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Aspects of Mary Wollstonecraft's Religious Thought

A thesis

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Abstract

The works of Mary Wollstonecraft have been largely utilized in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries within the domain of feminist studies. They were influential throughout the ‘feminist movement’ of the 1960s and 1970s and Wollstonecraft is routinely given the title of ‘mother’ of feminism. One result of her works being classified as important feminist texts is the elision of the religious element in her works. Moreover, recent scholarship has drawn attention to the central importance of religion in eighteenth century British discourse. This thesis will primarily argue that Wollstonecraft was heavily influenced by religion, and that her writings were conceived in response to a profoundly theologico-political culture. This influence of religion has generally been overlooked by researchers and this thesis will aim to redress this absence.

Four of Wollstonecraft’s works – all produced within a ‘similar’ political climate and within a concise time period – are utilized to show that religion was a foundational element within Wollstonecraft’s thought and arguments. This thesis shows that Wollstonecraft was not so much a ‘feminist’ thinker, but a unique intellectual determined to show that the inferior position of women went against ‘God’s will’, teachings and the equality He had ascribed to both men and women during Creation.

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Introduction

Admirers of Mary Wollstonecraft are often reluctant to see her as a religious thinker. This should not surprise us Most studies do no more than gesture towards it, and then usually dismiss it as ideological baggage foisted on her by her times, with no positive implications for her views on women.¹

This thesis aims to highlight how important and necessary religion and theological ideas were in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft. It will show how religious language and imagery was utilized by Wollstonecraft throughout her works and the extent to which religion was informed by her 'feminist' objectives. Moreover, it will demonstrate how religion was an important medium through which Wollstonecraft was able to portray her views; that is, how religion became the framework which enabled Wollstonecraft to highlight, and subsequently argue against, social injustice. Therefore, her putative 'ideological baggage' is the primary focus of this thesis. Consequently, the environment of the eighteenth century is fundamentally important *purely* because it contributed to the specifically religious tenour of Wollstonecraft's thought.

Religion, as the main focus of this thesis, is reinforced by the upsurge of importance placed on this topic by contemporary academia. As a topic of research it has been enthusiastically pursued over the past two to three decades. This trend seems likely to continue.² Moreover, the study of religion in eighteenth century Britain specifically has become a dynamic historiographical imperative.³ Influential

¹ Barbara Taylor, 'The Religious Foundations of Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, edited by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 99.

² 'When Jacques Derrida died I was called by a reporter who wanted to know what would succeed high theory and the triumvirate of race, gender and class as the center of intellectual energy in the academy. I answered like a shot: religion'. See Stanley Fish, 7 January 2005, 'One University Under God?', *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Chronicle Careers* [online: accessed 20 February 2007], available URL: <http://chronicle.com/jobs/2005/01/2005010701c.htm>.

³ See H. T. Dickinson (ed), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002). Within this *Companion* there are chapters titled, and related to, 'The Church of England', 'Religious Minorities in England', 'Methodism and the Evangelical Revival', 'Religion in Scotland', and 'Religion in Ireland'. Moreover, religious elements – either specifically on religion or on the clergy or church – exist in other chapters on 'general' topics, such as 'Parliaments, Parties and Elections', 'Popular Politics and Radical Ideas', or in 'Ireland: The Making of the 'Protestant

contributors to the field include J. C. D. Clark, J. G. A. Pocock and Gordon Spence.⁴ This upsurge can be credited to an increasing emphasis on theological variations which can be studied and which are becoming topics of inquiry for scholars.⁵ Scholars are increasingly undertaking research into the ‘different’ churches in eighteenth century Britain – such as the Established Church and Dissenting Churches; how different ‘groups’ interacted with religious institutions; and the augmentation of different ‘types’ of religion such as the expansion of Dissenting sects to include, among others, Shakers, Lutherans, Arians, and Calvinists. There has also been renewed interest in the hierarchical structures within eighteenth century religious institutions and the interactions between church, state, and politics. Moreover, the theological relationship between women and the church has also become a prominent theme within academic study.⁶

Ascendancy’, 1690-1760’. Clearly, there is greater emphasis on the study of the position of religion, and on the impact of religion and religious institutions, on society and different ‘groups’ within the societal make-up of eighteenth century Britain.

⁴ J. C. D. Clark’s *English Society* utilizes religion as a main mode of analysis. He highlights the impact of the Glorious Revolution – a Revolution brought on by religious factors – and the ‘state’ of religion after this event. Moreover, he focuses on the placement and influence of the Established Church, as well as discussing the Dissenting religions extant in England. See J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics During the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). J. G. A. Pocock has been influential in religious study through his work on classic authors, such as Edward Gibbon. He has republished Gibbon’s influential eighteenth century text, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, as well as undertaking research on eighteenth century Britain which draws on the fundamentals of religion in forming society and its subsequent impact and effects. See J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Moreover, Pocock has published a text which establishes the need for historians’ to ‘re-claim’ the studying of British history; that the study of Britain’s history, including its religions and religious foundations, can yield more information than academics generally credit it with. See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Lastly, Gordon Spence has undertaken academic study on Dissenters and the religious phenomenon of theodicy. Moreover, he highlights the use of Enlightenment principles, such as reason, on the institution of religion. See Gordon Spence, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft’s Theodicy and Theory of Progress’, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 14 (1995), pp. 105-27.

⁵ For example, Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils have gathered research on a number of sects within British history and the different positions of the church, as well as reformatory and revolutionary periods within history which have impacted on religion in Britain. See Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils (eds), *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994).

⁶ Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Richardson investigate the placement of women within the Bible in order to examine the adherence of society to certain theological arguments. They explore the different religious beliefs of certain figures, as far back as Saint Augustine and seventeenth century English political polemist John Milton, and the subsequent dissemination of those religious ideas. Moreover, they discuss the ‘effect’ which certain social phenomena have had on religion, such as the effect of witchcraft, homosexuality, and feminism. See Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Richardson,

The ‘feminist movement’ of the 1960s and 1970s reversed the relative obscurity into which Wollstonecraft’s life and writings had been thrust since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Her life and works are now seen as most influential in the areas of English literature and feminism. Moreover, the number of biographies available on Wollstonecraft has risen since this ‘movement’, and it continues to do so.⁷ Her novels continue to be studied for the insights they provide into the Enlightenment and Romantic ‘movements’ of the eighteenth century. Moreover, Wollstonecraftian scholarship has come to include research on her educational treatises, her travel writing, her letters, and her political thought generally.⁸

It is feminist academia however, which has primarily claimed Wollstonecraft as their ‘founder’. She is automatically labeled a feminist by almost all who study her. Susan Gubar defines Wollstonecraft as, ‘a pioneer whose feminist efforts were tragically misunderstood by the misogynist society in which she lived’.⁹ Moreover,

Women and Religion: The Original Sourcebook of Women in Christian Thought (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1996).

⁷ Biographies include: Ralph M. Wardle, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, [1951] 1966); Margaret George, *One Woman’s “Situation”*: A Study of Mary Wollstonecraft (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970); Edna Nixon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Her Life and Times* (London: Dent, 1971); Eleanor Flexner, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Biography* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1972); Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974); Kitty Warnock, *Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Hamilton, 1988); Jennifer Lorch, *Mary Wollstonecraft: The Making of a Radical Feminist* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990); Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1992); Harriet Devine Jump, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Writer* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994); Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000); Wendy Gunther-Canada, *Rebel Writer: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment Politics* (DeKalb: University of Northern Illinois Press, 2001); Diane Jacobs, *Her Own Woman: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001); Caroline Franklin, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Literary Life* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Lyndall Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus* (London: Little, Brown, 2005); Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

⁸ Much of Wollstonecraft’s *oeuvre* is collected in Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (eds), *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: William Pickering, 1989). This set of collected works will be used throughout this thesis.

⁹ Susan Gubar, ‘Feminist Misogyny: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Paradox of “It Takes One to Know One”’, *Feminist Studies*, 20, 3 (Fall 1994), p. 454. Furthermore, Gubar claims that, ‘Wollstonecraft stands at an originatory point in feminist thought precisely because she envisioned a

her work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, is claimed to be the ‘first’ feminist text.¹⁰ Wollstonecraft is primarily credited with challenging the normative definitions of gender in the eighteenth century and with attempting to remedy the negative effects which these normative definitions had on the treatment and placement of women in society.¹¹

Therefore, Wollstonecraftian scholarship has, for the most part, led to the labeling of Wollstonecraft as a ‘feminist’ and therefore, Wollstonecraft and ‘feminism’ are now largely synonymous. For intellectual historians this conflation is highly problematic. Quentin Skinner insists that intellectual historians normally proceed in one of two ways.¹² Firstly, on the assumption that the environment surrounding the text needs to be examined in order for the text to be understood; or, secondly, on the assumption that the text can stand alone as an atemporal, self-sufficient intellectual statement.

The use of a classic text without an understanding of the context surrounding it, Skinner argues, derives from a scholars’ attempt to find ‘universal ideas’ and ‘dateless wisdom’. Some scholars insist that a twenty-first century concept or idea

time when the female of the species could shed herself of an enfeebling articulation or feminization’, p. 457.

¹⁰ Barbara Caine credits *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as the, ‘central text in late eighteenth-century British, or even Anglo-American, feminism’. She goes on to argue that the importance of this text is found in: ‘its complex discussion of sexual difference and its elaboration of the ways in which constructions of femininity, both at an ideological level and in terms of the conduct of everyday life, serve the interests of male sexual desire’. See Barbara Caine, *English Feminism: 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 23-24.

¹¹ David Glover and Cora Kaplan discuss the concept of ‘gender’ and its different definitions. See David Glover and Cora Kaplan, ‘Femininity and Feminism’, in *Genders* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 10-15. Catriona Mackenzie categorizes Wollstonecraft as ‘a founder’ when she states in her abstract: ‘[I]t is standard in feminist commentaries to argue that Wollstonecraft’s feminism is vitiated by her commitment to a liberal philosophical framework ...’ See Catriona Mackenzie, ‘Reason and Sensibility: The Ideal of Women’s Self-Governance in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft’, *Hypatia*, 8, 4 (Fall 1993), p. 35. Moreover, Caine places Wollstonecraft within the ‘feminist’ camp by arguing that, ‘the *Vindication* is most powerful and interesting when read, not as a feminist programme, but rather as a passionate and angry protest against women’s subordination and against prevailing ideas of sexual difference’, *English Feminism*, p. 30. Therefore, Caine’s claims that the work should be read ‘not as a feminist programme’ highlights that this is precisely how it is usually categorized.

¹² Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory*, 8, 1 (1969), p. 3-53. Moreover, Skinner argues that there are fundamental problems with the ways which academics approach texts from a non-contextual perspective.

can be found in the past, in the same form, with which we engage it in the present.¹³ Furthermore, Skinner maintains that each classic text is typically placed under a topic heading. For example, a text might be deemed a political or religious text and, therefore, scholars will expect to ‘find’ certain themes within the classic piece of writing.¹⁴ Moreover, if a scholar does not ‘find’ a certain theme – disregarding the fact that it may not have been available to the author – then it is generally claimed that the specific author was unable to comprehend that theme. Furthermore, the scholar will commonly criticize the author for their ‘failure’ to discuss that specific theme, a theme which we, as contemporary scholars, see as wholly necessary to the topic which *we* state that author to be writing on.¹⁵ Moreover, Skinner notes the tendency for contemporary scholars in tracing the development of an ‘idea’, ‘system’ or ‘discipline’ to see previous articulations of particular ‘doctrines’ as imperfectly realized versions of contemporary, ‘complete’ doctrines.¹⁶ Such patently ahistorical, uncontextualised treatments are evident in Wollstonecraftian scholarship, as Gubar points out.¹⁷

On the other hand, when scholars do emphasis a text’s historical context they are generally attempting to trace the ‘movement’ of an idea.¹⁸ Skinner claims that the scholar requires an understanding of the ways in which a phrase or word has been

¹³ Richard Rorty insists that, ‘[T]here is nothing wrong with self-consciously letting our own philosophical views dictate terms in which we describe the dead. But there are reasons for *also* describing them in other terms, their own terms. It is useful to recreate the intellectual scene in which the dead lived their lives – in particular, the real and imagined conversations they might have had with their contemporaries (or near-contemporaries)’ [original emphasis]. See Richard Rorty, ‘The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres’, in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, edited by Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 50.

