

The following is a post from Richard Zach who is a professor of Philosophy at the University of Calgary. It might be amusing to work out analogies in the style of Ms. Astell for a few other possible quantifications ($\forall x$)(\exists) etc.

My colleague Elizabeth Brake pointed out to me a wonderful passage in the "1706 Preface" to Mary Astell's *Reflections upon Marriage*, in which she's criticizing William Nicholls' claim (in *The Duty of Inferiors towards their Superiors*, in *Five Practical Discourses* (London 1701), Discourse IV: *The Duty of Wives to their Husbands*), that women are naturally inferior to men. Shorter Astell: "You're suppressing your quantifiers. Once you make them explicit, you're either committing treason or are stating the obvious." (Note that in 1706 England was ruled by Queen Anne.)

'Tis true, thro' Want of Learning, and of that Superior Genius which Men as Men lay claim to, she [the author] was ignorant of the Natural Inferiority of our Sex, which our Masters lay down as a Self-Evident and Fundamental Truth. She saw nothing in the Reason of Things, to make this either a Principle or a Conclusion, but much to the contrary; it being Sedition at least, if not Treason to assert it in this Reign. For if by the Natural Superiority of their Sex, they mean that every Man is by Nature superior to every Woman, which is the obvious meaning, and that which must be stuck to if they would speak Sense, it wou'd be a Sin in any Woman to have Dominion over any Man, and the greatest Queen ought not to command but to obey her Footman, because no Municipal Laws can supersede or change the Law of Nature; so that if the Dominion of the Men be such, the Salique Law, as unjust as English Men have ever thought it, ought to take place over all the Earth, and the most glorious Reigns in the English, Danish, Castilian, and other Annals, were wicked Violations of the Law of Nature! If they mean that some Men are superior to some Women this is no great Discovery; had they turn'd the Tables they might have seen that some Women are Superior to some Men. Or had they been pleased to remember their Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy, they might have known that One Women is superior to All the Men in these Nations, or else they have sworn to very little purpose. And it must not be suppos'd, that their Reason and Religion wou'd suffer them to take Oaths, contrary to the Laws of Nature and Reason of things. (iii-iv, and Astell: *Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 9-10)

posted by Richard Zach @ 9:09 PM 0