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To Redeem Reason: Appreciating the Religiously Inspired Intervention of Mary Wollstonecraft

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In his 2006 Regensburg Address, entitled "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections," Pope Benedict XVI sought to correct the "modern self-limitation of reason" and its regretful impact on various disciplines within the university. A critical juncture in the intellectual recovery of an older and richer account of what Catholic scholars have called "expanded reason," Benedict's critique of the modern account of reason is one shared by a number of feminist scholars working outside the Catholic tradition. They too have criticized highly abstract, disembodied "reason," often labeling such modern accounts masculine.[1] They thereby seek to correct these limited accounts with a "different" (feminine) voice.[2] Far better, in my view, is to understand—as Pope Benedict did—that what these feminist scholars perceive as masculine is actually an impoverished account of reason per se, for both men and women. Although not an admirer of the Catholic Church, nor systematic in her philosophical approach, the late eighteenth-century philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft worked with the eclectic religious and philosophical resources at her disposal to

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expand her era's self-limitation of reason and to persuade women to form their own reason for virtuous self-governance.

Often underappreciated by scholars working in the Western tradition is the consequential philosophical reality that disembodied, hyper-empirical, Cartesian reason—most radically articulated in Immanuel Kant—not only eliminated from reason's licit purview metaphysical questions of final and formal causality. That same impoverished account also served to reimagine—as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas seemed to, but now in an entirely new, modern way—women as excluded from full "rationality." This modern bifurcation of reason—not only abstract and disembodied but often imagined as masculine—also shaped the prevailing historical narrative about the origins of women's rights. Far from recognizing the contributions of premodern Christian thinkers like Christine de Pizan, who defended women's full rational and moral capacities against lingering Aristotelian prejudices, the standard account of women's equal rights simply credits the secular Enlightenment's priorities of reason, liberty, and equality with overcoming biblical religion. This triumphalist story depicts the advancement of women's rights as the logical extension of a liberal, secular individualism that downgrades familial obligations and liberates from moral constraints. It is within this interpretive framework that Mary Wollstonecraft was for too long situated—as a secular radical who simply applied the "rights of man" to women, unmoored from faith, virtue, and duties alike.

A close associate of English republicans of her day and a critic of Edmund Burke's prescient *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Wollstonecraft became, in the popular imagination, a radical symbol of the Age of Reason, propped up by her short-lived husband William Godwin's unfortunate biography after her death. Though her actual writings would influence nineteenth-century literary figures like George Elliot (and, some scholars now argue, Jane Austen) as well as early American women's advocates like Sarah Grimke and Lucretia Mott, until the late twentieth century Godwin's portrayal of Wollstonecraft—with all its poetic license—mostly stood in for serious scholarly treatment of her thought.

Wollstonecraft-as-icon, symbolic of a sexual freedom Godwin himself urged upon the world, would until this very day be both scorned and lionized in crude popular accounts.

When students of Western political thought today study the corpus of Wollstonecraft's thought closely, however, an entirely different figure emerges from her texts. Indeed, an intense academic reappraisal of her thought—now more than three decades on—has revealed instead a complex moral and political thinker who was influenced deeply by Christianity and by ancient and modern sources alike. The recovery of her thought serves not only to correct the flawed assumptions about the historic cause of women's rights; it also complicates an all-too-familiar narrative, born of the Enlightenment's most radical period, that pits reason against religion, equality against excellence, freedom against obligations, and rights against duties. Her own thought brings these supposed contraries close together—albeit, in my view, not with the unrivaled synthesis of the Catholic tradition, as it has developed from the admirable philosophical synthesis of Thomas Aquinas.

My 2021 book, *The Rights of Women: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Notre Dame), seeks to uncover for our time the deep relevance of this complex, religiously inspired, natural law thinker, joining a cadre of other scholars, of different religious traditions and intellectual commitments, in illuminating the same.[3] Traditionally Anglican in upbringing and then influenced by dissenting English Protestants, Wollstonecraft had an impressive command of the Bible, familiarity with key Christian thinkers like St. Augustine, and frequently engaged Shakespeare's and Milton's works. She was also tutored for a time by Thomas Taylor, the eccentric English scholar who produced the first complete English translations of Plato and Aristotle. The influence of both can be seen in her work. In addition to her many books, she published hundreds of reviews in the *Analytical Review* and translated contemporary moral, religious, and pedagogical writings into English from German, French, and Dutch. Although she was influenced by both ancient and modern thinkers, her account of the interconnection of rights, duties, and virtues is wholly her own. It is also one clearly grounded

in the biblically revealed truth that women, like men, are rational creatures, equal in dignity, because made in God's image and accountable to him. Inspired by Wollstonecraft's lifelong searching synthesis of faith and reason, *The Rights of Women* seeks to recover her "lost vision" to better inform knotty issues in our time.

The book encourages readers to imagine a counterfactual world in which Wollstonecraft's vision of rights as necessarily embodied, relational, and knit together with virtues and duties had been followed rather than the autonomy-based account of rights hailed in many quarters in our day. Specifically, I suggest that Wollstonecraft's vision would not have ultimately culminated in the celebrated work of the late US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (even as I affirm aspects of Ginsburg's early approach to sex discrimination law). Rather, Wollstonecraft's integrative vision shares a far greater affinity with the celebrated work of the internationally renowned Catholic jurist Mary Ann Glendon (whose own thought is described in some detail later in the book). The book proposes an account of law and political economy that recenters the household, relativizes the pervasive logic of the market, makes room for vulnerability, dependency, and caregiving, and elevates the collaboration of men and women in the home and beyond, drawn from insights of Wollstonecraft, Glendon, and many others female thinkers noted throughout the book.

To understand Wollstonecraft's truly revolutionary intervention and why it is now being more appreciated by academics (including a philosophically trained Catholic legal scholar like me), the first part of this paper delineates, with more detail than provided in the book, the impoverished account of humanity, rationality, and authority that she inherited in her own time, and it shows how she worked to challenge that account. Then, the second part offers textual evidence in support of her religiously inspired vision of anthropology, human reason, moral education, and familial relations, suggesting that religious scholars of all stripes would benefit from studying the full corpus of her thought more closely today.