¹⁴ Skinner, pp. 9-10.

¹⁵ Skinner, p. 5.

¹⁶ Skinner, p. 12.

¹⁷ Gubar draws attention to post-Enlightenment criticisms of Wollstonecraft’s ‘faith in reason as an innate human characteristic ... [and] divine faculty’ and underlines how contemporary understandings of female emancipation often leads scholars to anachronistically focus on supposed failures and shortcomings in Wollstonecraft’s *oeuvre*. ‘[A] number of critics have noted problems, tensions, and repressions in the *oeuvre* produced by Wollstonecraft. In particular, these scholars claim that, by appropriating an Enlightenment rhetoric of reason, Wollstonecraft alienated herself and other women from female sexual desire’. See Gubar, pp. 455, 459.

¹⁸ However, Skinner maintains that this methodology is not as ‘popular’ as leaving the text to stand alone.

used throughout history. However, historians' can never *really* understand what 'status' the idea had and, if it continued to be used throughout history, how important it *actually* was. Therefore, Skinner argues that historians' are not able to grasp a full understanding and appreciation of a text.¹⁹ He maintains that historians who want to understand the development of an idea should focus on the 'various agents who used the idea, and on their varying situations and intentions in using it'.²⁰ Studying the context illustrates the significance of the writing for the author and in turn highlights the audience appealed to and, by association, the author's social, political, and religious connections and intentions.²¹

This thesis will investigate the 'intention' Wollstonecraft embodied when writing her works. This is discoverable only through an engagement with the contexts with which she participated. It is also important to examine how Wollstonecraft *herself* fits into this time period. This will help to determine her literary intentions – whether, and how, personal experiences shaped her ideologies – and the social influences which impacted on her writings. Therefore, biographical information is needed in order to understand the personal contexts surrounding her writings.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born on the 27 April 1759, in a shabby, overcrowded area of London called Spitalfields. She was the first daughter and second child of Elizabeth and Edward John Wollstonecraft.²² Wollstonecraft received a meager education at a day school in Beverley. While her older brother Ned trained as a lawyer, Wollstonecraft received the 'standard' female education in obedience and

¹⁹ Skinner, pp. 36-38.

²⁰ Skinner, p. 38.

²¹ Skinner, pp. 44, 47-48. Moreover, Skinner argues: 'to understand a text must be to understand both the intention to be understood, and the intention that this intention should be understood, which the text itself as an intended act of communication must at least have embodied', p. 48. Furthermore, Skinner maintains that, while scholars should learn from the past, they need to understand that they are the product of the environment in which they live; that contemporary questions are the result of the context surrounding her or him, p. 53.

²² Todd, p. 4. Lyndall Gordon states that on the 20 May 1759 Wollstonecraft was christened in the Church of St Botolph Without Bishopsgate in the Anglican faith – the Established religion of the time period. See Gordon, *A New Genus*, p. 6. In addition, Gordon's biography goes under the title of *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft*. As far as I can determine, the two biographies are the same, apart from the change to the location of publication.

learnt how to be a good mother and wife.²³ The future employments available to Wollstonecraft were as a teacher, governess, needleworker or lady's companion.

Her father, Edward John, was an alcoholic who failed at a number of business ventures. As a result, the Wollstonecraft's frequently moved during Mary's childhood.²⁴ Elizabeth, Mary's mother, took care of the household and children and was the chief discipliner. Wollstonecraft's later husband, William Godwin, wrote that her mother's "system of government" included attempts to curb Mary's strong-willed attitude and an education in silence and obedience to make Wollstonecraft appealing for marriage.²⁵

At the age of nineteen, Wollstonecraft took a job as a lady's companion. The social division between herself and her employer depressed Wollstonecraft; class divisions would continue to be a point of contestation and depression throughout her life. Lyndall Gordon claims that Wollstonecraft was relieved from depression once she

²³ Michelle Cohen insists that the education of boys and girls adhered to the public/private divide which was evident in eighteenth century society. She states: '[T]he first point to be noted in any discussion of the education of girls (as well as boys) of middling and upper ranks in the eighteenth century is that it was inflected by the public/private debate. Should young ladies and young gentlemen be educated at home or at school? Despite the expansion of various 'seminaries' and establishments for girls' education throughout the century, most educationalists, conservative and progressive alike, vigorously opposed boarding schools for girls and extolled home education. There had to be a good reason for a girl to be educated at school rather than at home, for 'whatever elegant or high-sounding schools may be sought out for a girl, a mother seems the only governess intended by nature''. Therefore, the education of girls was placed under the observance of the mother – this would enable the means of educating girls in how to be a good housewife and mother. See Michelle Cohen, 'Gender and 'Method' in Eighteenth-Century English Education', *History of Education*, 33, 5 (September 2004), p. 586.

²⁴ Gordon states that Edward John was 'born' into the 'working class' and, after inheriting a large sum of money from his father, used 'social flexibility' to 'rise out of the manufacturing class by acquiring a gentleman's blend of land and leisure', *A New Genus*, p. 8. Gordon insists that Wollstonecraft's father was not well adapted to this 'class' as he had little or no motivation to work. Moreover, she claims that: '[W]ith no background or training in agriculture, Mr Wollstonecraft failed repeatedly, and sank lower with each move', *A New Genus*, p. 9.

²⁵ George, pp. 27-28. Wollstonecraft also had six siblings: two younger sisters and four brothers – one older and three younger. Gordon claims that Wollstonecraft described her older brother as the 'deputy tyrant of the house' and claimed that her parents were besotted with him – while she 'was not the favourite of either parent', *A New Genus*, p. 6. Moreover, Gordon insists that Ned, her older brother, would remain a continual source of hostility for Wollstonecraft throughout her life and his eventual occupational status 'embodied ... the unfairness of the patriarchal system', *A New Genus*, p. 20. The other siblings with whom Wollstonecraft had most contact were her two sisters, Elizabeth and Everina. Wollstonecraft kept in contact with her sisters through letters and helped her sisters through numerous periods of anguish.

had been ‘freed from being the paid companion’.²⁶ In 1784 Wollstonecraft opened and operated a school in Newington Green – an area populated predominantly by religious Dissenters. It was a community outside London which claimed ‘to have purged religion of superstition’.²⁷ Here she met Richard Price who taught Wollstonecraft that the individual could have a personal relationship with God built on morality and rationality.²⁸ Residence in Newington Green enabled Wollstonecraft’s introduction to a number of intellectuals, such as Joseph Johnson and Godwin.

In 1786 the school closed down and a year later Wollstonecraft wrote *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. Wollstonecraft argued against the different educations afforded to boys and girls and highlighted her dislike of baby talk, frivolity, comestics, artificial manners, and the theatre – phenomena somewhat synonymous with girls’ education. This text established the foundation of what would become an extremely profitable relationship with the publisher Joseph Johnson. Moreover, Johnson provided Wollstonecraft’s main point of entrance into the literary ‘world’. In the late 1780s Johnson launched a journal titled the *Analytical Review* and Wollstonecraft was employed as a reviewer.

The French Revolution broke out in 1789 and its meanings and subsequent consequences created huge debate in England. In November, 1789 Richard Price delivered a sermon praising the Revolution.²⁹ A year later Edmund Burke wrote *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, criticizing Price and dismissing the importance of the Revolution. In 1790, Wollstonecraft’s work, *A Vindication of the*

²⁶ Gordon, *A New Genus*, p. 27.

²⁷ Todd, pp. 58-59.

²⁸ Tomalin, pp. 31-34. Tomalin insists that, ‘Mary wanted to believe that individual willpower and energy could better the state of the world, and that human nature was improving, as Price and his friends thought’, p. 34.

²⁹ Price’s sermon was called *A Discourse On the Love of Our Country*. A number of eighteenth century journals reviewed this sermon. See ‘‘A Discourse on the Love of Our Country’’: Delivered on November 4th, 1789, at the Meeting House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain. Dr Richard Price, D. D. LL. D. F. R. S. and Fellow of the American Philosophical Societies at Philadelphia and Boston. Cadell. 1789’, *The Literary Magazine and British Review*, 3, 41 (December 1789), pp. 455-56.

Rights of Men was published. It attacked Burke's arguments, writing, and reasoning style. *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* was followed by *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. This text argued that men needed to recognize female subjugation and make room for females 'at the conference table of revolutionary liberalism'.³⁰

Wollstonecraft traveled to France in December 1792.³¹ This trip produced her work, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe*. It was a history which took as its main theme the 'progress' of French civilization and argued that the Revolution was a response to, and consequence of, this progress.³² While in France, she began a relationship with an American merchant, Gilbert Imlay which resulted in the birth of a daughter, Fanny Imlay.³³ However, their courtship was not to last. In the midst of their rapidly deteriorating relationship, Imlay proposed that Wollstonecraft go to Scandinavia to settle a business deal which had gone astray. This journey resulted in the publication of *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. It was a travel piece based on letters Wollstonecraft wrote during her journey.

³⁰ Todd, pp. 89-91. After the publication of this text, Wollstonecraft became 'involved' with the Swiss painter Henry Fuseli. Virginia Sapiro claims that Wollstonecraft singled out Fuseli 'as an object of both admiration and affection'. See Virginia Sapiro, *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 31. Their relationship deteriorated in 1792 and Sapiro describes this relationship thus: '[M]ost of her [Wollstonecraft's] biographers have dwelt on the love which she developed for Fuseli and her unsuccessful proposal for a ménage à trois in which she apparently offered to have the intellectual part of her beloved while his wife could keep the physical', p. 32.

³¹ Wollstonecraft, Johnson and the Fuselis had planned to travel to France together to 'witness the Revolution'; however, these plans were abandoned. See Sapiro, p. 32.

³² Although this book was originally supposed to cover an extended period of the French Revolution, it is in actuality only dedicated to a small time frame.

³³ As the Revolution became increasingly hostile to non-French living in the country, Imlay and Wollstonecraft were registered as married in order that she could stay in the country relatively safely. Tomalin mentions their 'marriage' when discussing the registration of Fanny after her birth, pp. 174-75.

Wollstonecraft returned to England after her travels to learn that Imlay had begun a relationship with another woman.³⁴ Wollstonecraft, seemingly unable to cope with this betrayal, planned suicide. In October 1795 she jumped off the Putney Bridge into the Thames River where she was rescued by watermen.³⁵ After this attempt Wollstonecraft again met the radical philosopher William Godwin and a courtship began. Wollstonecraft discovered, in the early months of 1797, that she was pregnant and on August 30th, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin – who would later become Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein* – was born. There were complications after the birth and eleven days later Wollstonecraft passed away from puerperal fever.³⁶

After Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin produced a controversial memoir titled, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which was published by Johnson in 1798. Godwin stated: '[I]t has always appeared to me, that to give the public some account of the life of a person of eminent merit deceased, is a duty incumbent on survivors'.³⁷ It was not this intention which was problematic for Wollstonecraft's contemporaries, but the content of the work. *Memoirs* highlighted the unconventional lifestyle and character of Wollstonecraft.³⁸

Furthermore the liaison between Wollstonecraft and Godwin was understood as something symbolic. To the forces of reaction, as represented by the *Anti-Jacobin Magazine*, and now strongly in the ascendant, it was of course an unholy alliance – atheism, anarchism, feminism, French Revolutionary politics and free love, all

³⁴ Tomalin states: 'Mary's Dissenting friends, Johnson, the Newington Green ladies and her family must have wondered at her behaviour and her plight and felt dismay when they realized she was now a discarded mistress saddled with a child', p. 184.

