qualify themselves for the enjoyment of it? Have they any idea at all of these things when they speak of them? Or, if they have, is it not a very false one?

Now that we may avoid mistake the better, and because we usually join words to our ideas even when we only meditate, we should free them from all equivocation, not make use of any word, which has not a distinct idea annexed to it, and where custom has joined many ideas to one word, carefully separate and distinguish them. For if our words are equivocal, how can we by pronouncing such and such, excite the same idea in another that is in our own mind, which is the end of speech, and consequently how can we be understood? And if sometimes we annex one idea to a word, and sometimes another, we may for ever wrangle with those who perhaps would be found to agree with us if we understood each other, but can neither convince them, nor clear up the matter to our own mind. For instance: should I dispute whether evil were to be chosen without defining what I mean by evil, which is a word customarily applied to things of different natures, and should conclude in the affirmative, meaning at the same time the evil of pain, or any corporal loss or punishment, I were not mistaken,

though another person who annexes no other idea but that of sin to the word evil, might justly contradict me and say that I was. Or if in the process of my discourse, I should without giving notice of it, substitute the idea of sin instead of that of pain, when I mention evil, I should argue falsely. For it is a maxim that we may choose a less evil to avoid a greater, if both of them be corporal evils, or if one of them be so, and we choose it to avoid a sin, between which and the evil of pain there is no comparison: But if the two evils proposed to our choice be both of them sinful, that principle will not hold, we must choose neither, whatever comes of it, sin being eligible no manner of way.

Thus many times our ideas are thought to be false when the fault is really in our language, we make use of words without joining any, or only loose and indeterminate ideas to them, prating like parrots who can modify sounds, and pronounce syllables, and sometimes martial them as a man would, though without the use of reason or understanding anything by them. So that after a long discourse and many fine words, our hearer may justly ask us what we have been saying? And what it is we would be at? And so a great part, of the good breeding of the world, many elegant compliments pass for nothing, they have no meaning, or if they have, 'tis quite contrary to what the words in other cases signify.

From the companion of two or more ideas clearly conceived arises a judgment, which we may lay down for a principle, and as we have occasion argue from. Always observing that those judgments which we take for axioms or principles, be such as carry the highest evidence and conviction, such as everyone who will but in the least attend may clearly see, and be fully convinced of, and which need not another idea for their demonstration. Thus from the agreement which we plainly perceive between the ideas of God and of goodness singly considered, we discern that they may be joined together so as to form this proposition, *that God is good*: And from the evident disparity that is between God and injustice, we learn to affirm this other, *that he is not unjust*. And so long as we judge of nothing but what we see clearly, we can't be mistaken in our judgments, we may indeed in those reasonings and deductions we draw from them, if we are ignorant of the laws of argumentation, or negligent in the observation of them.

The first and principal thing therefore to be observed in all the operations of the mind is, that we determine nothing about those things of which we have not a clear idea, and as distinct as the nature of the subject will permit, for we cannot properly be said to know anything which does not clearly and evidently appear to us. Whatever we see distinctly we likewise see clearly, distinction always including clearness, though this does not necessarily include that, there being many objects clear to the view of the mind, which yet can't be said to be distinct.

That (to use the words of a celebrated author) may be said to be “clear which is present and manifest to an attentive mind; so as we say we see objects clearly, when being present to our eyes they sufficiently act on them, and our eyes are disposed to regard them. And that distinct, which is so clear, particular, and different from all other things, that it contains not anything in itself which appears not manifestly to him who considers it as he ought.”<sup>4</sup> Thus we may have a clear, but not a distinct and perfect idea of God and of our own souls; their existence and some of their properties and attributes may be certainly and indubitably known, but we can’t know the nature of our souls distinctly, for reasons too long to be mentioned here, and less that of God, because he is infinite. Now where our knowledge is distinct, we may boldly deny of a subject, all that which after a careful examination we find not in it: But where our knowledge is only clear, and not distinct, though we may safely affirm what we see, yet we can’t without a hardy presumption deny of it what we see not. And were it not very common to find people both talking and writing of things of which they have no notion, no clear idea; nay and determining dogmatically concerning the entire nature of those of which they cannot possibly have an adequate and distinct one, it might seem impertinent to desire them to speak no farther than they apprehend. They will tell you peremptorily of contradictions and absurdities in such matters as they themselves must allow they cannot comprehend, though others as sharp sighted as themselves can see no such thing as they complain of.