Contextualizing Wollstonecraft's Intervention

In this first part, a brief survey will situate Wollstonecraft's revolutionary intervention and its import in recovering an account of women and men as the individual, sexually dimorphic, rational creatures that we are.[4]

Christine de Pizan's Defense of Women's Reason Sparks the Querelle des Femmes

In the early fifteenth century, on the eve of the Protestant Reformation, Christine de Pizan, the first woman to make her living by her own pen, corrected two falsehoods that continued to treat women as inferior to men, even after centuries of Christianity's beneficial impact on women's status vis-à-vis pagan societies. First, employing both Aristotelian logic and the teachings of Genesis 1–3, Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* corrects contemporaneous thinkers who followed the Aristotelian legacy of viewing females as naturally "inferior," "misbegotten males" whose reason was, in the words of the Philosopher, lacking in "authority." Deeply steeped in the worldview of medieval Christendom in early Renaissance France, Pizan then corrects those who, in blaming Eve exclusively for the Fall, treat woman as a "vile creature" incapable of cultivating the cardinal and theological virtues as fully as man. Pizan's allegorical Lady Reason states what in time would become official Catholic teaching: "It is he or she who is the more virtuous who is the superior being: human superiority or inferiority is not determined by sexual difference but by the degree to which one has perfected one's nature and morals."[5]

Proving her premodern credentials, Pizan in *The City of Ladies* also offers a capacious account of the *objects of reason*. She instructs her readers to understand, as her ancient and medieval teachers did, the full measure of human reason as a kind of participation in or imitation of the divine mind. Reason acts as what we would call conscience, "straighten[ing] out men and women when they go astray," as well as "showing them their error and how they have failed." Likewise, reason also "commands" interiorly, "teach[ing] what to do and what to avoid," and reflecting for "each

man and woman his or her own special qualities and faults" so that each may achieve "clear self-knowledge." But reason's capabilities move beyond conscience and self-knowledge to include metaphysical and scientific pursuits too. Against the self-limitation of reason that was already in her time beginning to rear its head in the rise of nominalism and voluntarism—and the eventual rejection of formal and final causes in the Enlightenment period— Pizan writes that reason allows persons to see "the essences, qualities, proportions, and measures of all things,"[6] and to contemplate eternity as well.

Pizan's intervention, with its capacious account of reason, applied to both men and women as the rational creatures they were, launched the centuries-long *querelle des femmes* into which Wollstonecraft's own intervention, with some similar characteristics, would emerge more than three hundred years later.

The Rise of Voluntarism

Before René Descartes would require from reason geometric certainty and empirical measurability, Martin Luther, educated in the nominalist school of Catholic theology, rose in the century after Pizan to purify biblical Christianity of what he took to be the taint of Aristotelian ethics. Responding to waning ecclesiastical and political authority, Luther's impact on the Western world is sometimes regarded as an advance for women and "freedom of conscience," and perhaps in some ways it was. But the Reformation not only shuttered monasteries in which both men and women were themselves exercising *fides et ratio*, a lived synthesis witnessed profoundly in the thought of great female doctors of the church such as Hildegard of Bingen and Theresa of Avila. As religious vocations for intellectually inclined women were no longer honored within Protestantism—and the Virgin Mary no longer extolled—Luther and his followers effectively privatized women's contributions. Instead of the religious vocation given pride of place in his day's Catholicism, Luther instead exalted the domestic "calling" of marriage, motherhood, and fatherhood.

Now clearly the priority of marriage and domestic life were also part of the pre-Reformation lives of Christian women. But in

the medieval world, the sharp demarcations of public and private, home and work, reason and intuition, did not yet exist. Men were fathers and primary leaders of homes, and women were mothers and primary caregivers of young children. These deeply interdependent relations were necessitated by the existential collaboration in the preindustrial home, where nearly all work was situated. Christian men and women were expected both to cultivate the virtues in their children and to employ their practical reason to carry out their daily tasks of household management (the original meaning of "economics"). As such, women's distinctive and highly skilled contribution to the agrarian household economy was taken for granted and deeply respected, as was men's.[7]

Perhaps even more consequential for ordinary women than the shuttering of monasteries, then, was the elevating by Luther, John Calvin, and the Catholic nominalists before them of God's will (voluntarism) over what they took to be Scholastic priority of God's (and man's) reason (rationalism). Although I have found no evidence that Wollstonecraft had unmediated access to contemporaneous Catholic thought (eighteenth-century British Protestants were deeply suspicious of "superstitious" Catholicism), an altogether new rationalist/voluntarist debate had emerged in her time.

Following the Unitarians over the Calvinists on this point, she expressly rejects voluntarist views of God's will, arguing that the moral law is synonymous with God's perfect wisdom and goodness. It is also intelligible so human reason can (and should) submit to it. For instance, in her first political treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (*VRM*), she writes, "It is not [God's] power that I fear—it is not to an arbitrary will, but to unerring reason I submit."[8] Likewise, in a 1790 book review, she observes, "The perfection of power is its consistency with wisdom. . . . [N]o contradiction is implied by saying that he *can* only do what his wisdom points out is best. The grandest idea which we can form of God is, that his motives are always right, and his Will wisdom."[9]

Wollstonecraft saw quite clearly the deleterious downstream political and domestic threats of a voluntarist account of authority implicit in a moral law drawn from God's (potentially arbitrary)

will. Indeed, the strength of each ruler's "unbounded" will over his obedient subjects would only grow stronger during the Enlightenment, especially after the political intervention of legal positivist Thomas Hobbes.

Wollstonecraft's Critique of Arbitrary Rule in Politics

Appealing to a natural justice Hobbes had explicitly rejected, Wollstonecraft viewed threats to autocratic political rule in both England and France much as the American republicans did: "It is impossible for any man, when the most favourable circumstances concur, to acquire sufficient knowledge and strength of mind to discharge the duties of a king, entrusted with uncontrollable power."[10] Political rule was illegitimate when opposed to the public trust and the common good, especially when that rule threatened a nation's most vulnerable citizens: "And not only misery but immortality proceeds from this stretch of arbitrary authority. . . . A government that acts in this manner cannot be called a good parent, nor inspire natural (habitual is the proper word) affection, in the breasts of the children who are thus disregarded."[11]

In the *VRM,* she pushes monarchist Edmund Burke to reflect on how the lower classes were treated by the French monarchy. Not only were women in the streets clamoring for bread, but the corrupting materialistic focus of the upper classes had left the lower classes ill-formed morally as well. To Wollstonecraft's mind, Burke misplaces his sympathies on the loss of royal "appearances" when he ought, Wollstonecraft thinks, to show more distress at the "many industrious mothers . . . and hungry cry of helpless babes." Critiquing Burke's depiction of these mothers as "the vilest of women," Wollstonecraft retorts, "[P]robably you mean women who gained a livelihood by selling vegetables or fish, who never had had any advantages of education.[12]