³⁵ Tomalin, pp. 184-89.

³⁶ Richard Holmes claims that Wollstonecraft died of septicaemia. See Richard Holmes, 'Introduction', in *Penguin Classics: Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin: A Short Residence in Sweden and Memoirs of the Author of 'The Rights of Woman'* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 14. Wollstonecraft's death-notice highlights the eighteenth century view of her; it provides a glimpse into her place within society. See 'Chronicle' in *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature, For the Year 1797. The Second Edition*, p. 49.

³⁷ Godwin in Holmes, p. 204.

³⁸ Holmes insists that her life 'was regarded as a portent by her contemporaries, the moment they looked back on it. Nor was this only among radicals, or those sympathetic to feminism', p. 14. Therefore, although her personal life was seen as a portent, it was *Memoirs* which allowed this unsympathetic 'looking back' to take place.

brought together in one unseemly bed, and now swiftly and properly punished by Divine Providence.³⁹

All the events of Wollstonecraft's life – her strong feelings for her female friends; her affair with the married Furseli; her relationship with Imlay and the birth of their daughter out of wedlock; and her attempted suicides – were discussed by Godwin unashamedly and explicitly.⁴⁰ Furthermore, *Memoirs* highlighted the 'unfeminine' conduct which marked Wollstonecraft's life – her employment, the continual demonstration of her intellectual capacity, her travels to foreign countries without a chaperone, there were numerous 'examples'.⁴¹ *Memoirs* caused such controversy that Godwin published a second edition in the summer of 1798 with a number of changes and deletions.⁴² However, it was too late. The tarnishing of Wollstonecraft and her reputation had taken place.⁴³

³⁹ Holmes, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Holmes, p. 43. Furthermore, Holmes reinforces this by stating: '[I]t was Godwin's frankness over Mary Wollstonecraft's love-affairs and suicide attempts that seemed to cause the most immediate offence', p. 44. Moreover, Gordon maintains that, '[I]t was said that the improper life of the author of the *Rights of Woman* must discredit the book itself', *A New Genus*, p. 4.

⁴¹ Orrin N. C. Wang reinforces this argument. Wang claims that Wollstonecraft was seen to be 'an individual aspiring to rational discourse while hopelessly repressing irrational emotion ...'. Furthermore, Wang insists that Wollstonecraft was viewed as emotionally unstable due to her 'various love affairs, her illegitimate child, the "unconventional" form of her relationship to Godwin, and her attempted suicides'. See Orrin N. C. Wang, 'The Other Reasons: Female Alterity and Enlightenment Discourse in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 5, 1 (1991), p. 129. Furthermore, Andrew Elfenbein states Godwin's 'opinion' of Wollstonecraft's works, claiming that: '[I]n his [Godwin's] eyes, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is an embarrassment because of its supposed lack of feminine grace: Wollstonecraft's authorial character has a "rigid, and somewhat Amazonian temper"'. See Andrew Elfenbein, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Sexuality of Genius', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, edited by Claudia L. Johnson, p. 229.

⁴² Holmes, p. 202.

⁴³ Holmes comments on this damage: 'It is fair to say that most readers were appalled by the *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. There was no precedent for biography of this kind. Godwin's candour and plain-speaking about his own wife filled them [the readers] with horrid fascination. The *Historical Magazine* called the *Memoirs* 'the most hurtful book' of 1798. Robert Southey accused Godwin of 'a want of all feeling in stripping his dead wife naked'. The *European Magazine* described the work as 'the history of a philosophical wanton', and was sure that it would be read 'with detestation by everyone attached to the interests of religion and morality; and with indignation by any one who might feel any regard for the unhappy woman, whose frailties should have been buried in oblivion', p. 43.

Wollstonecraft's contemporaries labeled her a 'sexual predator'. Eighteenth century gothic novelist, Horace Walpole, called her a 'hyena in petticoats'.⁴⁴ Moreover, 'John Adams, the second President of the United States, called her 'this mad woman', 'foolish', 'licentious''.⁴⁵ These labels demonstrate some of the responses among Wollstonecraft's contemporaries to her personal and literary life. Gordon argues that a 'scandalous link between prostitution and women's advance – disseminated in the late 1790s and renewed by Victorians – led a new generation of feminists to distance themselves from Wollstonecraft, lest her supposedly dissolute life should damage the Cause'.⁴⁶ Moreover, Richard Holmes states that:

[T]he *Anti-Jacobin* delivered a general onslaught on the immorality of everything Mary Wollstonecraft was supposed to represent, from independent sexual behaviour and the formal education of young women, to disrespect for paternal authority and non-payment of creditors But perhaps the most damaging, and certainly the saddest, reaction came from those women writers who were essentially sympathetic to Wollstonecraft's cause, but who were dismayed to see it personalized in the actual details of her life ... They felt Godwin had written too much about her emotional life and too little about her intellectual achievement. They thought that the very form of the biography betrayed the ideology of feminism.⁴⁷

The nineteenth century carried on these unpleasant attitudes towards Wollstonecraft.⁴⁸ Moreover, in the early twentieth century Wollstonecraft was seen as 'God's angry woman', a man-hater whose feminist crusade was caused by penis-envy, or, perhaps, an erotic love for her own mother ...'⁴⁹ It was not until the 1960s and 1970s, some one hundred and sixty years after her death and publications, that Wollstonecraft was 'rescued' from oblivion and enlisted in the cause of female emancipation. The feminist movement of these decades utilized

⁴⁴ For other references to the criticism which Wollstonecraft received and the tarnishing of her reputation see Cindy L. Griffin, 'A Web of Reasons: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the Re-weaving of Form', *Communication Studies*, 47, 4 (Winter 1996), pp. 272-88.

⁴⁵ Gordon, *A New Genus*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Gordon, *A New Genus*, p. 389. Gordon also insists that: '[S]he was famous, then notorious. For most, her freedom to shape her life as she saw fit had to fade', *A New Genus*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Holmes, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁸ Caine illustrates the reception Wollstonecraft received during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as mentioning the impact of Godwin's *Memoirs*. See Barbara Caine, 'Victorian Feminism and the Ghost of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Women's Writing*, 4, 2 (1997), pp. 261-72.

⁴⁹ Miriam Brody (ed), *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 2.

Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* to emancipate women and to put into the public domain the life of the 'married middle-class woman'.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the 1960s and 1970s placed Wollstonecraft in the role of the 'founding mother of feminism's second wave'. Miriam Brody argues that this generation claimed to have, 'rescued Wollstonecraft from the abuses of misunderstanding and underrating that had earlier dismissed her arguments as the ravings of an unfortunate woman who had simply met the wrong kind of man'.⁵¹

This is where contemporary scholarship stands – with Wollstonecraft at the forefront of 'feminist' thought.⁵² Utilizing Skinner's maxims, this thesis will aim to show that Wollstonecraft was not so much a 'feminist' writer, but was a writer arguing that the position of women in society was 'wrong' because it went against 'God's will' and teachings. Therefore, the first chapter of this thesis establishes the environment which Wollstonecraft lived in. This is fundamental as the environment enabled the development of Wollstonecraft's ideas, and further determined the discursive framework through which she was able to establish her ideas. Primarily Chapter One discusses the religious climate and politics of eighteenth century Britain. The changing influence of eighteenth century political and monarchical institutions will be considered as their impact on society and religion was fundamental to Wollstonecraft's thought. 'Class' structures evident in Britain are also noted as they too would become topics of discussion for Wollstonecraft. An examination of the 'private/public' divide will be undertaken in order to determine

⁵⁰ Brody, p. 63.

⁵¹ Brody, p. 65. Gordon insists that: '[E]ach age retells this story [of Wollstonecraft's life]; there have been invaluable portraits, from Godwin's 'champion' at the end of the eighteenth century to Mrs Fawcett's heroine for the suffragist Cause, and from Claire Tomalin's outstanding image of the wounded lover to Janet Todd's moody drama queen as seen through the exasperated eyes of her sisters', *A New Genus*, p. 3. Moreover, Gordon claims that, '[I]n the opening year of our present century the *Times Literary Supplement* judged her 'little short of monstrous'', *A New Genus*, p. 4.

⁵² Brody claims that *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is the 'feminist manifesto', p. 25. Furthermore, Susan Ferguson insists that: '[A]ccording to the standard narrative of feminist intellectual history, modern feminism in the English-speaking world begins with Mary Wollstonecraft's bold appeals for women's inclusion in a public life overwhelmingly dominated by men'. See Susan Ferguson, 'The Radical Ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 32, 3 (September 1999), p. 427.

the position of women within 'employment' and what was deemed 'appropriate' for women to undertake.

Chapter Two will focus primarily on Wollstonecraft's first *Vindication*. It will firstly determine the ideological backgrounds of those figures that were important in the development of this political text – namely, Richard Price, Edmund Burke and Joseph Johnson. The context surrounding the publication will be discussed and this will highlight Wollstonecraft's own intentions in undertaking this writing. An exploration of the main arguments and themes within the first *Vindication* will follow and the religious language and imagery within her arguments will be considered.

This will lead on to an analysis of Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* in Chapter Three. References to religion and Scripture will be highlighted and their influence on and importance to her main arguments will be explored. I will suggest that Wollstonecraft attempted to refute those normative arguments which stated the subordinate position of women as 'natural' and which found their origins in sixteenth and seventeenth century religious thought.

Chapter Four will centre on Wollstonecraft's engagement with the French Revolution. It will firstly explore the expectations which Wollstonecraft carried with her to France and her subsequent view of the impact which religion and politics had on the outcome of the Revolution. It will move on to consider the principles of 'Enlightenment' and 'reason' within Wollstonecraft's writings and how she utilized these concepts within her main theme of the 'progress of civilization'.

Wollstonecraft's encounter with Scandinavia will be the focus of the final chapter. This chapter will highlight the religiosity of Wollstonecraft's letters and consider the precise *nature* of this religion. Wollstonecraft's employment of Romanticist

concepts, including that of the sublime, will be explored as these impact on her religious ideas.

This thesis thus explores the theological underpinnings of Wollstonecraft's thought. It utilizes four of Wollstonecraft's texts to highlight the religiosity which will be shown to underpin her arguments. Moreover, these specific texts are utilized, not only because they were the most 'well-known', but because they embody a continuum on which changes to Wollstonecraft's writings and thoughts can be mapped. These changes were determined by, and framed within, the context in which she lived. This study thus commences with a discussion of eighteenth century Britain.

Chapter One

‘They must follow Nature and be ‘themselves’’: Mary Wollstonecraft’s Long Eighteenth Century¹

The environment which Wollstonecraft lived in is important to discuss for its impact on the way she wrote, for evidence of the audience she appealed to, and can provide insight into the reason Wollstonecraft wrote on the topics which she did. This chapter will discuss the religious, political, and social environment of the eighteenth century. It will highlight Wollstonecraft’s ‘position’ in English society and some fundamental factors which would come to influence her writings. Particular attention will be paid to the religious environment and the ‘class’ differences evident within eighteenth century society as I believe these two factors impacted on Wollstonecraft’s frames of thought and writings most extensively.