As judgments are formed by the comparing of ideas, so reasoning or discourse arises from the companion or combination of several judgments. Nature teaches us when we can’t find out what relation one idea bears to another by a simple view or bare comparison, to seek for a common measure or third idea, which relating to the other two, we may by comparing it with each of them, discern wherein they agree or differ.<sup>5</sup> Our invention discovers itself in proposing readily apt ideas for this middle term, our judgment in making choice of such as are clearest and most to our purpose, and the excellency of our reasoning consists in our skill and dexterity in applying them.

Invention indeed is the hardest part, when proofs are found it is not very difficult to manage them. And to know precisely wherein their nature consists, may help us somewhat in our enquiries after them. An intermediate idea then which can make out an agreement between other ideas, must be equivalent to, and yet distinct from those we compare by it. Where ideas agree it will not be hard to find such an equivalent, and if after diligent search we cannot meet with any, ’tis a pretty sure sign that they

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<sup>4</sup>Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), Part 1, §45; Astell’s note.

<sup>5</sup>Norris, *Reflections upon the Conduct of Human Life* (1690), Second Reflection, §15; citing Malebranche, *The Search After Truth* (1674–75), Book 6, Part 2, Chapter 1.

do not agree. It is not necessary indeed that our middle idea be equivalent in all respects, 'tis enough if it be in such as make the comparison: And when it is so to one of the compared ideas but not to the other, that's a proof that they do not agree amongst themselves.

All the commerce and intercourse of the world is managed by equivalents, conversation as well as traffic. Why do we trust our friends but because their truth and honesty appears to us equivalent to the confidence we repose in them? Why do we perform good offices to others, but because there's a proportion between them and the merit of the person, or our own circumstances? And as the way to know the worth of things is to compare them one with another, so in like manner we come to the knowledge of the truth of them by an equal balancing. But you will say, though I may learn the value of a *Spanish* coin by weighing, or comparing it with some other money whose standard I know, and so discern what proportion it bears to those goods I would exchange; yet what scales shall I find to weigh ideas? What hand so even as to poise them justly? Or if that might be done, yet where shall I meet with an equivalent idea when I have occasion to use one?

In answer to this demand I consider, that as light is always visible to us if we have an organ to receive it, if we turn our eyes towards it, and that nothing interpose between it and us; so is truth, we are surrounded with it, and God has given us faculties to receive it. If it be asked, why then do we so seldom find it? The reason is, because instead of making right use of our faculties we employ them in keeping it out; we either shut our eyes, or if we vouchsafe to open them, we are sure to view it through such unsuitable mediums as fail not to misrepresent it to us. As for those few noble spirits, who open the windows of their souls to let in truth, and take the films of interest, passion and prejudice from before their eyes, they will certainly be enlightened, and cannot miss of obtaining as much truth as they are capable of receiving. for, to go on with the comparison, as we can see no farther than our own horizon, though the light shine never so bright around us; and as we cannot discern every object even within that compass clearly, nor any distinctly but what we particularly apply ourselves to; So neither are our capacities large enough to take in *all* truth, as has been often said, nor are we capable of attaining any, without attention and diligent examination. But if we carefully consider those ideas we already have and attend to those truths we are acquainted with, we cannot want mediums to discover more, if our enquiries be after that which is within our reach. He who is the fountain of truth is also a God of order, and has so regularly connected one truth with another, that the discovery of one is a step towards a further progress; so that if we diligently examine those truths which, we know, they will clear the way to what we search after: For it seldom happens but that the question itself directs

us to some idea that will serve for the explanation or proof of it.