Often lost in mischaracterizations of this dispute is that Burke and Wollstonecraft were both thinkers formed within the Christian tradition, and so in this way theirs was an intra-Christian dispute. Agreeing with Burke that her beloved mentor, the Reverend Richard Price, took pro-revolutionary rhetoric to a "Utopian"

extreme, she explains that in the speech Burke criticizes, Price was celebrating only the Storming of the Bastille (widely regarded at the time as akin to the American Revolution). He was not commending, she writes, the "mobbing triumphal catastrophe of October" (where mobs in Versailles pushed the king to Paris). In the text, she distances herself from a utopian politics that seeks heaven on earth, explaining that she "perceive[s], but too forcibly, that happiness, literally speaking, dwells not here;—and that we wander to and fro in a vale of darkness as well as tears."[13] Indeed, a few years later, when writing about the French Revolution from Paris during the Reign of Terror, she laments its brutal violence even as she affirms her earlier assessment: The ill-formation and -treatment of the revolting lower classes in France readily explained it.[14] Having long been treated more like brute animals than the "improvable" human beings they were, they acted the part when given the chance.[15]

Arbitrary Rule in the Domestic Sphere

Building on her earlier pedagogical texts, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (*VRW*) Wollstonecraft takes her critique of voluntarism into the family. She worries about the impact of a husband and father who wields unbounded authority: not in virtuous service of his family but up and against them. Parallel to her later analysis of the compounding moral corruptions in prerevolutionary France, she observes in her first book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, how a malformed woman who has not developed fully into a mature human being is likely to turn her own "slavish fear" of a father or husband into maltreatment of those over whom she herself wields authority: "She who submits, without conviction, to a parent or husband, will as unreasonably tyrannise over her servants; for slavish fear and tyranny go together."[16] She saw clearly that it was ultimately God's "eternal rule of right" that judged justly ("never swerv[ing]") and informing all claims of reason and right, for "[r]ighteous are all his judgments—just, as merciful!"[17] If only man, and not woman, were given reason—"the divine, indefeasible, earthly sovereignty breathed into man by the

Master of the universe"—then women would have no "inherent rights to claim," and male authority would be the only and just means imposed on her to carry out her duties.[18] But that was not the Christian view.

On this point Wollstonecraft is especially concerned with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's then-popular theory of education for girls, which he explores in chapter 5 of his *Emile* and which she engages throughout her second *Vindication*. Indeed, "[t]he mother, who wishes to give true dignity of character to her daughter must . . . proceed on a plan diametrically opposite to that which Rousseau has recommended."[19] Wollstonecraft sees both the great potential of marriages based on virtue and equal dignity and the real threats of male-female relations based on power and domination. She instead pleas for a true education of women as rational human beings made not for mere subjection to (or power over) men—as she interprets Rousseau—but for friendship with both man and God.

Against the Hobbesian account of power relations between the sexes that Rousseau seems (ironically) to assume, Wollstonecraft regards power as a vicious foundation for the relationship between the sexes. She laments, "Still the regal homage which [women] receive is so intoxicating, that . . . it may be impossible to convince them that the illegitimate power, which they obtain by degrading themselves, is a curse."[20] And so she takes her task in the *VRW* to be a difficult one. She not only has to convince her male readers that a fulsome education is crucial for women to be good wives, mothers, and citizens. She also has to convince women (and mothers of daughters) that a life of authentic virtue and true companionship with one's husband (or future husband) is a more noble ambition than the fleeting powers won in sentimentalism and sensuality.

Indeed, the sensual power that she thinks Rousseau wants women to obtain over men is by "unjust means," she writes, because it demands that women both practice and foster vice. It is a path, in her view, that leads women to become either the abject slaves of men or capacious tyrants over them. As she explains throughout the text, there are many risks to women who forgo their

own intellectual and moral development and focus on their distinctively feminine charms: First, a woman who has been trained from youth to focus on beauty in order to win the best husband is vulnerable to being abandoned by him for a younger woman as her beauty wanes. Second, if left a widow, she will have no substantial moral or economic resources to depend on because she was so focused on becoming pleasing. Third, taught to reign by her charms, a woman may also be tempted by the attention she receives from men who are not her husband. And fourth, women who prostitute themselves degrade the sexual culture for all women. As to this final one—and her strong call for chastity on the part of both women and men—she writes:

> Women then having necessarily some duty to fulfill, more noble than to adorn their persons, would not contentedly be the slaves of casual lust; which is now the situation of a considerable number who are, literally speaking, standing dishes to which every glutton may have access. . . . [T]he mischief does not stop here, for the moral character, and peace of mind, of the chaster part of the sex, is undermined by the conduct of the very women to whom they allow no refuge from guilt: whom they inexorably consign to the exercise of arts that lure their husbands from them, debauch their sons and force them, let not modest women start, to assume, in some degree, the same character themselves.[21]

These vicious power dynamics are thus a corruption, a degradation of all that women (and men) ought to be. Wollstonecraft famously writes against Rousseau, "I don't wish [women] to have power over men but over themselves."[22] She wished the same for men too. But for women to achieve virtuous governance over themselves, the culture would need "a revolution in female manners—to restore their lost dignity—so by reforming themselves they might reform the world."[23] But to do that, women had to be reimagined in the modern mind as the fully dignified and rational human beings God made them to be.

Deconstructing Modernity's False Conception of Reason

The Cartesian shrinking of reason into certain and pure logic not only hurled from reason's proper domain classical metaphysics' formal and final causes. Starting with Descartes and reaching its zenith in Kant, the moderns also denied the necessity of human embodiment to man's reasoning capabilities, a sensitive embodied receptivity that was basic to premodern accounts of the creative unity between the objective/known and subjective/knower. For thinkers after Descartes, the material world (*res extensa*) was chaotic and subrational, while the rational mind (*res cogitans*) was orderly and objective and was detached from matter. Indeed, both Francis Bacon and Niccolò Machiavelli imaged the inchoate "nature" they sought to "master" as feminine (with the masculine "form" imposing order on it). But more consequential for the intellectual landscape that Wollstonecraft inherited was how the moderns, one after another, built their image of rational man and less-than-rational woman.