During the ‘long eighteenth century’ Britain encountered a number of events which greatly transformed her relationship to other countries, and also affected the relations between different ‘groups’ within society.² Some of the events affecting the relationship between Britain and other countries were the Revolutions – both American and French – and the many wars, for example, with Spain.³ Those events which affected internal relations were the religious upheavals of the late 1680s, the treatment of the Dissenting and Catholic ‘groups’, the debates regarding the placement of the King and Church in society, and the many political disputes among parliamentary parties, which generally originated from those events mentioned above. For example, the treatment of Dissenting and Catholic groups

¹ Ornella Moscucci, *The Science of Woman: Gynaecology and Gender in England, 1800-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), cited in Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 328.

² Frank O’Gorman uses this term to describe the eighteenth century. See Frank O’Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political & Social History 1688-1832* (London: Hodder Headline Group, 1997), p. x.

³ H. M. Scott refers to the rivalry between England and Spain and the consequences of continued war. See H. M. Scott, ‘Britain’s Emergence as a European Power, 1688-1815’, in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by H. T. Dickinson (London: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 434-36.

led to the political ‘disputes’ which surrounded the Test, Corporation and Occasional Conformity Acts. Therefore, the relations between different groups within society were most affected by religious, political, and social factors.

In the eighteenth century religion was closely connected to the monarchy. The King was an important and generally common figure in politics and religion. Moreover, it was the King who could determine political structures – the political group most sympathetic to the King’s beliefs was generally favoured politically – and, in most cases, the Established religion. However, the events of 1688 took these ‘privileges’ away from the King and changed the relationship between the monarch and society.

In 1688 King James II’s position on the throne was challenged due to his policies on Catholic toleration and his attitude towards Catholic/Protestant equality. James II was a Catholic and his subjects were Protestant; therefore a conflict in religious terms was inevitable.⁴ He supported policies aimed at Catholic equality; however, these policies threatened the position of the Anglican Church, the Established religious institution. It was believed that the Anglican Church would be diminished to the same ‘lowly’ status as the Catholic, and other Dissenting Churches, if James II succeeded in gaining Catholic toleration. This threat diminished however, by the belief that Mary, James’ eldest daughter from his Protestant marriage, would succeed James to the throne as he had been married to his Catholic wife for fifteen years and no children had been produced. However, the birth of James’ son to his Catholic wife in 1688 changed this future succession. Therefore, the birth of a male Catholic heir established that the throne would be succeeded by another Catholic. Frank O’Gorman states:

the birth of a Catholic, male heir threatened to postpone indefinitely the prospect of a Protestant succession. Even if James died while his heir was still a child, a regency would inevitably be dominated by his Catholic wife.⁵

⁴ O’Gorman, pp. 30-31.

⁵ O’Gorman, pp. 30-31.

William of Orange, Mary's wife, proposed to James that he should remove all Catholics from office and summon a free parliament; if James refused then William would attack. James fled to France, leaving the throne empty and the parliament disarrayed. The religious divisions between Protestants and Catholics and James' campaigning for Catholic toleration led to Anti-Catholic rioting. Protestants believed that the cure to this religious unrest was the succession to the throne of William, which was undertaken in the aftermath of James' flight to France. A Declaration of Rights was introduced in 1689 which further cemented religious divisions, as it established that any member of parliament or successor to the throne had to be a member of the Church of England – therefore, excluding all Catholics and Dissenters.⁶ These exclusions continued into the eighteenth century, and in some cases into the nineteenth century, and they caused social, political, and religious unrest.

The position and authority of the King was fundamentally changed during the religious unrest of 1688, as parliament and society began to challenge the autonomy which the King possessed. The King had ruled by 'Absolute Monarchy' – which meant that the King ruled through a belief that he had an undisputable 'right' to his position. H. T. Dickinson associates Absolute Monarchy with divine right, passive and non-resistant obedience from the public and hereditary succession that could not be annulled or questioned.⁷ These beliefs had been largely accepted, before 1688, as the foundational principles by which a King could rule the country. Furthermore, the public was to be unquestioning in its acceptance of its King. However, after 1688, people began to question the validity of the Monarch, its authority within parliament and religion, and its jurisdiction over societal conditions. In addition, the 'debates' over the position of the King reinforced the differences between the two distinct parliamentary groups – the Whigs and the Tories. Robert A. Smith suggests that these names had their origins in the

⁶ Clark, pp. 79-80.

⁷ H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 29-30.

Exclusionist Crisis which took place between 1679 and 1681.⁸ This crisis, which took place before James II had succeeded to the throne and was led by the Whigs, aimed to exclude the Catholic James from the throne, firstly through legislation and, if that failed, by assassination.⁹ Therefore, the division between parliamentary parties, which began in the late 1670s, was cemented by the religious unrest of the late 1680s.¹⁰ While it is often difficult to state precisely what the differences between the Whigs and the Tories were, there were some evident dissimilarities between the two groups. W. A. Speck argues that the Whigs and Tories were ‘divided primarily over great issues concerning the nature of government, the religious settlement and the objects of foreign policy’.¹¹ Dickinson insists that Whig ideology ‘opposed ... absolute monarchy and ... support[ed] the right of subjects to resist an arbitrary tyrant’.¹² Whig opposition to monarchical rule correlated with their view that parliament should hold a considerable amount of power in regard to the running of the country. Tories were ardently committed to preserving the position of the Church of England and were the main supporters of persecution for those Dissenters taking Occasional Conformity.¹³

The Church of England was closely integrated into the dealings of parliament and politics. Many members of parliament were members of the Church of England and this religious uniformity in parliament was reinforced through a number of Acts which excluded Dissenting religions from holding parliamentary and local offices.¹⁴ Ian Green argues that ‘the eighteenth-century Church [of England] ‘enjoyed a

⁸ Robert A. Smith, *Eighteenth-Century English Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 121. Furthermore, Dickinson has argued that these names, ‘originally arose as terms of abuse: meaning, respectively, Catholic Irish outcasts and Presbyterian Scottish outcasts from pre-Revolution Anglican society. The two terms were first used at Westminster during the Exclusion crisis of 1679-82, when the taunt of Tory was applied to the crown’s supporters and that of Whig to its opponents’, *Liberty and Property*, pp. 58-59.

⁹ Clark, p. 69.

¹⁰ Smith, p. 122.

¹¹ W. A. Speck, *Tory and Whig: The Struggle in the Constituencies, 1701-1715* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1970), p. 1.

¹² Brian Hill, ‘Parliament, Parties and Elections (1688-1760)’ in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by H. T. Dickinson, p. 57.

¹³ Hill, pp. 58-62.

¹⁴ Clark, pp. 79-82.

greater identity of interest and outlook with the politically powerful, landed classes’’.¹⁵

[The clergy] of the later eighteenth century were closer to the aristocracy and gentry of the day than ever before. The Established Church also played a leading part in State rituals such as coronations and royal funerals; it preached sermons to commemorate the martyrdom of Charles I and the Restoration of Charles II; it defended the political order and the judicial system of the day, and taught that the social hierarchy and inequalities of wealth were God’s will, though it also stressed the duties and responsibilities of superiors to inferiors.¹⁶

Therefore, the Church of England was influential in political and judicial institutions. It was also highly influential in the way that individuals’ viewed their position in society, as evident in the dissemination of ideas regarding wealth and social hierarchies. ‘Religion ... was offered as [the public’s] guide and solace’.¹⁷ The Church upheld the principles of the state, was a powerful means of dispensing information to the public, and was able to generate large numbers of people to support political and religious matters.¹⁸ However, the importance of the Church after 1688, although remaining closely connected to parliament and the Monarch, diminished within individual lives.¹⁹ Justin Champion maintains that the ‘eighteenth-century Church of England loosened its ritual authority over the people’ and that the ‘institutional structure or membership of the Church of England may have become ‘erastian’ and dominated by the ‘cousins of the gentry’’.²⁰ Champion

¹⁵ Ian Green, ‘Anglicanism in Stuart and Hanoverian England’, in *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, edited by Sheridan Gilley & W. J. Sheils, pp. 179-80.

¹⁶ Green, p. 180.

¹⁷ Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, p. 263.

¹⁸ Clark establishes the extent of this influence and ‘power of the clergy’ when he states: ‘Every event of life contributes to their interests: they christen; they educate; they marry; they church; they bury; they persuade; they frighten; they govern; and scarce any thing is done without them’, p. 33.

¹⁹ Clark, p. 31.

²⁰ Justin Champion, ‘‘May the last king be strangled in the bowels of the last priest’: Irreligion and the English Enlightenment, 1649-1789’, in *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution*, edited by Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 31. Erastianism is defined as: ‘[T]he theory concerning the relations of church and state ... Opposing Genevan claims that excommunication belonged to the church, Erastus taught that in a Christian state the magistrates possessed the disciplinary power, and he attacked the infallibility of the church’. See Vergilius Ferm (ed), *An Encyclopedia of Religion*, (London: Peter Owen, 1964), p. 254.

argues that English people became increasingly radical and questioned their religious principles and religious beliefs extensively. He states:

[T]heological institutions and beliefs – priests, sacraments, heaven, hell, even God – ... [became] false systems, founded upon human ignorance and fear. These false ideologies contrived not only spiritual deviance but civil tyranny Kings and priests were condemned as conspirators against human reason and liberty The indictment of priestcraft was not because it was ‘religion’, but because it was corrupt religion. Reform of religion was the stepping stone to reform of society.²¹

Therefore, the belief that religion was corrupt became augmented in the eighteenth century. People began to question the validity of salvation, damnation and Biblical Scriptures. Moreover, the King and priests – who had enjoyed unquestioned obedience in the past – were seen to be damaging religion. They were no longer viewed as institutions which upheld an disseminated religions’ moralistic principles.

The main disseminators of these negative views and ideologies were Dissenters. A Dissenter was a person who did not conform to the religion of the Established Church and subsequently joined a sect which fostered different religious views and ideologies from those of the Established Religion – in England this was Anglicanism.²² As the eighteenth century progressed, the number of Dissenting sects grew. Dissenters encountered violence due to their different religious views and John Seed argues that Dissenters,

were subject to official harassment, troublesome court appearances and fines, confiscation of property, and spells of imprisonment. They endured violent threats and intimidation, official and unofficial. They were abused in the street. Their private meetings and meetinghouses were broken into during religious worship and minister and congregation threatened and abused.²³

²¹ Champion, pp. 37, 41.

²² William L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), p. 134.

²³ John Seed, ‘History and Narrative Identity: Religious Dissent and the Politics of Memory in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 44, 1 (January 2005), p. 51.

The range of beliefs among Dissenting groups expanded throughout the eighteenth century. Knud Haakonssen maintains that the ‘original Dissenting’ groups of the seventeenth century – Evangelical Protestantism and Counter-Reformation Catholicism – were ‘divided’ into smaller and diverse groups during the centuries before the nineteenth century.²⁴ Moreover, the emergence of different sects was a result of different ideologies concerned with the divinity of the Trinity and the truth of the Bible. For example, Presbyterianism encountered divisions over the Trinity as some members of the ‘Cambridge camp’ viewed it skeptically, ‘affirming that Christ, as the son of God, could neither be divine himself nor the same person as His Father in any way’.²⁵ Moreover, Methodists believed that the Bible was the one source of ‘spiritual authority’; whereas Jansenism (a group which derived from the Jesuits) preached moral conduct from uncertainties found in the Bible.²⁶

The *specific* ideas of each Dissenting group and how they differed from the next sect could not always be easily distinguished. William Doyle has stated that many similarities could be found between Dissenting sects:

[I]n church government, dissenters rejected bishops; although they differed among themselves as to where authority should lie instead. In doctrine, most dissenters were Calvinists, believing that God predestines men to be saved or damned and that they are powerless to change their fate. Anglicans, by contrast, were Arminians, believing that Christ died for all men, that none is predestined to salvation or damnation, but that salvation is open to all those who sincerely aspire to it.²⁷

Similarities were also found between eighteenth century political groups and Dissenters. Although Dissenters were excluded from holding office and were officially harassed and persecuted, some members of parliament were sympathetic to certain Dissenting sects. Furthermore, generalities can be made between certain parliamentary groups and Dissenting factions. Geoffrey Holmes insists that the first

²⁴ Knud Haakonssen (ed), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

²⁵ Doyle, p. 165.