There is no object, no accident of life but affords us matter of instruction. God has so disposed all the works of his hands, all the actings of his providence, that every one of them ministers to our improvement, if we will but observe and apply them. Indeed this living *ex tempore*<sup>6</sup> which most of us are guilty of, our making no reflections, our gay and volatile humor which transports us in an instant from one thing to another, e're we have with the industrious bee sucked those sweets it would afford us, frequently renders his gracious bounty ineffectual. For as the diligent hand maketh rich, whilst the slothful and prodigal come to nothing, so the use of our powers improves and increases them, and the most observing and considerate is the wisest person: For she lays up in her mind as in a storehouse, ready to produce on all occasions, a clear and simple idea of every object that has at any time presented itself. And perhaps the difference between one woman's reason and another's may consist only in this, that the one has amassed a greater number of such ideas than the other, and disposed them more orderly in her understanding, so that they are at hand, ready to be applied to those complex ideas whose agreement or disagreement cannot be found out but by the means of some of them.

But because examples are more familiar than precepts, as condescending to show us the very manner of practicing them, I shall endeavor to make the matter in hand as plain as I can by subjoining instances to the following rules, which rules as I have not taken wholly on trust from others, so neither do I pretend to be the inventor of them.

We have heard already that a medium is necessary when we can't discern the relation that is between two or more ideas by intuition or a simple view. Could this alone procure us what we seek after, the addition of other ideas would be needless, since to make a show of wit by tedious arguings and unnecessary flourishes, does only perplex and incumber the matter, intuition being the simplest, and on that account the best way of knowing.

**Rule I.** And therefore we should in the first place, *acquaint ourselves thoroughly with the state of the question, have a distinct notion of our subject whatever it be, and of the terms we make use of, knowing precisely what it is we drive at*<sup>7</sup>: that so we may in the second

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<sup>6</sup>“At the moment, without premeditation or preparation” (OED).

<sup>7</sup>Norris, *Reflections upon the Conduct of Human Life* (1690), Second Reflection, §14; Norris's rules derive from those in Malebranche, *The Search After Truth* (1674–75), Book 6, Part 2, Chapter 1.



**Rule II.** *Cut off all needless ideas and whatever has not a necessary connection to the matter under consideration, which serve only to fill up the capacity of the mind, and to divide and distract the attention.*<sup>8</sup> From the neglect of this comes those causeless digressions, tedious parentheses and impertinent remarks which we meet with in some authors. For, as when our sight is diffused and extended to many objects at once we see none of them distinctly; so when the mind grasps at every idea that presents itself, or rambles after such as relate not to its present business, it loses its hold and retains a very feeble apprehension of that which it should attend. Some have added another rule (viz.) *that we reason only on those things of which we have clear ideas*<sup>9</sup>; but I take it to be a consequence of the first, and therefore do not make it a distinct one: For we can by no means understand our subject, or be well acquainted with the state of the question, unless we have a clear idea of all its terms.

**Rule III.** Our business being stated, the next rule is *to conduct our thoughts by order, beginning with the most simple and easy objects, and ascending as by degrees to the knowledge of the more composed.*<sup>10</sup> I need not tell you, that order makes everything, easy, strong and beautiful, and that the superstructure is neither like to last or please unless the foundation be duly laid, for this is obvious to the most superficial reader. Nor are they likely to solve the difficult, who have neglected or slightly passed over the easy questions. Our knowledge is gradual, and by passing regularly through plain things, we arrive in due time at the more abstruse.