A radically autonomous (male) individual who willed, warred, and mastered nature through owning and constructing himself as property, the modern rational individual had *no conceptual room* for the embodied relationality and receptivity of maternity, as real women experienced it, or the embodied relationality and receptivity of knowing, as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas conceived of it. With Kant, we finally see autonomous self-legislation as a thorough-going abstract project, shorn of the concrete particularities the premodern account regarded as indispensable to both being and knowing in the concrete world. For Kant, the thinking self is "ageless, sexless, without qualities, and without a life story," without embodiment, and perhaps exclusive of women. As the late American political theorist Jean Bethke Elshtain writes:

> Is the Kantian . . . promulgation of a rationalized, universalized ethic *particularly* problematic if the self is female? This seems plausible, first, because women are less likely to conceive of themselves or be seen by others as beings free from all considerations of natural and social conditions.

> Encumbered and defined by the social relations of family life, more tightly linked to embodied experience, culturally constituted in a symbolic and mimetic relation to "Nature," it was surely difficult to see eighteenth-century women as abstract Kantian subjects nullifying the effects of "special contingencies."
>
> . . . [Furthermore,] Kant gives the emotions little moral weight . . . see[ing] sympathy and compassion as untrustworthy and capricious. . . . As the culturally defined more emotional and less rationally rule-governed being . . .women [are] less reliably rational.[24]

Downgrading moral virtues of mercy and sympathy—and continuing to associate women, as Aristotle, Aquinas, and Rousseau did, with the virtues of docility and obedience—Kant sees women as neither fully rational nor fully moral beings, given his radically modern conceptions of both.

Notably, right after the insightful passage just quoted, Elshtain mentions in passing Wollstonecraft's celebration in *VRW* of "manly virtues" (like courage), which Wollstonecraft commends to women. Since Wollstonecraft was writing around the same time as Kant, Elshtain writes, her "project makes sense in context because moral courage, in the rationalist [Kantian] frame, is a manly virtue. Observing this linkage," Elshtain continues, "Wollstonecraft could only urge women to become as men rather than to deconstruct the deeper edifice on which this account of the virtues was erected."[25]

Elshtain is right that Wollstonecraft's hope that women would attain the so-called manly virtues would have made sense in the rationalist context she inherited. But contra Elshtain, Wollstonecraft's project was not for "women to become as men" but rather, borrowing Elshtain's framing, "to deconstruct the deeper edifice"—an edifice that contributed, in Wollstonecraft's telling, to "mistaken notions of female excellence."[26]

Again and again Wollstonecraft explicitly rejects the suggestion that women will become more masculine if they become more rational or courageous. She quips, "If by [masculine], men mean to

inveigh against [women's] ardour in hunting, shooting and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry."[27] Her interest was not that women would join masculine contests or games, much less (for all but a few) to forsake maternity; to the contrary. Rather, she is most eager to see all women attain the virtues of their human nature (even those, like courage, considered to be manly) because women are human beings, and as such, the virtues are necessary for their happiness. The exercise of the human virtues, she writes, "ennobles the human character, rais[ing] females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind."

Observing that women (and men) have *human* souls, Wollstonecraft continues, "[They] are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties . . . [and thus] to rise in excellency by the exercise of powers implanted for that purpose."[28] She thereby explicitly rejects the then-common fractioning of the virtues as masculine and feminine, famously "throw[ing] down [her] gauntlet, and deny[ing] the existence of sexual virtues."[29] To be fully human, she insists, men and women must cultivate *all* the human virtues (i.e., women ought to be courageous and just; and men, modest and chaste).

But even as she sees the virtues as the common means for both sexes to grow in happiness, she differentiates their embodied duties. Like Pizan before her, Wollstonecraft views women as human creatures with distinctive feminine duties (as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers), which they ought to carry out with the *human virtues*, just as men have distinctive duties (as sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers) to be carried out with these same virtues. "Women, I allow, may have different duties to fulfill; but they are human duties, and the principles that should regulate the discharge of them, I sturdily maintain, must be the same."[30] Such virtuous integration in the person gives way, in women's case, to a "maternal character"—a "tenderness" that, she writes early on, "arises quite as much from habit as instinct."[31] "[B]y the exercise of their bodies and minds," she concludes in *VRW*, "women would acquire that mental activity so necessary in the maternal character, united with the fortitude that distinguishes steadiness of conduct

from the obstinate perverseness of weakness."[32] As for men, she commends the "character of a master of a family, a husband, and a father" that produces "a sober manliness of thought, and orderly behavior," in sharp contrast to "the depraved affections of the libertine," who "is only anxious to secure his own private gratifications" and rank.[33]

Given the aforementioned trajectory of disembodied autonomous reason during the Enlightenment, it is no wonder that some twentieth-century feminists also reject what Pope Benedict called the "self-limitation of reason," even dubbing the error masculine. Indeed, the Catholic philosopher Prudence Allen, in her magisterial three-volume *The Concept of Woman*, eloquently laments the poor choice left to women after the Enlightenment: "The appeal of disembodied unisex reason, begun by Plato and reasserted by Descartes, and the appeal to an embodied devaluation of women, begun by Aristotle and reasserted in many different forms throughout the centuries, left the ordinary woman with two poor alternatives."[34] Unfortunately, Allen fails to see the full value of Wollstonecraft's thought as itself an alternative to the poor alternatives Allen rightly observes.

Although recognizing Wollstonecraft's "significant contribution" and her important critique of Rousseau's highly fractional theory of the sexes (i.e., that the virtues of man and of woman make one moral being), Allen suggests that Wollstonecraft followed Cartesian dualism in grounding her arguments for women's equality "in their reason."[35] Allen is certainly correct that Wollstonecraft offers a strong defense of women's reason. But Wollstonecraft does not argue for women's equality on that basis; indeed, she does not quite argue for women's equality at all.[36] Rather, she grounds women's capacity for reason in the fact that women, like men, have rational souls equally created by God. In Wollstonecraft's account, women's reason should be better formed than it is so that women might make virtuous judgments for themselves, rather than heeding blindly the authority of others. Furthermore, although Wollstonecraft does not argue from any kind of express Aristotelian hylomorphism and does sometimes write as though reason is

somehow freestanding, she certainly does not ignore the body, as Allen also suggests. Rather, as shown, sexually distinctive, concrete, and particular, embodied obligations are central to her claim that women's reason must be cultivated so that women may virtuously carry out their duties as "more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, and more reasonable mothers."[37]

A Defense of Women as Fully Human Creatures Made for Eternity

While not as systematic in her defense of women's rational capacities as contemporary philosophers might like, Wollstonecraft worked in her time to recover, with the resources at her disposal, a more capacious account of reason for both women and men. The full corpus of her thought, read as a piece, thereby offers an account of women as the fully human creatures they are, with both rational and maternal capacities that the virtues help to integrate. A scholarly recognition of this account was not recognized until recent decades, first, because of Wollstonecraft's guilt-by-association with the secular rationality foregrounded in the French Revolution as well as the thought of her short-lived husband William Godwin and, second, as a result of inattention to her early and deeply religious pedagogical thought as the key to understanding ambiguous terms (like "reason" and "virtue") in her later political thought. But the corpus of her work nonetheless serves to challenge modernity's self-limitation of reason and its concomitant denigration of women. As such, her thought deserves greater attention in our day.