²⁶ Doyle, pp. 165, 168.

²⁷ Doyle, pp. 164-65. For further information see Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 428-34.

Whigs opposed Catholic succession and championed ‘the claims of Protestant dissenters to a measure of toleration’.²⁸ In addition Green states:

[A]ll [e]piscopalians were firmly opposed to Dissent, but some, faced by an apparently rapid growth of Nonconformity [this term replaces the term ‘dissent’ in the eighteenth-century] after 1689, felt that it was essential to return to the principle of one State, one Church, and wage a vigorous new campaign against Dissent, while others felt that a policy of persuasion rather than coercion should be adopted to try to win over Dissenters. Those who took the former view were likely to be associated with the ‘High Church’ ... [and] likely to support the Tories Those who adopted the latter position were often called ‘Low Churchmen’ or ‘Latitudinarians’, and were usually more sympathetic towards the Whigs ...²⁹

Green highlights distinct differences between religious groups, political parties, and groups within the Church itself – the High and Low Churchmen. Moreover, there were ‘debates’ among different parties regarding the threat which Dissenting groups presented. The perceived Dissenting threat was to the political and religious structures of the eighteenth century, and, as already mentioned, to stop any Dissenting influence on these institutions a number of Acts were passed to limit the positions of power Dissenters could attain. The most influential of these were the Test and Corporation Acts, which were passed in 1661. They ‘laid down that only those who conformed to the Church of England could hold office under the crown or serve in town corporations, [and they] remained on the statute books until 1828’.³⁰ Andrew Thompson states that ‘legally speaking, these acts prevented dissenters from holding civil office. Dissenters viewed this as an infringement on their civil rights’.³¹ Moreover, Mark Knights argues that ‘the Presbyterians and some other dissenters resented their formal exclusion from holding office and the retention of such a key confessional ‘test’; while high churchmen continued to regard the dissenters as wrong, potentially dangerous and hypocritical’.³² Although

²⁸ Geoffrey Holmes, *Religion and Party in Late Stuart England* (London: Historical Association, 1975), p. 6.

²⁹ Green, pp. 178-79.

³⁰ Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, p. 16.

³¹ Andrew Thompson, ‘Contesting the Test Act: Dissent, Parliament and the Public in the 1730s’, *Parliamentary History*, 24, 1 (2005), p. 58.

³² Mark Knights, ‘Occasional Conformity and the Representation of Dissent: Hypocrisy, Sincerity, Moderation and Zeal’, *Parliamentary History*, 24, 1 (2005), p. 41. For more information regarding this persecution see Rowland Harry Weston, ‘William Godwin and the Legacy of the English Civil

excluded from holding office, a number of Dissenters took the sacrament in order to hold political positions, but they did not adhere to the religion of the Church of England – something termed ‘Occasional Conformity’.³³ Campaigns to have these exclusionary Acts removed from legislation began as soon as they were introduced in parliament and a number of strategies were employed to do so. For example, an article in the *Occasional Paper* in 1717 argued that repealing the Test Act would ‘bring honour on the Church of England, because it would no longer be associated with a persecuting spirit’.³⁴ Furthermore, arguments in the 1730s focused on the importance of the Church of England as a religious establishment. These arguments claimed that Dissenters ‘were perfectly willing to accept that the Church of England was one of a number of true protestant churches’.³⁵ Therefore, the Dissenters insisted that they meant no hostility and presented no danger to the Church of England; they merely wished to adhere to a ‘different’ form of religion.

There were a number of Dissenters who were highly influential in the eighteenth century and closely connected to Wollstonecraft. One main figure was Reverend Richard Price who, in the later half of the eighteenth century, upheld and disseminated Dissenting ideas.³⁶ Price was the son of an Independent minister, whose father conformed to the Calvinist Dissenting religion. Price followed the Arian faith – also a Dissenting sect – and was converted to this religion after reading a work by the Arian, Samuel Clarke.³⁷ Moreover, Price associated himself with Unitarianism, which made his religious beliefs layered.³⁸ Calvinists believed that men were predestined to salvation or damnation; Unitarians believed that God

War’ (unpublished Honours thesis, James Cook University, 1995), p. 12. Weston goes on to discuss the influence of Dissent within the writings of Burke and William Godwin, pp. 12-26.

³³ Knights, p. 43.

³⁴ Thompson, p. 63.

³⁵ Thompson, p. 65.

³⁶ G. J. Barker-Benfield, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthwoman’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50, 1 (January-March 1989), p. 96.

³⁷ Watts, p. 471.

³⁸ Donald Davie, *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930* (*The Clark Lectures, 1976*) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 127, 135.

was one being and therefore, dismissed the Trinity.³⁹ Price believed in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, believed in the power of the Holy Trinity, and moreover, he believed in the pre-existence of Christ. Price advocated natural rights, was a ‘friend’ of America, and preached that people should live ‘rigorously moral lives’.⁴⁰ He believed that every life was infused with the presence of God; that lives and events were predestined by ‘God’s will’.⁴¹ Price was also associated with a religious sect called the Rational Dissenters. According to Martin Fitzpatrick:

Rational Dissenters elevated truth over expediency in politics, were anxious to eliminate errors of orthodox theology, proclaimed the virtues of candid free inquiry in all aspects of life and were confident that Providence would secure the triumph of truth over error.⁴²

Rational Dissenters established their own community outside London in a place called Newington Green. It was here that Wollstonecraft first came in contact with Rational Dissenters and Richard Price – though she never became a Rational Dissenter herself. Janet Todd describes Newington Green as a ‘community [of Dissenters] who claimed to have purged religion of superstition, leaving only an essential creed’.⁴³ Furthermore, Ana M. Acosta argues that Newington Green was preeminent for its impact on the English economy and positions within economic institutions.⁴⁴ Price became a mentor to Wollstonecraft and she was introduced to

³⁹ Norman Ravitch, ‘Far Short of Bigotry: Edmund Burke on Church Establishments and Confessional States’, *Journal of Church and State*, 37, 2 (Spring 1995), p. 373. Unitarianism is defined: ‘[A]s a system of [Christian] thought and [religious] observance, [which] derives [its] name from [the] central [doctrine] of the single personality of God the Father, in contrast with the Trinitarian conception of [a] threefold being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit’. See S. G. F. Brandon (ed), *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), p. 628.

⁴⁰ Martin Fitzpatrick, ‘The Enlightenment, Politics and Providence: Some Scottish and English Comparisons’, in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by Knud Haakonssen, p. 83.

⁴¹ Fitzpatrick, p. 84. The meaning of the term ‘predestination’ is discussed by Ernest Gordon Rupp. He suggests that this belief was fundamental in the writings of John Wesley. See Ernest Gordon Rupp, *Oxford History of the Christian Church: Religion in England 1688-1791* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 368-72.

⁴² Fitzpatrick, p. 83.

⁴³ Todd, pp. 58-59.

⁴⁴ She claims that, ‘[A]t least a quarter of the late-Stuart London merchants were Dissenters; and Dissenters comprised about thirty-seven percent of the colonial trade, two-thirds of the New England Company, and forty-three percent of the directors of the Bank of England’. See Ana M. Acosta, ‘Spaces of Dissent and the Public Sphere in Hackney, Stoke Newington, and Newington Green’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 27, 1 (Winter 2003), pp. 3-4.

many of the leading eighteenth century radical thinkers through her friendship with Price – namely, her future publisher, Joseph Johnson, and her future husband, William Godwin.

Wollstonecraft's contact with this radical Dissenting group was important as many of her leading ideas were fostered within this intellectual environment. Wollstonecraft developed her ideas regarding the 'evils' of the aristocracy, the monarch and the clergy, which were to be important topics in her two *Vindications*. Moreover, debates and ideas regarding the rights of women and the position of the 'lower classes' within society were encouraged within this environment. Aristocratic 'evils', as well as the rights of the 'lower classes', were prevalent within Wollstonecraft's writings. Although the term 'class' is a problematic label to use when discussing differences within societies, it was true that there were distinguished 'social positions', or 'distinction[s] of ranks', during the eighteenth century in England.⁴⁵ A description of the differences between these 'positions', or an explanation of the 'types' of people in each 'rank', will not be attempted as that would unnecessarily simplify the English society and the people within it.⁴⁶ However, when Wollstonecraft spoke of the 'evils' within society she was referring to the actions of those people who had gained their positions through primogeniture or hereditary succession – those people who did not have to work for their social status. These men gained positions of 'power' through peerage – titles and positions were passed to the sons of men already sitting in parliament or from those already holding positions of influence. Richard G. Wilson states:

recruitment was self-perpetuating since new members were drawn almost entirely from within the peerage class itself. A few generals, admirals and very successful

⁴⁵ Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 145.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Rogers, however, suggests that: '[B]y the early eighteenth century definitions of society as tripartite, with identifiable strata of rich, middling and poor peoples, became quite commonplace', p. 172. See Nicholas Rogers, 'The Middling Orders', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by H. T. Dickinson, pp. 172-82.

lawyers were ennobled, but their family and social connections were almost invariably with the peerage and large landowners.⁴⁷

Moreover, the positions handed down to sons were generally political, either at a national or local level, and therefore these positions were closed to any person 'outside' this system. People excluded from these positions were those which Wollstonecraft 'campaigns' for in her writings – those people within the working, poorer groups of society.

According to Defoe in 1709, below the middle ranks who 'live well' came four groups: the 'working trades who labour hard, but feel no want'; the country people, farmers, etc. who 'fare indifferently'; the poor, 'who fare hard'; and the 'miserable who really pinch and suffer want'. Just above the labouring poor he placed those with some skill and the artisans whom he embraced under the general term 'mechanics'. Together these sections of society can be considered in general terms as the labouring poor.⁴⁸

Individuals' were placed in the category of 'labouring poor' due to their income; dependent on whether they increased or decreased the wealth of the country.⁴⁹ Moreover, this group was mobile throughout the eighteenth century, as they were largely agricultural based workers until the rise of industrialization when agriculture diminished and urban work became a 'norm' – however, this is over-simplified.⁵⁰ This group became more dependent on a wage and had to adapt to the changing work environment, which was more often than not unjust and unfair.⁵¹ Moreover, during the eighteenth century employments which had been 'open' to women were slowly eradicated, and women were taken out of the public working environment

⁴⁷ Richard G. Wilson, 'The Landed Elite', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by H. T. Dickinson, p. 159.

⁴⁸ John Rule, 'The Labouring Poor', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by H. T. Dickinson, p. 183.

⁴⁹ Rule, p. 183. These differences were brought in by Gregory King at the end of the seventeenth century to distinguish the different 'types' of people within the category of the 'labouring poor'.

⁵⁰ Rule, pp. 186-89. Although industrialization was slightly outside the time period of the eighteenth century, the effects were still felt within society.