**Rule IV.** In this method we are to practise the fourth rule which is, *not to leave any part of our subject unexamined*, it being as necessary to consider all that can let in light, as to shut out what's foreign to it.<sup>11</sup> We may stop short of truth as well as over-run it; and though we look never so attentively on our proper object, if we view but half of it, we may be as much mistaken, as if we extended our sight beyond it. Some objects agree very well when observed on one side, which upon turning the other show a great disparity. Thus the right angle of a triangle may be like to one part of a square, but compare the whole, and you'll find them very different figures. And a moral action may in some circumstance be not only fit but necessary, which in others, where time, place, and the like have made an alteration, would be most improper; so that if we venture to act on the former judgment, we may easily do

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<sup>8</sup>Norris, *Reflections upon the Conduct of Human Life* (1690), Second Reflection, §16.

<sup>9</sup>Norris, *Reflections upon the Conduct of Human Life* (1690), Second Reflection, §13.

<sup>10</sup>Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637), Part 2, Rule 3.

<sup>11</sup>Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637), Part 2, Rule 4.

amiss, if we would act as we ought, we must view its new face, and see with what aspect that looks on us.

To this rule belongs that of *dividing the subject of our meditations into as many parts, as we can, and as shall be requisite to understand it perfectly*.<sup>12</sup> This is indeed most necessary in difficult questions, which will scarce be unravelled but in this manner by pieces: ever taking care to make exact reviews, and to sum up our evidence justly e're we pass sentence and fix our judgment.

**Rule V.** To which purpose we must *always keep our subject directly in our eye, and closely pursue it through all our progress*; there being no better sign of a good understanding than thinking closely and pertinently, and reasoning dependently, so as to make the former part of our discourse a support to the latter, and *this* an illustration of *that*, carrying light and evidence in every step we take. The neglect of this rule is the cause why our discoveries of truth are seldom exact, that so much is often said to so little purpose; and many intelligent and industrious readers when they have read over a book are very little wiser than when they began it. And that the two last rules may be the better observed, 'twill be fit very often to look over our process so far as we have gone, that so by rendering our subject familiar, we may the sooner arrive to an exact knowledge of it.

**Rule VI.** All which being done we are in a fair way towards keeping the last rule, which is, *to judge no further than we perceive, and not to take anything for truth which we do not evidently know to be so*.<sup>13</sup> Indeed in some cases we are forced to content ourselves with probability, but 'twere well if we did so only where 'tis plainly necessary. That is, when the subject of our meditation is such as we cannot possibly have a certain knowledge of, because we are not furnished with proofs which have a constant and immutable connection with the ideas we apply them to, or because we can't perceive it, which is our case in such exigencies as oblige us to act presently, on a cursory view of the arguments proposed to us, when we want time to trace them to the bottom, and to make use of such means as would discover truth.

I cannot think we are often driven to such straits in any considerable affair, though I believe that very many subjects may be proposed to us, concerning which we cannot readily pass our judgment, either because we never considered them before, or because we are wanting in some means that lead to the knowledge, of them. In which case reason wills that we suspend our judgment till we can be better informed; nor would it have us remit our search after certainty, even in those very cases in which

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<sup>12</sup>Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637), Part 2, Rule 2.

<sup>13</sup>Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637), Part 2, Rule 1.

we may sometimes be forced to act only on probable grounds. For reason can't rest satisfied with probabilities where evidence is possible, our passions and interest may, but *that* does not incline us to leave off enquiring lest we happen to meet somewhat contrary to our desires. No, reason requires us to continue our enquiries with all the industry we can, till they've put us in possession of truth, and when we have found, enjoins us to follow her, how opposite soever she may cause our latter actions to be to our former. But by this we may learn (and so we may by everything that such weak and fallible creatures as we are, perform) to think candidly of those whose opinions and actions differ from our own. Because we do not know the necessity of their affairs, nor in what ill circumstances they are placed in respect of truth.

And now to apply what has been said; the state of the question being distinctly known, and certain ideas fixed to the terms we make use of, we shall find sometimes that the difference which was supposed to be between the things themselves, is only in words, in the diverse ways we make use of to express the same idea.