Given the nearly universal anti-Catholicism of British and American thinkers of her time, the rise of the nominalist school within late Scholasticism that itself elevated legalistic obedience to the faith over pious cultivation of the virtues, the wide-scale corruption of the Catholic hierarchy in prerevolutionary France, and Aquinas's own interpretation of Aristotle that assumed lesser rationality in women, Wollstonecraft had no access to the Catholic synthesis of faith and reason that Catholic scholars like me appreciate

today. Still, her own account, in its recognition of women as fully human creatures individually created by and equally responsible to God, corrects the erroneous judgment that women are naturally wanting in reason and thereby naturally inferior to men.[38] It is an assumption the modern Catholic Church has deposed and that the work of Catholic scholars is masterfully building on today.[39]

Although Wollstonecraft's best-known political writings are less explicitly religious than her earlier pedagogical texts, a careful reader still discerns the self-same religiously inspired account, which underlies her defense of women's dignity, education, and rights. Four prayers published in her *Female Reader* indicate a depth of Christian faith that may well have changed in character in the years that followed but whose formative insights animate her thought as a whole. An excerpt of her evening prayer:

> Though knowest whereof I am made, and rememberest that I am but dust: self-convicted I prostrate myself before thy throne of grace, and seek not to hide or palliate my faults; be not extreme to mark what I have done amiss—still allow me to call thee Father, and rejoice in my existence, since I can trace thy goodness and truth on earth, and feel myself allied to that glorious Being who breathed into me the breath of life, and gave me a capacity to know and to serve him.[40]

The body of her work draws together the following characteristics that I lay out throughout *The Rights of Women*.

Theological Anthropology

Wollstonecraft enunciates a theological anthropology that insists that God's creatures, made in his image and responsible to him, ought to understand and act in accordance with the end goal of their lives: imitation of and eternal friendship with God. She thereby begins to recover (though unsystematically and incompletely) the formal and final causes of the human person lost to most Enlightenment thinkers after Descartes.

Although quotations like these could be multiplied several times over, here are examples of her theological anthropology evident throughout her texts: "[T]his divine love, or charity, appears to me the principal trait that remains of the illustrious image of the Deity, which was originally stampt on the soul, and which is to be renewed."[41] "[H]e who formed the human soul, only can fill it, and the chief happiness of an immortal being must arise from the same source as its existence."[42] "[O]nly an infinite being could fill the human soul, and that when other objects were followed as a means of happiness, the delusion led to misery, the consequence of disappointment."[43] "Christianity can only afford just principles to govern the wayward feelings and impulses of the heart: every good disposition runs wild, if not transplanted into this soil; but how hard it is to keep the heart diligently. . . . Good dispositions, and virtuous propensities, without the light of the Gospel, produce eccentric characters."[44] "[T]hen more particularly feeling the presence of my Creator, I poured out my soul before Him—and was no longer alone!—I now daily contemplate His wonderful goodness; and, though at an awful distance, try to imitate Him."[45]

In her first political text, the *VRM*, the biblical, even Augustinian underpinnings of her thought can be found throughout: "What else can fill the aching void in the heart, that human pleasures, human friendships can never fill? What else can render us resigned to live, though condemned to ignorance? —What but a profound reverence for the model of all perfection, and the mysterious tie which arises from a love of goodness? What can make us reverence ourselves, but a reverence for that Being, of whom we are a faint image? . . . [T]he world appears to contain only the Creator and the creature, of whose happiness he is the source."[46]

The selfsame theological anthropology is found in the first chapter, as well as throughout the text, of her celebrated treatise on women's rights:

> [F]or why should the gracious fountain of life give us passions, and the power of reflecting, only to embitter our days, and inspire us with mistaken notions of dignity? Why should he

> lead us from love of ourselves to the sublime emotions which the discovery of his wisdom and goodness excites, if these feelings were not set in motion to improve our nature, of which they make a part, and render us capable of enjoying a more godlike portion of happiness? Firmly persuaded that no evil exists in the world that God did not design to take place, I build my belief on the perfection of God.[47]

Near the end of the same text, she condemns "lurking leeches" who in the cities make their livings selling horoscopes and the like, taking advantage of the "the credulity of women."

> Women, because they have not been led to consider the knowledge of their duty as the one thing necessary to know, or, to live in the present moment by the discharge of it, are very anxious to peep into futurity, to learn what they have to expect to render life interesting, and to break the vacuum of ignorance. I must be allowed to expostulate seriously with the ladies, who follow these idle inventions; for ladies, mistresses of families, are not ashamed to drive their own carriages to the door of the cunning man. And if any of them should peruse this work, I entreat them to answer to their own hearts the following questions, not forgetting that they are in the presence of God.
>
> Do you believe there is but one God, and that he is powerful, wise, and good?
>
> Do you believe that all things were created by him, and that all beings are dependent on him?
>
> Do you rely on his wisdom, so conspicuous in his works, and in your own frame, and are you convinced, that he has ordered all things which do not come under the cognizance of your senses, in the same perfect harmony, to fulful his designs?
>
> Do you acknowledge that the power of looking into futurity and seeing things that are not, as if they were, is an attribute of the Creator?[48]

Such questions rested on her understanding of the dependent relation of human reason to God's benevolent wisdom, in which she placed her faith. As she wrote early on, "Faith, hope and charity ought to attend us in our passage through this world; but the two first leave us when we die, while the other is to be the constant inmate of our breast through all eternity."[49]

Account of Human Reason

Wollstonecraft views the distinctive human capacity of reason as a kind of reflection or imitation of God's own "unerring reason." Human reason, then, is not autonomous in itself (as Kant would have it) but is ever reliant on the reality of God's active providence and reason's mature "unfolding" (a frequently used term) through education and formation. In a late chapter in the *VRW*, repeating advice from earlier pedagogical texts, Wollstonecraft advises parents to explain to their daughters that "[i]t is your interest to obey me till you can judge for yourself; and the Almighty Father of all has implanted an affection in me to serve as a guard to you whilst your reason is unfolding; but when your mind arrives at maturity, you must only obey me, or rather respect my opinions, so far as they coincide with the light that is breaking in on your own mind."[50]