⁵¹ For information on the position of the 'labouring poor' within this changing working environment see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968). Refer especially to the section on 'Exploitation', pp. 207-32.

and placed within a private domestic sphere.⁵² The eighteenth century English jurist, William Blackstone stated that:

[S]cripture, the law and other authorities jointly confirmed male superiority and the subordination of women. 'By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law,' ... 'that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of her husband'.⁵³

Therefore, women had no legal autonomy within marriage, and even before marriage, women were under the 'care' and authority of their fathers or brothers.⁵⁴ Women were confined to 'the affairs of her own kitchen', and due to their limited education and the presence of severe legislation, women were kept in a state of dependence.⁵⁵ Moreover, women were kept from the public sphere by an acceptance of ideologies related to religion and medicine.⁵⁶ It was argued that men were given a greater portion of 'reason', and that this enabled them to occupy the public sphere – this gendering being 'ordained by God and Nature'.⁵⁷ Moreover, these arguments were not only disseminated by men. Female writer Hannah Moore

⁵² Caine states: '[W]hile men clearly had an honoured and even dominant place within the private sphere, women were excluded from any recognition within the public or economic sphere', *English Feminism*, p. 21. Robert D. Spector refers to this 'public/private divide' in the literary world. See Robert D. Spector, 'Shaping Forces: Society, Personality, and Literary Tradition', in *Smollett's Women: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Masculine Sensibility* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 1-7. Olivia Smith also refers to this divide in her discussion of the state of eighteenth century language. See Olivia Smith, 'The Problem', *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 1-34.

⁵³ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England: Volume I* (New York: Garland, 1979, p. 430), cited in Porter, pp. 320-21.

⁵⁴ Ruth Abbey suggests that Wollstonecraft's views regarding marriage were liberal; that Wollstonecraft suggested a 'model of marriage that emulates many of friendship's salient features ...', p. 79. See Ruth Abbey, 'Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Hypatia*, 14, 3 (Summer 1999), pp. 78-95.

⁵⁵ Porter, p. 321. Furthermore, Rosemary Radford Ruether claims that this 'care' was enforced in law from the sixteenth century. She highlights the narrowing of the category 'female work' and the increasing differentiation between male and female employments. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 113-45.

⁵⁶ Glover and Kaplan distinguish the influence of medicine on the concept of 'gender', p. 19. Moreover, Caine discusses the general effect which religion had on the placement of women within society. She claims that: 'women were expected to be the religious and moral guides and leaders of men to whom they were in every way subordinate. They were expected to raise the moral and religious tone of their family, household, and local community, and, through that, of the wider economic and political world – a world to which they were denied any direct access', *English Feminism*, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Porter, p. 322.

stated that the ‘‘real’ aim of the education of girls should be to make them ‘good daughters, good wives, good mistresses, good members of society and good Christians’’.⁵⁸ Furthermore, women’s supposedly inferior intelligence and suitability for domestic life were seen as precepts of medicine.

According to anatomical and physiological thinking, the female constitution was specifically designed by God and Nature for childrearing, while psychologically too they were meant to be soft and nurturing, thereby suiting them to matrimony and that ‘chief end of their being’, motherhood Some studies of women’s brains held that they were smaller than men’s, thereby indicating their unfitness for intellectual pursuits.

Such conclusions hinged in particular on a gendered reading of the nervous system: women’s nerves were viewed as more sensitive than men’s ...⁵⁹

Therefore, women were only *fit* for the domestic sphere and the ‘job’ of raising children, but the ‘investigation’ of female constitutions had shown men this fact. Arguments from both the anatomical and religious ‘camps’ were widely distributed and upheld in society. An intelligent, thinking woman was not wanted. Moreover, as the eighteenth century was deeply religious, the theological elements within this gendered debate would have been widely upheld as part of ‘God’s word’.

The eighteenth century saw a change to the role of different ‘classes’, women and the position of the church and the monarch. It was marked by social, political, and religious upheaval. Moreover, it can also be distinguished by the growth and dissemination of a number of different radical and Dissenting ideologies. The topics discussed above, whether explicitly – Dissenters – or implicitly – the position of women within marriage – are all crucial in understanding why Wollstonecraft wrote on the topics she did. Specific individuals discussed above were also important in the development and dissemination of Wollstonecraft’s ideas. Moreover, the environment Wollstonecraft engaged with fostered the ideas which she would disperse to the public through her writings. Her individual position, either socially as a woman or religiously as associated with Dissenters, and her

⁵⁸ Porter, p. 322.

⁵⁹ Porter, p. 328.

knowledge of the position and experience of other 'groups' were important in the development of Wollstonecraft's ideas. These thoughts, which were influenced and instructed by the environment around her, were the basis for her arguments in her writings. Moreover, as eighteenth century society and individuals' lives were intertwined with an understanding of religion, I will highlight how Wollstonecraft's arguments were formed within a theological framework. The first work discussed, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, was focused on social, political and religious issues – mainly motivated by the onset of the French Revolution. Moreover, it was a work closely connected to Richard Price and Edmund Burke – men within different religious and political milieus'.

Chapter Two:

‘To avoid the loathsome sight of human miseries’: Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*¹

Wollstonecraft’s publication, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, was a response to debates surrounding two men, Richard Price and Edmund Burke. This chapter will discuss the lives and careers of Price and Burke, as well as Wollstonecraft’s publisher Joseph Johnson, and also include an analysis of key eighteenth century social events, such as the French Revolution. This context is important as it highlights factors which influenced the ideas found within this publication. It will also draw attention to her personal relationships with Price and Johnson and her hostile political connection with Burke as these associations had influences on her writing. The main themes will be highlighted and analysed with special emphasis placed on religious language and imagery within the text. The use of religion within Wollstonecraft’s arguments will be analysed in order to determine how a theological framework was utilized.

Richard Price’s political sermon, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* was important as it began the political and religious ‘debate’ among English men and women over the importance of the French Revolution. It was a religious sermon within a political and historical context.² The sermon discussed the state of society, politics, and the monarchy by drawing on the experiences of past events. Price highlighted the wrongs of government itself and the corrupt nature of men in power. Throughout the sermon Price discussed the individuals’ duty to love their country and argued that a community would benefit from the love and duty which the individual possessed and demonstrated. The love of one’s country, however, did

¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft: Volume 5*, edited by Janet Todd & Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering, 1989), p. 58.

² Richard Price, ‘*A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*’, in *The Vindications: The Rights of Men, The Rights of Woman: Mary Wollstonecraft*, edited by D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997), pp. 355-70.

not rest on a love of laws and the constitution, but on the universal love of mankind. This love derived from the idea of ‘Universal Benevolence’, which was a belief that ‘benevolence and sympathy can be extended to all humanity’.³ This idea was discussed and analysed by a number of ‘moral philosophers’ – with each one taking a different stance, either slightly or radically different to the next, depending on their social, religious and political affiliations. The idea of Universal Benevolence, it was argued, could be applied to the kin group, the community, or the country in which a person lived. For example, Evan Radcliffe states that Adam Smith and David Hume believed that ‘we should direct our benevolence to those close to us and that when we do so, we are in effect serving the ends of Universal Benevolence’.⁴ However, Francis Hutcheson believed that the individual should undertake ‘that action ... which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers’.⁵ Furthermore, Henry Home – better known as Lord Kames – believed that benevolence should be extended beyond the bounds of kin and community. Radcliffe maintains that, ‘love of [one’s] country [was] treated as an alternative to love of humanity, one that [was] proper and attainable: the nation [was] broader than a small group, yet within [a person’s] limited human comprehension and abilities’.⁶ Following on from these differing opinions of where benevolence should be projected, were debates surrounding the idea that Universal Benevolence may not be possible at all. It was this point which divided Burke and Price, firstly over the contents of Price’s speech and secondly over enthusiasm for the French Revolution.

Price believed that Universal Benevolence was achievable and argued in his sermon that mankind would benefit if benevolence was extended to all. Price insisted that benevolence would lead to familial love as ‘every man would consider every other man as his brother, and all the animosity that now takes place among contending

³ Evan Radcliffe, ‘Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54, 2 (April 1993), p. 221.

⁴ Radcliffe, p. 221.

⁵ Radcliffe, p. 225.

⁶ Radcliffe, pp. 227-28.

nations would be abolished'.⁷ Burke, however, believed that Universal Benevolence would destroy British patriotism. The distribution of Universal Benevolence to mankind threatened Burke's beliefs regarding the centrality and importance of the family.

Burke profoundly mistrusts any principle that distracts us from our habitual or familiar feelings, and to him universal benevolence is a philosophical abstraction Burke emphasizes the practical results of a belief in universal benevolence. These results are in his view catastrophic, for what universal benevolence destroys is what civilization depends on: all our social feelings and attachments, beginning in the family and ending in the nation.⁸

Therefore, two extremes were achieved within the same political climate of the eighteenth century. What led to the two different viewpoints were the political, social and religious differences of Price and Burke. The viewpoints of these two men are in stark contrast with each other and it has been stated that Price's support of the French Revolution led Burke to remove his support for Dissenters.⁹ Price's sermon, more so than Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, used the idea of Universal Benevolence as its main theme. Price argued that Universal Benevolence would put an end to wars – whether they were between people or between countries – and halt unjust territorial advancements. Moreover, Price argued that British people were 'citizens of the world'.¹⁰ He believed that British people should love their country passionately, but also have an interest in other countries. Therefore, British people were placed within the 'global' environment. It was assumed that other countries would enter this environment once they had a regard for the well-being of other people and other countries. Price stated:

[W]e should love it [Britain] ardently, but not exclusively. We ought to seek its good, by all the means that our different circumstances and abilities will allow; but at the same time we ought to consider ourselves as citizens of the world, and take care to maintain a just regard to the rights of other countries.¹¹

⁷ Price in Macdonald & Scherf, p. 358.

⁸ Radcliffe, p. 234.

⁹ Ravitch, p. 4.

¹⁰ Price in Macdonald & Scherf, p. 359.

¹¹ Price in Macdonald & Scherf, p. 359.

Countries around the world should be looked on with as much love as one's own. Moreover, the people of another country should be encouraged to demand a fair and just government, just as people in Britain were demanding. Therefore, Price's support of the French Revolution can be shown to accord with his philosophy of Universal Benevolence. He supported the French people's desire for fair and equal governmental representation and an untyrannical monarchy. Price argued that if a king and government were tyrannical then the people had the right to overthrow these institutions.¹² Price insisted that the king and government had a 'job' to care for the people of the country they represented; that this care led to a harmonized community. If this care was lacking, Price argued, then men should be prepared to overthrow this tyranny.¹³ Price, therefore, advocated that the events of the French Revolution was justified as the people were leading to an overthrow of a tyrannical and unjust king and government. He maintained that the events would enable France to become more enlightened and its government would become fairer in its conduct with the French people and with foreign countries. He placed Britain at the centre of his argument and used it as the exemplar of what France could become. Importantly, the history of Britain and contemporary events in France were placed within a theological framework.

Religious toleration was the primary theological theme of Price's sermon. Radcliffe claims that Dissenters such as 'Price and Joseph Fawcett portray Christ as urging not friendship or patriotism but a universal community'.¹⁴ Therefore, Dissenters could reverse the arguments of non-Dissenters and state that everyone, no matter their religious orientation, should be included in the community in which they lived. Price argued, in regards to other countries – although his arguments could be placed within the local context – that the Bible stated that 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self'.¹⁵ Britain had granted religious toleration, although

¹² Price in Macdonald & Scherf, pp. 364-65.

¹³ Price in Macdonald & Scherf, p. 361.

¹⁴ Radcliffe, p. 230.

¹⁵ Price in Macdonald & Scherf, p. 358.

restrictions remained, and for that reason British people were enlightened. Price advocated for the French people to experience those enlightened principles which had been disseminated throughout Britain. He stated:

[E]nlighten them and you will elevate them. Shew them they are *men*, and they will act like *men* Set religion before them as a rational service, consisting not in rites and ceremonies, but in worshipping God with a pure heart and practicing righteousness from the fear of his displeasure and the apprehension of a future righteous judgment, and that gloomy and cruel superstition will be abolished which has hitherto gone under the name of religion, and to the support of which civil government has been perverted. - Ignorance is the parent of bigotry, intolerance, persecution and slavery. Inform and instruct mankind; and these evils will be excluded [original emphasis].¹⁶

Price argued that a ‘better’ form of religion would be introduced through Enlightenment ideas; the dissemination of a rational religion would be achieved and this would be beneficial. Moreover, it would be beneficial because men would begin to ‘act like men’ and the community would be rid of the evils of ‘bigotry, intolerance, persecution and slavery’. Therefore, the dissemination of Enlightenment principles would lead the French people towards a personal, more rational, and less state influenced religion.