For if upon looking into ourselves we discern, that these different terms have but one and the same idea, when we have corrected our expressions the controversy is at an end, and we need enquire no further. Thus, if we are asked *whether God is infinitely perfect* there needs no intermediate idea to compare the idea of God with that of infinite perfection, since we may discern them on the very first view to be one and the same idea differently expressed, which to go about to explain or prove were only to cumber with needless words, and to make what is clear, obscure. For we injure a cause instead of defending it, by attempting an explanation or proof of things so clear, that as they do not need, so perhaps they are not capable of any.

But if it be made a question *whether there is a God, or a being infinitely perfect* we are then to examine the agreement between our idea of God and that of existence. Now this may be discerned by intuition, for upon a view of our ideas we find that existence is a perfection, and the foundation of all other perfections, since that which has no being cannot be supposed to have any perfection. And though the idea of existence is not adequate to that of perfection, yet the idea of perfection includes that of existence, and if *that* idea were divided into parts, one part of it would exactly agree with *this*. So that if we will allow that *any* being is infinite in all perfections, we cannot deny that that being exists; existence itself being one perfection, and such an one as all the rest are built upon.<sup>14</sup>

If unreasonable men will farther demand, *why is it necessary that all perfection*

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<sup>14</sup>This paragraph provides an [ontological argument](#) for God's existence, an argument form revived in Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Fifth Meditation. In the paragraphs that follow Astell also provides a [cosmological argument](#).

*should be centered in one being, is it not enough that it be parceled out amongst many? And though it be true that that being who has all perfection must needs exist, yet where's the necessity of an all-perfect being?* We must then look about for proofs and intermediate ideas, and the objection itself will furnish us with one. For those *many* whose particular ideas it would have joined together to make a compound one of all-perfection, are no other than creatures, as will appear if we consider our idea of particular being and of creature, which are so far from having anything to distinguish them, that in all points they resemble each other. Now this idea naturally suggests to us that of creation, or a power of giving being to that which before the exerting of that power had none, which idea if we use it as a medium, will serve to discover to us the necessity of an all-perfect being.

For in the first place, whatever has any perfection or excellency (for that's all we mean by perfection here) must either have it of itself, or derive it from some other being. Now creatures cannot have their perfections from themselves because they have not their being, for to suppose that they made themselves is an absurdity too ridiculous to be seriously refuted, 'tis to suppose them to be and not to be at the same time, and that when they were nothing, they were able to do the greatest matter. Nor can they derive either being or perfection from any other creature. For though some particular beings may seem to be the cause of the perfections of others, as the watch-maker may be said to be the cause of the regular motions of the watch, yet trace it a little farther, and you'll find this very cause shall need another, and so without end, till you come to the foundation-head, to that all-perfect being, who is the last resort of our thoughts, and in whom they naturally and necessarily rest and terminate. If to this it be objected that we as good as affirm that this all-perfect being is his own maker, by saying he is self-existent, and so we fall into the same absurdity which we imputed to that opinion which supposes that creatures were their own maker. The reply is easy, that we do not say he made himself, we only affirm that his nature is such, that though we can't sufficiently explain because we can't comprehend it, yet thus much we can discern, that if he did not exist of himself no other being could ever have existed. So that either all must be swallowed up in an infinite nothing, if nothing can properly have that epithet, and we must suppose, that neither we ourselves, nor any of those creatures about us ever had, or ever can have a being, which is too ridiculous to imagine, or else we must needs have recourse to a self-existing being, who is the maker and lord of all things. And since self existence must of necessity be placed somewhere, is it not much more natural and reasonable to place it in infinite perfection, than amongst poor, frail creatures, whose origin we may trace, and whose end we see daily hastening?