Contemplation of the divine and his good will is not only possible, then, but it is also natural and the highest end of reason. As the governess in Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* tells her young female students, "Thank God for permitting you to see it, and for giving you an understanding which teaches you that you ought, by doing good, to imitate Him."[51] Reason is, in Wollstonecraft's thought, "the heaven-lighted lamp in man, and may safely be trusted when not entirely depended on; but when it pretends to discover what is beyond its ken, it certainly stretches the line too far, and runs into absurdity."[52] Furthermore, it is "an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator; for, can that soul be stamped with the heavenly image, that is not perfected by the exercise of its own reason?"[53] It is "a gift" that "render[s] us capable of enjoying a more godlike portion of happiness?"[54] And in

a particularly Platonic turn of phrase, she declares that "the same turn of mind which leads me to adore the Author of all Perfection—which leads me to conclude that he only can fill my soul; forces me to admire the faint image—the shadows of his attributes here below."[55]

In her estimation, the human mind enjoys "innate" principles for discerning truth—she declares that "[w]ithout reasoning we assent to many truths; we feel their force"[56]—to which the mind is naturally inclined and by proper education is directed. Education, then, is not mere preparation for life, as John Locke would have it, but "the first step to form a being advancing gradually toward perfection."[57] It is the imitation of the divine patterns that inspire one toward virtue: "Teach us with humble awe to imitate the divine patterns and lure us to the paths of virtue,"[58] she writes in her *Female Reader* (a 1789 text in which she compiles passages from Scripture, Shakespeare, Milton, and others "for the improvement of young women," as the subtitle explains). She believed that good socialization, education, and faith formation were essential to habituating the instincts or passions to abide by one's reason.

Sometimes simplistically pegged as either a Cartesian rationalist or a Rousseauian romantic, Wollstonecraft synthesizes various premodern and modern sources to contribute something wholly her own. For example, against Hume's view that "reason is the slave of the passions," Wollstonecraft views the passions more as the premoderns did—as important instigating elements of action, but in need of the ordering guidance of reason. In this way both women and men are, as Plato first recognized, human beings with common appetites and rational capacities that ought to be properly ordered. As Christian theologian Emily Dumler-Winckler masterfully shows in her 2022 book, *Modern Virtue*, Wollstonecraft reveals how moral intuitions, imagination, passions, and rational judgment interact dynamically and are refined by the virtues in both men and women.[59] This is the case even as the objects of attention might differ between men and women, given their distinctive bodies, their duties, and the individual circumstances of their lives.[60]

Unsurprisingly, then, Wollstonecraft rejects the view of religion as sentimental feeling, blind faith, unthinking submission to tradition (as such), or the mere fulfilment of rites, arguing rather that the true practice of religion ought to be "rational"—that is, tested by reason. Given her deep religious commitments, in this way she is further from secular Enlightenment radicals than from Pope Benedict, who writes of faith purifying reason; and reason, faith. For Benedict, "not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature,"[61] and for Wollstonecraft, "[t]he more man discovers of the nature of his mind and body, the more clearly he is convinced, that to act according to the dictates of reason is to conform to the will of God."[62]

In her account, which differs from Benedict's thought most fundamentally—and crucially—in its absence of a final ecclesial authority to whom one ought ultimately entrust the formation of one's reason, human beings can discern certain moral principles in the "immutable attributes of God" (which she also calls God's goodness), which we are to imitate and by which, over time, we can learn to make good moral judgments. She offers this early guidance to a friend: "[T]hrough the assistance of Divine Grace we are obtaining habits of virtue that will enable us to relish those joys that we cannot now form any idea of. I feel myself particularly attached to those who are heirs of the promises, and travel on in the thorny path with the same Christian hopes that render my severe trials a cause of thankfulness when I can think."[63]

Yet, our reason is also, crucially, limited, so "the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, doubtless possesses many attributes of which we can form no conception."[64] To another friend she wrote:

> [T]those who humbly rely on Providence will not only be supported in affliction but have peace imparted to them that is past describing. This state is indeed a warfare, and we learn little that we don't smart for in the attaining. The cant of weak enthusiasts has made the consolations of religion and the assistance of the Holy Spirit appear ridiculous to the

> inconsiderate; but it is the only solid foundation of comfort that the weak efforts of reason will be assisted and our hearts and minds corrected and improved till the time arrives when we shall not only see perfection, but see every creature around us happy.[65]

To be true, one's practice of religion must also inspire one to act rightly: "to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God."[66] In the introduction of her *Female Reader*, Wollstonecraft critiques those who "go to church twice a week and give alms"[67] but cannot control their tempers, years later arguing in the *VRW* that "devotion is mockery and selfishness, which does not improve our moral character."[68] Indeed, she bemoans the corruption of church authorities whose bad example had aided in the woeful "separation of religion from morality," which she regrets in the *VRM*, and worries that obsession over liturgical rites distracts attention from growing in the moral life: "[T]he gross ritual of Romish ceremonies is all they can comprehend; they can do penance, but not conquer their revenge, or lust. Religion, or love, has never humanized their hearts; they want the vital part; the mere body worships."[69] Still, despite their consequential distance in terms of religious commitment and practice, it would not be incorrect to say that as did Pope Benedict, Wollstonecraft saw the way that faith and reason could improve, correct, and purify each other and thereby, as Benedict put it, "restore reason to its true glory."

Development of Moral Character Through Education and Habituation

Wollstonecraft's great complaint in the *VRW* and her earlier texts is that a false system of education and other societal norms has not prepared women (or men, for that matter) for their deeply noble human, social, spousal, and parental obligations. They were instead living lives more akin to those of brute animals than of the dignified humans they are created to be. Whereas Rousseau (and Locke, to whom Rousseau was chiefly responding) sought to educate men and women to be virtuous citizens for the needs of a republican or

liberal polity, Wollstonecraft had her educational vision set on the transcendent purpose of women's lives as well.