Moreover, Britain had shown the limits which could be placed on the monarchy and government. Price limited the ‘power’ of the king to the position of ‘the first servant of the public’.¹⁷ If the king failed to serve the public, who had placed him in that position, then overthrowing tyranny was a justified act. However, if the king served the public then he was entitled to the respect and obedience of the people. Price insisted that this was of the utmost importance; public ignorance towards this ‘right’ would lead to ‘an idolatry as gross and stupid as that of the ancient heathens’.¹⁸ Price further claimed that the government was also subject to this criterion. Like the monarchy, the government was trusted by the people to serve their interests and uphold liberty and virtue. Price argued that the people under an

¹⁶ Price in Macdonald & Scherf, p. 360.

¹⁷ Price in Macdonald & Scherf, p. 365.

¹⁸ Price in Macdonald & Scherf, p. 365.

unvirtuous government had the right to resist it; this resistance was a duty which the public needed to maintain. Governments should not be able to encroach on individual rights and if the people were to love their country they needed to demand fair and equal governmental representation. Moreover, Price stated that people had a fundamental right to equality and religious freedom. He maintained that this would enlighten the country and the people, enabling a more virtuous population to exist. The people, once aware of the oppressive nature of men in power, would make their opinions heard so the ‘servants’ of the country – the King and politicians – could never become the ‘masters’ of the people. Moreover, this fact was reiterated by Price at the end of his sermon when he stated:

[T]remble all ye oppressors of the world! Struggle no longer against increasing light and liberality. Restore to mankind their rights; and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together.¹⁹

Price did not use the term ‘oppressors’ to refer to Britain; as British people had greater input in determining who represented them in government and they held ‘power’ over the monarchy, as witnessed in the events of 1688 through the removal of one king for another. Moreover, Price associated the Enlightenment with ‘light and liberality’, whereas countries who had not embraced Enlightenment principles were seen as being marked with abuses. Therefore, Price was encouraging the changes which had taken place in Britain, and, in addition, he held them up as a positive exemplar for other countries. Dissenting groups were strong advocates and supporters for the distribution of this liberty and toleration. Dissenters believed in an individual’s/group’s right to overthrow tyranny and corruption. Moreover, they disagreed with the institution of Absolute Monarchy and the eighteenth century belief that ‘kings were appointed by God and answerable only to Him’.²⁰ This was one of the many differences between Dissenters and non-Dissenters. It was also one of the many differences between Price and Burke.

¹⁹ Price in Macdonald & Scherf, p. 370.

²⁰ Doyle, p. 159.

Edmund Burke was the first person to publicly oppose Price's sermon. Burke was born in Dublin, Ireland on January 12, 1729. He was the son of a Protestant father and a Roman Catholic mother. A biographer of Burke, Bertram Newman, claims that practically nothing is known of Burke's early life and other biographies do not mention much information, if any, on this period in Burke's life.²¹ The absence of biographical knowledge until Burke's late twenties or early thirties has been explained by a number of possibilities. These possibilities come in the form of rumors and include assumptions that he was in America, had a lover in the countryside, and was an unsuccessful candidate for the Chair of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow.²² However, it is more likely, through conclusions determined from scholarly research on the matter, to believe the rumor that Burke was courting Jane Nugent, who he married in the winter of 1756-57.

Burke scholars do know that his father was a lawyer and that Burke Junior, from an early age, was trained to enter this profession. Of his religious upbringing, Carl B. Cone states that:

[I]t was customary in that period for the partners of a mixed marriage to rear boys in their father's faith, girls in that of their mother. Accordingly, Edmund grew up in the Anglican Church but with a sympathy for the plight of Roman Catholics.²³

This sympathy originated in, and was encouraged by, his early education in Catholicism. From the age of five he lived in Ballyduff, in County Cork, with his paternal uncle, Patrick Nagle.²⁴ The 'objective' of this period was to instruct Burke in the Catholic religion and education, as Ballyduff was openly Catholic at this stage. Burke attained knowledge of the native Gaelic language and experienced the

²¹ Bertram Newman, *Edmund Burke* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1927), p. 3. A more recent study is Conor Cruise O'Brien's, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993). In this work assumptions and guesses were still made in regard to Burke's early life.

²² Newman, p. 8.

²³ Carl B. Cone, *Burke and the Nature of Politics: The Age of the American Revolution* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), p. 1.

²⁴ O'Brien, p. 19.

persecution which was endured by Catholics.²⁵ According to Conor Cruise O'Brien:

Patrick Nagle would have assumed, if he was not directly told, that his sister Mary [Burke's mother] would want her son to get as much as possible of a Catholic upbringing, which could be achieved with much more security in Ballyduff than in Dublin. He would also assume that Richard Burke must have no serious objection to Edmund's being brought up a Catholic, or he would not have allowed him to be sent to Ballyduff for five years.²⁶

After this period of schooling Burke was sent to a Quaker school in Ballitore, County Kildare. O'Brien states that, '[P]resumably his father thought it was time for him [Burke Junior] to be preparing for a career, as a Protestant'.²⁷ From here Burke went on to study at Trinity College. He studied a range of topics, although his father wanted him to pursue law, and demonstrated his knowledge of politics through a debating team and a newspaper which he established.²⁸ Burke Senior sent Burke to the Middle Temple in London to study law; however, Burke was not interested and it has been claimed that it was at this time that Burke Senior 'finally' cut off Burke's allowance.²⁹ The gap in biographical information (mentioned above) takes place here, as Burke seemed to disappear from sight. He 'reemerged' in 1756-57 with a fiancée, who he subsequently married, and a son was born. At this time Burke entered the literary world with his anonymous publication, *A Vindication of Natural Society: A View of the Miseries and Evils Arising to Mankind*. Newman explains this text as,

one aspect of an idea, general at the time, that political society was the result of an actual 'contract' entered into between men and men or men and their rulers, a contract which put an end to a 'state of nature' ...³⁰

²⁵ O'Brien, p. 22.

²⁶ O'Brien, pp. 20-21.

²⁷ O'Brien, p. 23.

²⁸ F. L. Lucas, *The Art of Living: Four Eighteenth-Century Minds: Hume, Horace Walpole, Burke, Benjamin Franklin* (London: Cassell and Company, 1959), p. 134.

²⁹ Lucas, p. 134.

³⁰ Newman, p. 12.

Burke's next publication, and one that gained more appraisal and influence, was *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.³¹ This work was published in 1756 and argued that the study of aesthetics should be approached from a psychological point of view. One should try to find what it was in human nature – not in material objects – which made something 'beautiful or terrible'.³² This work gave Burke a reputation as a writer and he subsequently received an offer to become the editor of the *Annual Register*, which he accepted.

In 1759 Burke entered politics through the position of private secretary to William Gerald Hamilton, who was appointed to the Board of Trade.³³ The political environments Burke engaged with led him to further develop political opinions and relationships; to build on those political ideas which had been formed during his schooling. When Hamilton was appointed to the position of Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Burke accompanied him to Ireland and viewed 'his people' through the eyes of a statesman.³⁴ This visit led to the development of Burke's opinions regarding the nature of Irish religion and religious exclusion in Ireland.³⁵ For the three decades after this visit Burke exercised considerable input with regard to certain ideas and events which affected Ireland and were argued in English parliament. The main event was the American Revolution (1775-1785) and the main ideas were those surrounding religious Dissent, religious toleration and the place of the Church within society.

³¹ The title of this work differs as some, such as Lucas, state the title as *Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful*. There also seems to be confusion among scholars as to when the work was published, with some stating the publication year as 1756 and some as 1757. For the purpose of this chapter I will refer to Newman's biography and utilize its subsequent dates and titles of publications.

³² Lucas, p. 135.

³³ Newman, p. 15.

³⁴ Newman, p. 17.

³⁵ Burke acquired knowledge of the persecution of Catholics through his schooling in Ballyduff and his father's insistence on an upbringing as a Protestant, as this would lead to more profitable employment opportunities. At a later age, and with subsequent political knowledge, Burke returned to Ireland as a political advisor and undertook the writing, *Tract Relative to the Laws against Popery in Ireland*. This *Tract* developed Burke's ideas regarding the exclusion of Catholics from political and social offices. For information see O'Brien, pp. 39-57.

Although supportive of the American Revolution and religious Dissent, Burke was not supportive of the French Revolution.³⁶ His dislike of the French Revolution produced the publication, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.³⁷ Burke's opinion of America as an English colony was sympathetic, and can be associated with both 'sides' of the debate surrounding the American Revolution. Burke strongly believed in the idea of American liberty, but also argued that America should be placed in a subordinate position to England – after all, she was one of Britain's colonies.³⁸ Burke had financial ties to America and political ties to England and its parliament, and therefore, a 'balancing act' of seeming 'friendly' to both countries was undertaken.³⁹ The aspects of, and 'reasons' for, the French Revolution were not as easily understood or accepted by Burke and other members of parliament as those principles which had underpinned the American Revolution. The French Revolution was seen as a threat to established order, the Crown, and religion, and therefore, Burke disagreed with its principles and did not encourage or offer support to the event.⁴⁰

Norman Ravitch maintains that Burke's differing support of the American and French Revolutions, and his increasing lack of support for religious Dissent, was partially the result of Price's sermon. During Burke's political career he had openly campaigned for the removal of religious restrictions such as the Test and Corporation Acts. Although religious restrictions eventually came to affect

³⁶ For information on Burke's sympathy towards the American Revolution see O'Brien, pp. 89-172. Also, for information on Burke's support of Dissenters in England see Ravitch, pp. 365-383. Although this article is not explicitly related to Burke's opinions of Dissenters, it describes Burke's differing support for Dissenters before and after Price's sermon.

³⁷ The full title of the publication is: *From Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London relative to that Event in a Letter intended to have been sent to a Gentleman in Paris (1790)*. See B. W. Hill (ed), *Edmund Burke on Government, Politics and Society* (Sussex: Harvester Press Limited, 1975), p. 279.

³⁸ Ian Harris (ed), *Edmund Burke: Pre-Revolutionary Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 199.

³⁹ Harris, pp. 199-200.

⁴⁰ Moreover, *The Literary Magazine and British Review* state that: 'Mr Burke contends that the liberties of Englishmen are not grounded on any claim of natural right, but upon established custom, and asserts this to be a better foundation ...' See '*Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London, Relative to that Event*. In a Letter intended to have been sent to a Gentleman in Paris, by the Right Hon[ourable] Edmund Burke, 8vo. 1790. Dodfley', *The Literary Magazine and British Review*, 5, 41 (December 1790), pp. 446-48.

Protestant Dissenters, they were primarily aimed at Catholics and, as mentioned above, Burke was sympathetic to the advancement of religious toleration for Catholics.