To sum up all: Since there are innumerable beings in the world, which have each

of them their several excellencies or perfections; Since these can no more derive their perfections than their being from themselves or from any other creature; Since a self-existing being is the result of our thoughts; the first and only true cause, without whom it is impossible that anything should ever have existed; Since creatures with their being receive all that depends on it from him their maker; Since none can give what he has not, and therefore he who communicates an innumerable variety of perfections to his creatures, even all that they enjoy, must needs contain in himself all those beauties and perfections he is pleased to communicate to inferior beings; nothing can be more plain and evident than that there is a God, and that the existence of an all-perfect being is absolutely necessary.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps these arguments are not in form, I do not oblige myself to follow servilely the rules of art, nor know I what better judges will think of them, but they seem to me to be clear, rational and concluding, which is all I aim at. And I hope the reader will receive from hence more light into the way of arguing, than she could have gained had I spent as many pages in prescribing rules and giving trifling examples, which when they are known, merit only to be forgot again. But if some are better pleased with the usual way of syllogism, and think an argument cannot be rightly managed without one, for their satisfaction we will add another instance.

Suppose the question were put *whether a rich man is happy?* By a rich man understanding one who possesses the wealth and good things of this world, and by happy the enjoyment of the proper good of man. We compare the two terms riches and happiness together, to discern if they be so much one and the same, that what is affirmed of the one may be laid of the other; but we find they are not. For if riches and happiness were terms convertible, then all who are happy must be rich, and all who are rich must be happy, to affirm the last of which is to beg the question, and the contrary appears by the following argument, which makes use of *satisfaction with one's own condition* for the middle idea or common measure.

He who is happy is satisfied with his condition and free from anxious cares and solicitude (for these proceeding from the want of good, he who enjoys his proper good cannot be subject to them.) But riches do not free us from anxieties and solicitude, they many times increase them, therefore to be rich and to be happy are not one and the same thing.

Again, if there are some who are happy and yet not rich, then riches and happiness are two distinct things. But a good poor man is happy (in the enjoyment of God who

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<sup>15</sup>Descartes, Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Meditation Three (trans. Cress): “For whence, I ask, could an effect get its reality, if not from its cause? And how could the cause given that reality to the effect, unless it also possessed that reality? Hence it follows that . . . what is more perfect . . . cannot come into being from what is less perfect.”

is better to him than thousands of gold and silver,) therefore riches and happiness are to be distinguished.

We may further consider, that if the enjoyment of riches can make a man happy according to our notion of happiness, they must be his proper good. Now if we compare the idea of riches with that which we have of man, we shall find in the former nothing but what's material, external and adventitious, but our idea of the latter represents to us somewhat that thinks, and so is of an immaterial and more noble nature, a nature altogether different from the former, and much more excellent and superior to it; and by consequence the less noble cannot be the good of the more, nor a body or an extended substance, the proper good of the mind, a spiritual or thinking substance. So that upon the whole matter we find, that we cannot affirm a man is happy because he is rich, neither can we deny it; Riches considered absolutely in themselves, neither make a man happy nor hinder him from being so. They contribute to his happiness or they obstruct it according to the use he makes of them.

As for the common rules of disputation they do more frequently entangle than clear a question, nor is it worthwhile to know any more of them than may help to guard us from the sophistry of those who use them, and assist us in the managing an argument fairly, so long as it is tenable, and till we are driven from it by the mere dint of truth. To be able to hold an argument right or wrong may pass with some perhaps for the character of a good disputant, which yet I think it is not, but must by no means be allowed to be that of a rational person; it belongs to such to detect as soon as may be the fallacies of an ill one, and to establish truth with the clearest evidence. For indeed truth not victory is what we should contend for in all disputes, it being more glorious to be overcome by her than to triumph under the banners of error. And therefore we pervert our reason when we make it the instrument of an endless contention, by seeking after quirks and subtleties, abusing equivocal terms, and by practicing the rest of those little arts every sophister is full of, which are of no service in the discovery of truth, all they can do is to ward off an opponent's blow, to make a noise and raise a dust, that so we may escape in the hurry, our foil being undiscovered.