Wollstonecraft's view of a proper education for women forms the mind through its rigor. It is also inherently religious and moral. In her view, we cannot expect women to virtuously carry out the duties they have to their families unless they understand why they ought to be virtuous: They must understand in what their true dignity (and nobility) consists. An authentic education of intellect and will would, she explains in the preface of the *VRW*, "strengthen [woman's] reason til she comprehend her duty, and see in what manner it is connected to her real good. . . . The more understanding women acquire, the more they will be attached to their duty—comprehending it—for unless they comprehend it, unless their morals be fixed on the same immutable principles as those of man, no authority can make them discharge it in a virtuous manner."[70]

She thereby sets out an approximation of Aristotelian virtue ethics that emphasizes forming children (especially through good exemplars) to cultivate habitual practices into the mature "independent" appropriation of the virtues oneself.[71] One imitates the divine patterns not ultimately as a rule obeyed, a ritual practiced, or a philosophical tenet held, even as obedience, rituals, and understanding are, for Wollstonecraft, all essential components. Rather, in imitating exemplars from an early age, in books, in parents, and in teachers, children ought to develop the moral virtues that perfect their relation with God and others—being crafted and crafting oneself in turn. As she saw early on, "when the character of the Supreme Being is displayed, and He is recognized as the Universal Father, the Author and Centre of Good, a child may be led to comprehend that dignity and happiness that must arise from imitating Him."[72]

It is making virtue one's own that afforded women the capacity of carrying out their duties of care to others freely, or as Wollstonecraft puts it, "independently." Although it may sound alien to moderns who tend to regard obligations as constraints on independence, Wollstonecraft believed just the opposite: "the

being who discharges the duties of its station is independent."[73] Because of Wollstonecraft's passionate late eighteenth-century advocacy for the rights of women, she is often considered the first feminist. Yet her older account of independence, as the "grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue,"[74] serves to challenge modern feminism's promotion of independence as radical autonomy, too often defined as freedom from all given bodily and moral constraints. For Wollstonecraft, by contrast, independence is "secure[d] by contracting my wants,"[75] as well as by carrying out one's duties, as she argues in the preface to the *VRW* and throughout her texts.

Relations of Mutual Obligation and Friendship

Wollstonecraft believes that women must be educated to see the whole—the real purpose of their lives *in God*—not only because it is where they will find their own happiness but also because it is the only way to help them see how important their work is as mothers, as those preparing others for eternity too. They will not be strong, faithful, benevolent, and "maternal" women (the last descriptor of which she uses with some frequency) if they are turned in on themselves, superficially caring about appearances from their youth, consumed with how to please. She wishes by education to see them prepared to be intimate companions of their husbands, to enjoy not only their love but also their respect. "By managing her family and practicing various virtues [she] becomes the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband."[76] This kind of marriage is, for her, the sort that will enable the happiness of the spouses in the difficult, collaborative work of raising children together, as well as in more public-facing occupations.

While regarding "the care of children in their infancy [to be] one of the grand duties annexed to the female character by nature,"[77] she did not think natural duties of care to be so compelling in a woman that they would necessarily overpower corrupt social conventions that tempted women to more superficial pleasures. She also well knew that the task of cultivating the character of children required immense strength—of body, mind, and

soul—such that women's capacities to engage in this important work needed to be cultivated by a liberal education, appropriately weighty social expectations, and crucially, paternal engagement, affection, and support.

Early in the *VRW* Wollstonecraft describes a woman who has walked the road to character, but the man she married for love has died. Her description is one she holds up for imitation: "I think I see her surrounded by her children, reaping the reward of her care. . . . She lives to see the virtues which she endeavored to plant on principles, fixed into habits, to see her children attain a strength of character sufficient to enable them to endure adversity without forgetting their mother's example. The task of life thus fulfilled, she calmly waits for the sleep of death, and rising from the grave may say, 'Behold, thou gavest me a talent, and here are five talents.'"[78]

For Wollstonecraft, human beings are both dependent rational animals and responsible agents. On the one hand, "[w]e are all dependent on each other; and this dependence is wisely ordered by our Heavenly Father, to call forth many virtues, to exercise the best affections of the human heart, and fix them into habits."[79] On the other hand, we are also "created accountable creatures who must run the race ourselves, and by our own exertions acquire virtue: the utmost our friends can do is point out the right road, and clear away some of the loose rubbish which might at first retard our progress."[80] Our progress in the moral life is measured by our treatment of others and our growth in charity and benevolence: "If I behave improperly to servants, I am really their inferior, as I abuse a trust, and imitate not the Being, whose servant I am, without a shadow of equality."[81]

Conclusion

As the foregoing discussion demonstrates, Mary Wollstonecraft challenges both the modern self-limitation of reason and its particularly deleterious impact on women. Too many feminist conceptions today merely accept a disembodied Cartesian account of reason, with female bodies and caregiving giving way to male-normed aspirations in sex and work. Others wish to

elevate feminine "intuition" to balance out "masculine" reason. A challenge to both, Wollstonecraft understands that because both women and men have God-given "rational souls," their cultivation of the human virtues would enable them to better appreciate and virtuously carry out their respective embodied duties with a maternal or paternal character. For most women, this includes motherhood; and for most men, fatherhood. In placing the culturally essential work of cultivating the virtues squarely in the collaborative work of the family (with support from schools), Wollstonecraft connects the goods of motherhood and fatherhood to personal and societal happiness—a connection too often missing from modern feminist theory today.

As Wollstonecraft rightly observes, rationality and maternity are both natural potentialities of the female human being. Given a woman's infinite worth, Wollstonecraft knew she must not be educated like a "fanciful kind of half being" focused on external adornments, accomplishments, or charm. Nor was she "born only to procreate and rot."[82] No, to be fully human, women and men alike must "endeavour to acquire the human virtues (or perfections)"[83] of their common nature—as the rational, sexually dimorphic, interdependent beings they are.

Notes

1. See, e.g., Susan R. Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (SUNY Press, 1987).
2. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press, 1982).
3. See, e.g., Sylvana Tomaselli, *Wollstonecraft: Philosophy, Passion, and Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2021); Eileen Hunt Botting, *Family Feuds: Wollstonecraft, Burke, and Rousseau on the Transformation of the Family* (SUNY Press, 2006); Emily Dumler-Winkler, *Modern Virtue: Mary Wollstonecraft and a Tradition of Dissent* (Oxford University Press, 2022); Brenda Ayres, *Wollstonecraft and Religion* (Anthem Press, 2024).
4. For another lens on this account of the kinds of beings we are, see Erika Bachiochi, "Sex Realist Feminism," *First Things*, no. 332, April 2023.
5. Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (Penguin Classics, 2000), 23. Originally published in 1405. See also Intercollegiate Studies

Institute, "The Legacy of Christine de Pizan (ft. Erika Bachiochi)" uploaded to YouTube, December 11, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2L9Wv5MFLM.