It were endless to reckon up all the fallacies we put on ourselves and endeavor to obtrude on others. On ourselves in the first place, for however we may be pleased in the contemplation of our own craft or to use those softer names we are apt to give it, our acuteness and ingenuity; whoever attempts to impose on others is first imposed on himself, he is cheated by some of those grand deceivers, the world, the flesh, and the devil, and made to believe that vain-glory, secular interest, ambition or perhaps sensuality or revenge, or any the like contemptible appetites are preferable

to integrity and truth.

Neither is it necessary to reduce the most usual sophisms to general heads, since that's already very well performed in a book to which I'd rather refer you, than be at the trouble of transcribing, having nothing to add but this, that if I be not mistaken, all the false arguings enumerated there, and what others you may happen to meet with may be discovered and avoided by the rules already given, and do indeed proceed, so far as they relate to the understanding, from the non-observation of some of them.<sup>16</sup>

But it is to little purpose to guard ourselves against the sophisms of the head, if we lie open to those of the heart. One irregular passion will put a greater obstacle between us and truth, than the brightest understanding and clearest reasonings can easily remove. This every one of us is apt to discern in others, but we're blind to it in ourselves. we can readily say that it is pride or obstinacy, interest or passion or in a word self-love that keeps our neighbor from conviction, but all this while imagine our own hearts are very clear of them, though more impartial judges are of another mind.

I wish there were no reason to think that there are some who attempt to maintain an opinion which they know to be false, or at least which they have cause to suspect, and therefore industriously avoid what would manifest their error. 'Tis hoped however that the greatest part of the disputers of the world are not of this number, and that the reason why they offer their neighbor's sophistical arguments, is because they are not aware of it themselves; That what makes them so positive is their firm persuasion that they are acted only by a zeal for God, an honest constancy and staunch integrity, though at the very same time quite different motives move them under these appearances.

And indeed he must be an extraordinary good man, a wonder scarce produced in an age, who has no irregular passion stirring; who receives no manner of tincture from pride and vicious self-love, to which all are so prone, and which hide themselves under so many disguises; Who is got above the world its terrors and allurements, has laid up his treasure in heaven, and is fully contented with his present circumstances, let them be what they will, having made them the boundaries of his desires; who knows how to live on a little very happily and therefore receives no bias from his own conveniency, nor is weighed down by the dead weight of his appetites and interests; which ought to be the temper of every person who would find out truth, and who desires to make a right judgment in all things.

We all pretend to this it's true, and think ourselves injured if it be not believed that we are disinterested and free from passion, that no humor or private end, nothing

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<sup>16</sup>Arnauld & Nicole, *Logic, or, The Art of Thinking* (1662), Part 3, Chapters 19–20; Astell's note.

but an honest zeal for truth gives warmth to our discourses; and yet it often happens that ere we conclude them, we give just occasion to have it thought, that how large soever our knowledge in other things may be, we are not well acquainted with our own hearts. All which considered, how confidently soever we're persuaded of our own integrity, though we think we have penetrated to the very bottom of our hearts, it would not be amiss to suspect ourselves sometimes, and to fear a bias, even at the very instant we take care to avoid one.

For truth being but one, and the rational faculties not differing in kind but in degree, though there may be different measures of understanding, there could not be such contradictions in men's opinions as we find there are, even in those who examine as well as in those who do not, were they acted only by the love of truth, and did not self-love persuade them that they shall find their own particular account by such an opposition. I would not be so understood as if I thought that in all controversies one side must needs be criminal, if not by willfully opposing truth, yet at least by an indulgence of such unmortified passions as estrange them from her. No, without doubt great allowances are to be made on the score of education, capacity, the leisure, and opportunity of information we have had. But this we may venture to say, that had we but a modest opinion of ourselves, believing it as possible for us as for those who contradict us to be mistaken, did we behave ourselves answerable to such a belief; were we seriously convinced that nothing is so much our interest as a readiness to admit of truth, from what ever hand it comes, greatest part of our disputes would have a better issue than we generally find. At least if we could not be to happy as to convince one another, our contests would be managed with more temper and moderation, would not conclude in such a breach of charity, or at best in such a coldness for each other, as they usually do.