6. Pizan, *City of Ladies*, 10.
7. Erika Bachiochi, "*The Duty of the Moment: Retooling the Agrarian Model of Work/Home Integration," Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy 38,* no. 2 (2024): 714–30, https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndjlepp/vol38/iss2/3.
8. Mary Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790)," in *The Complete Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Delphi Classics, Kindle ed. (Delphic Classics, 2016), loc. 5971. All subsequent citations to Wollstonecraft's works with Kindle locations are from this volume.
9. Quoted in Dumler-Winckler, *Modern Virtue*, 42 (emphasis in original).
10. Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)," loc. 10671.
11. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Men," loc. 5669, 5678.
12. Ibid., loc. 5907.
13. Ibid., loc. 5961.
14. Mary Wollstonecraft, "An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution; and the Effect It Has Produced in Europe (1794)," loc. 14858.
15. Ibid., loc. 14480.
16. Mary Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787)," loc. 5031.
17. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 12857.
18. Ibid., loc. 13971.
19. Ibid., loc. 11128.
20. Ibid., loc. 10771.
21. Ibid., loc. 12915.
22. Ibid., loc. 25187.
23. Ibid., loc. 11205.
24. Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Meditations on Modern Political Thought: Masculine/Feminine Themes from Luther to Arendt* (Penn State Press, 1986), 26–27.
25. Ibid., 27.
26. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 10593.
27. Ibid., loc. 10538.
28. Ibid., loc. 10548.
29. Ibid., loc. 11302.
30. Ibid., loc. 11306.

31. Wollstonecraft, "Education of Daughters," loc. 4799.
32. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 13657.
33. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Men," loc. 5772.
34. Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 3, *The Search for Communion of Persons, 1500–2015* (Eerdmans, 2017), 318–19.
35. Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: A Synthesis in One Volume* (Eerdmans, 2025), 250.
36. Harvey Mansfield notices this in his nice summary of Wollstonecraft's thought in his book *Manliness*. See Harvey C. Mansfield, *Manliness* (Yale University Press, 2006), 124.
37. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 13124. See also her comment "The conclusion I wish to draw, is obvious: make women rational creatures, and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives, and mothers; that is—if men do not neglect the duties of husbands and fathers." Ibid., loc. 13668.
38. See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on 1 Timothy 2*, point 79, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~1Tim.C2.L3.n78.6: "Therefore, as the Philosopher says, whenever any two things are related as soul is to the body, and reason to sensuality, it is natural for the one with the greater amount of reason to rule and give orders, and for the other to be subject, since it is lacking in reason: *he shall have dominion over you* (Gen 3:16)."
39. See, e.g., Tim Fortin, "Finding Form: Defining Human Sexual Difference," *Nova et vetera* 15, no. 2 (2017): 397–431.
40. M. Wollstonecraft, *"The Female Reader": A Facsimile Reproduction*, ed. M. Ferguson (Scholars' Facsimile & Reprints, 1980), 378.
41. Wollstonecraft, "Education of Daughters," loc. 5049.
42. Mary Wollstonecraft, "The Cave of Fancy (1787)," loc. 3412.
43. Mary Wollstonecraft, "Mary: A Fiction (1788)," loc. 273.
44. Ibid., loc. 945.
45. Mary Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories from Real Life (1788)," loc. 4404.
46. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Men," loc. 6083.
47. Wollstonecraft. "Rights of Woman," loc. 10468.
48. Ibid., loc. 13690. The duty she refers to here is that "peculiar duty of their sex," which includes "suckl[ing] their children." Ibid.
49. Wollstonecraft, "Education of Daughters," loc. 5339.
50. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 13218.
51. Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," loc. 3674.
52. Wollstonecraft, "Education of Daughters," loc. 5316.
53. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 11328.
54. Ibid., loc. 10648.

55. Wollstonecraft, "Mary: A Fiction," loc. 712.
56. Wollstonecraft, "Education of Daughters," loc. 4837.
57. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 11338.
58. Wollstonecraft, "Female Reader," 381.
59. Dumler-Winkler, *Modern Virtue*, chap. 1.
60. Even as we agree about the strong influence of Christianity on Wollstonecraft's thought, Dumler-Winkler and I disagree about Wollstonecraft's view of abortion, among matters of application today. While we both view her as a natural law thinker in the republican tradition, who specially advocated "for the cause of virtue" and "rights against domination," Dumler-Winkler suggests her life story and late novel, *The Wrongs of Women*, indicate that she would favor a broad right to abortion today. See Emily Dumler-Winkler, "Reproductive Justice: Mary Wollstonecraft on Women's Rights Against Domination" for the "Cause of Virtue," *Political Theology* 26, no. 1 (2025): 30–50. Apart from the strong presumption that women's rights must include abortion rights in the academy today, I see no reason for such an interpretation of Wollstonecraft, given her own language concerning those who "destroy the embryo in the womb" in the "Rights of Woman," loc. 12924, as well her clear sympathy for the victim of coerced abortion in *The Wrong of Women*. For a cogent response to Dumler-Winkler's essay in *Political Theology* (which itself was a response to my book *The Rights of Women*), see Beatrice Scudeler, "Loving Both Mother and Child: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Case for a Maternal, Pro-Life Feminism," *Public Discourse*, September 17, 2024, https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2024/09/95899/.
61. Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting with the Representatives of Science," University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html#_ftnref5.
62. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Men," loc. 6292.
63. Wollstonecraft, "The Biographies: Mary Wollstonecraft, by Elizabeth Robins Pennell (1884)," loc. 23926.
64. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 11216.
65. Wollstonecraft, Biography by Pennell, loc. 23915.
66. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 11226.
67. Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader*, xxxvii.
68. Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," loc. 4425.
69. Wollstonecraft, "Mary: A Fiction," loc. 555.
70. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 10475.

71. For more discussion of Wollstonecraft's account of moral education, see E. Bachiochi, "'Lure Us to the Paths of Virtue': Mary Wollstonecraft on Moral Education," in *The Necessity of Character: Moral Formation and Leadership in Our Time*, ed. James Mumford and Ryan S. Olson (Finstock & Tew, 2024).
72. Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," loc. 3604.
73. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 13040.
74. Ibid., loc. 10454.
75. Ibid., loc. 10455.
76. Ibid., loc. 10919.
77. Ibid., loc. 13158.
78. Ibid., loc. 11301.
79. Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," loc. 454.
80. Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader*, xxxvii.
81. Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories." loc. 4282.
82. Wollstonecraft, "Rights of Woman," loc. 11524.
83. Ibid., loc. 11090.