If we consider wisely we shall find it to be our present interest as well as our future, to do that in reality which all of us pretend to, that is, to search after and to follow truth. And to do it with all that candor and ingenuity which becomes a true philosopher as well as a good Christian, making use of no arguments but what we really believe, and giving them up contentedly when we meet with stronger. Our *present interest*, which is that which weighs most with the generality, and to which we make all other considerations give place; For what is it we contend for? They who have such little souls as to bait at anything beneath the highest end, make reputation their aim, and with it that authority and wealth which usually attends it. But now reputation cannot be acquired, at least not a lasting one, by fallacious reasonings; we may perhaps for a while get a name by them amongst unwary persons, but the world grows too quick-sighted to be long imposed on. If a love of truth do not, yet envy and emulation will set other heads a work to discover our ignorance



or fraud, they are upon the same design, and will not suffer us to go away with the prize undeservedly. And besides, with how ill an aspect must he needs appear who does not reason fairly, and by consequence, how unlike is he to gain on those who hear him? There are but three causes to which false arguments can be referred, ignorance, rashness, or design, and the being suspected for any one of these hinders us very much in acquiring that reputation, authority or preferment we desire. I must confess were we sure the fallacy would not be detected, and that we should not lie under suspicion of it, we might gain our point; for provided the paint do not rub off, good coloring may serve a present turn as well as a true complexion: But there is little reason to hope for this, because of what was just now mentioned, and for other reasons that might be added.

Now what can be more provoking than the idea we have of a designing person? Of one who thinks his own intellectuals so strong and ours so weak, that he can make us swallow anything, and lead us where he pleases? Such a one seems to have an intention to reduce us to the vilest slavery, the captivation of our understandings, which we justly reckon to be the highest insolence. And since everyone puts in for a share of sense, and thinks he has no reason to complain of the distribution of it, whoever supposes that another has an overweening opinion of his own, must needs think that he undervalues his neighbor's understanding, and will certainly repay him in his own coin, and deny him those advantages he seems to arrogate.

The most we can say for ourselves when the weakness of our arguments comes to be discovered, is that we were mistaken through rashness or ignorance, which though more pardonable than the former, are no recommending qualities. If we argue falsely and know not that we do so, we shall be more pitied than when we do, but either way disappointed. And if we have added rash censures of those who are not of our mind, pride or positiveness to our errors as we cannot so handsomely retreat so neither will so fair a quarter be allowed as those who argue with meekness, modesty and charity may well expect. So that when we have cast up our account and estimated the present advantages that false arguings bring us, I fear what we have got by a pretense to truth, won't be found to countervail the loss we shall sustain by the discovery that it was no more. Which may induce us (if other considerations will not) to be wary in receiving any proposition ourselves; and restrain us from being forward to impose our sentiments on others.

After all, 'tis a melancholy reflection that a great part of mankind stand in need of arguments drawn from so low a motive as worldly interest, to persuade them to that to which they have much greater inducements. It is strange that we should need any other considerations besides the bare performance of our duty, and those unspeakable advantages laid up for all such as do it sincerely, hereafter. When we

have the approbation of God and the infinite rewards he has proposed to those who study to recommend themselves to him, for our encouragement, how low are we sunk if the applause of men and the little trifles which they can bestow weigh anything with us! I am therefore almost ashamed of proposing so mean a consideration, but the degeneracy of the age required it, and they who perhaps at first follow truth as the Jews did once, for the loaves only, may at last be attracted by its own native beauties.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Those who were pious only for the benefits it brought, rather than out of a true desire to serve God, were said to be pious “for the loaves only”—a common trope at the time that was not always associated with Jews specifically: see, for example, Edward Stephens, *The Spirit of the Church-Faction Detected* (1691), 21.