For many years Burke had been known as supportive of the rights of both Protestant dissenters and Roman Catholics in England, as he was also known – a more dangerous position – to favor the dismantling of the anti-Catholic penal system in Ireland.⁴¹

During 1789 and 1790, however, Burke's support for Dissenters changed and he insisted that:

[A] day may come for removing this Barrier [the Test and Corporation Acts]. But I am sure it is not likely to come soon, if some of the most active and leading among the Dissenters do not alter their Conduct. As long as they continue to claim what they desire as a Right; so long will they find it difficult to obtain As long as they shew, not a cool, temperate, conscientious dissent, but a warm, animated and acrimonious Hostility against the Church establishment, and by all their words and actions manifest a settled design of subverting it, so long will they, in my poor opinion, be met, in any attempt whatsoever of the least consequence, with a decided opposition.⁴²

The French Revolution threatened the Established order. If religious Dissenters chose to support the French Revolution then Burke would not support their assault on religious restrictions. The audience that Price preached to and the content of his speech frightened Burke, as it did many politicians of the time. Cone insists that after 1789 the 'very foundations of the Christian social order were assaulted'.⁴³ He maintains that Burke believed that, '[T]he French Revolution threatened destruction to the just, Christian order of western Europe because, Burke insisted, its principles were alien and hostile to the usages and principles of the social order that had developed in Europe through the centuries'.⁴⁴ If the French Revolution was genuinely causing the 'destruction' of Christianity, it can be argued that the principles and beliefs of Dissenters would also have been seen as 'unsympathetic'

⁴¹ Ravitch, p. 2.

⁴² Burke in Ravitch, p. 4.

⁴³ Burke in Carl B. Cone, *Burke and the Nature of Politics: The Age of the French Revolution* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1964), p. 5.

⁴⁴ Cone (1964), p. 7.

to Christendom. Perhaps the fundamental beliefs of Dissenters and those which drove the French Revolution were seen as identical, and therefore, they were both considered dangerous. Furthermore, if Burke understood that the French Revolution was destructive, he would also have believed that Price's speech, through the audience and reputation generated, would have the same ruinous effect on society and Established structures.

A number of points which Price made in his speech can be investigated for the extent to which they would have led Burke to retract his support for Dissenters and the French Revolution. As is stated above, Dissenters advocated that the public should have greater say in who represented them in politics. If the monarchy and government were corrupt then citizens had the right to overthrow those institutions and further campaign for greater freedom within religion. These points were at the centre of Price's speech. Those concerned with the French Revolution, it could be argued, were campaigning for religious toleration, an untyrannical government and king, and for better rights. Burke supported these objectives when they were linked with Dissenters and Catholics. Moreover, he campaigned to remove restrictions which hindered these two religious groups. Although British religious groups and French Revolutionary groups advocated for the removal of similar restrictive impediments, the way in which French people were attempting to supersede these limitations worried Burke. The violence associated with the French Revolution was viewed as unnecessary. Burke's displeasure and disgust over events underway in France is apparent in his description of the capture of the royal family.

Two had been selected from the unprovoked, unresisted, promiscuous slaughter, which was made of the gentlemen of birth and family composed the king's body guard. These two gentlemen, with all the parade of an execution of justice, were cruelly and publickly [sic] dragged to the block, and beheaded in the great court of the palace. Their heads were stuck upon spears, and led the procession; whilst the royal captives who followed in the train were slowly moved along, amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the

unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women.⁴⁵

He stated that these events were unprovoked, therefore insisting that they were unnecessary. Moreover, the treatment of the royal captives did not correlate to their social standing and Burke compared their attackers conduct with the ‘furies of hell’ – associating it with irreligious behaviour. Such activity was not enlightened or rational and it demonstrated a disregard for authority. Therefore, if Dissenters supported the French Revolution then they could also support this type of behaviour – behaviour which was seen to destroy Established institutions within society, such as the monarchy and religion. Therefore, the general diminution of support for Dissenters becomes more explicable if the thoughts and political affiliations of politicians such as Burke are investigated.⁴⁶

Price had advocated Universal Benevolence and equality for all people in the social and political arena. Dissenters believed that equality of rights would put an end to religious persecutions. Burke, however, did not support these aspects of Dissenting arguments. Although Burke campaigned for religious toleration, he did not advocate equal rights. Furthermore, he wanted political hierarchies retained as he believed that the Rockingham Whigs, and by association all politicians, were ‘natural rulers, a sort of patrician elite with a presumptive right to power’.⁴⁷ The French Revolution threatened the standing of this ‘patrician elite’. Burke believed that only ‘certain’ men were fit to hold office and positions of responsibility; therefore, only certain ‘types’ of people should, or even could, be ‘allowed’ into political and social positions. The Rockingham Whigs believed that they took part in ‘aristocratic ... politics’, maintaining ‘aristocratic trusteeship’ and ‘preserving a

⁴⁵ Edmund Burke, ‘*Reflections on the Revolution on France*’, in *The Vindications*, edited by D. L. Macdonald & Kathleen Scherf, p. 372.

⁴⁶ Furthermore, Radcliffe claims that non-Dissenters viewed the use of the principles of Universal Benevolence by Dissenters as attempts to eradicate patriotism. He goes on to state that Burke saw ‘signs [that] universal benevolence [would] function in Britain as ... in France [And that] [O]ther British opponents of the Revolution followed Burke in seeing universal benevolence as a threat to British patriotism’, p. 235.

⁴⁷ John Brewer, ‘Rockingham, Burke and Whig Political Argument’, *The Historical Journal*, 18, 1 (March 1975), p. 190.

patrician, aristocratic, propertied notion of politics'.⁴⁸ John Brewer argues that Rockingham Whigs were heavily influenced by the presence of the constitution and worked, throughout the 1780s-90s, in maintaining its importance. He goes on to state that Burke,

hammered home in the *Reflections*, and pleaded obsessively in the *Appeal*, [that] one could not have a theory of politics based on property, classification, and a tripartite constitution, and simultaneously support those whose political beliefs were based on personal, natural rights. To do so was to invite political and social suicide or, at least, tacitly to condemn all that one stood for.⁴⁹

Therefore, Burke viewed the ideologies and motives of revolutionary and dissenting individuals and groups with mixed opinions. For Burke, the French Revolution was an 'undesirable' social phenomenon. According to Brewer, the Revolution was uncongenial with Burke's political views. He insists that Burke 'continued to defend his patrician view of politics and, by vigorously attacking natural rights arguments, sought to combat the threat that reform and revolution posed to his political beliefs'.⁵⁰ Price was a 'threat' which Burke laboured to combat, as he was a disseminator of ideologies which attacked the foundations of Burke's political doctrines. As a result, Burke attacked Price's religious and social views as well as including a personal element within his argument. Burke's *Reflections* were extremely influential, however, as in the case of Price's speech, with people who held similar political views and fears; Wollstonecraft, as one of the first people to respond to Burke, was not one of these 'supporters'.

Wollstonecraft responded to Burke's *Reflections* with her publication *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. This publication was in pamphlet form and was written quickly. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf state that Wollstonecraft 'wrote quickly and passionately' with each written sheet being 'set, printed, and corrected' by Wollstonecraft's publisher Joseph Johnson.⁵¹ There was a first edition, which

⁴⁸ Brewer, pp. 195, 197, 191.

⁴⁹ Brewer, p. 199.

⁵⁰ Brewer, p. 200.

⁵¹ Macdonald & Scherf, p. 9.

did not bear Wollstonecraft's name, and which appeared in early December 1790. The reason for the missing name is not explained in works dedicated to this *Vindication*. However, it can be argued that it was a consequence of eighteenth century society's rigid divisions of male and female 'worlds'.⁵² On the fourteenth of December the second edition appeared which named Wollstonecraft as the author. Macdonald and Scherf cite Gerald P. Tyson as stating that, '[O]nly six weeks elapsed from the appearance of Burke's *Reflections* in November to the second 'corrected' edition of Wollstonecraft's answer'.⁵³ Johnson was influential in regard to Wollstonecraft's ability to produce both editions in quick succession. He supplied the means for Wollstonecraft to overcome the divisions of the male and female 'worlds' and provided Wollstonecraft with encouragement to write the first response to Burke's *Reflections*.

Joseph Johnson was born on the fifteenth of November 1738, at Everton, near Liverpool. He was the second son of a Baptist landowner and businessman, John Johnson. In 1752 Johnson moved to London and in 1754 was apprenticed to a publisher, George Keith. Keith was a member of the Musicians' Company and primarily published 'religious tracts based at the Bible and Crown Church'.⁵⁴ In 1761 Johnson was freed from his apprenticeship and he subsequently set up his own shop. He moved a number of times and eventually resided, in 1770, at St Paul's Churchyard. The first well-known work which Johnson published was Joseph Priestley's, *Essay on the First Principle of Government* in 1768. The relationship brought about through this publication continued throughout Johnson's life and led to his introduction, through Priestley, to a number of other radicals.⁵⁵ Johnson's

⁵² These divisions were evident in a number of areas of eighteenth century life. Kelly draws attention to the divisions within the literary 'world' as this was largely a 'male area'. See Kelly, pp. 9-11.

⁵³ Gerald P. Tyson, *Joseph Johnson: A Liberal Publisher* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979), cited in D. L. Macdonald & Kathleen Scherf, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Carol Hall, 'Johnson, Joseph (1738-1809)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000: Volume 30 [Jenner-Keayne]*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 282.

⁵⁵ Hall, pp. 282-83. Hall mentions a number of people who Johnson was acquainted with and highlights the connection he had, either religiously or through his printing business, with them.

‘circle’ of friends would come to include Thomas Paine, William Godwin, William Cowper, Richard Price, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Mary Wollstonecraft.⁵⁶

Johnson’s printing business was extremely important to the ‘radical’ members of English society as he was the publisher to whom most turned. He began his career printing political and theological tracts, mainly related to Unitarianism.⁵⁷ To these publications he added works on medicine, surgery, science, educational books and works of literature.⁵⁸ These topics gave him contact with a number of influential thinkers of the age and these thinkers provided an intellectual milieu which fostered radical ideas. Johnson held ‘famous’ weekly three o’clock dinners which a range of intellectuals, with differing opinions regarding politics and religion, would attend.⁵⁹ Johnson enabled the publication of a number of radical and influential texts and provided the environment for radical ideas to be discussed away from the public. His publication of highly influential radical works was most noted during periods of upheaval in England. For example, Johnson published Benjamin Franklin’s essays on politics during the height of the American War of Independence and Richard Price’s sermon, *On the Love of Our Country* during the French Revolution.

Carol Hall states that ‘Johnson published most of the key responses to Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)’.⁶⁰ Of these responses, the most noted publication by Johnson was Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. Johnson became acquainted with Wollstonecraft from 1787 when, due to her connection with Price, she attended one of Johnson’s three o’clock dinners.⁶¹ Janet Todd states that Johnson was ‘reputed to be cautious and mean, but this

⁵⁶ Hall, pp. 282-84.

⁵⁷ Joseph Priestley was influential in regards to Johnson’s acquisition of knowledge and belief in this faith.

⁵⁸ Gordon, *A New Genus*, p. 124.

⁵⁹ Jon Mee, ‘Johnson, Joseph (1738-1809)’, in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment: Volume Two [Enthusiasm-Lyceums and Museums]*, edited by Alan Charles Kors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 301.

⁶⁰ Hall, p. 283.

⁶¹ Virginia Woolf wrote that the men who attended these dinners: ‘called her simply “Wollstonecraft”, as if it did not matter whether she were married or unmarried, as if she were a young man like themselves’. See Virginia Woolf, ‘Four Figures: III. Mary Wollstonecraft’ in *The Common Reader: Second Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 157.

reputation was not borne out by his dealings with Wollstonecraft'.⁶² Johnson became a type of father figure for Wollstonecraft and she wrote: 'I never had a father or a brother. You are both to me'.⁶³ He became a friend, father figure, mentor and employer for Wollstonecraft and helped her during her numerous financial and personal 'episodes'.

Wollstonecraft informed her sisters, after her first published work was released, that she intended 'to live by literary exertions and be independent'.⁶⁴

'I am determined!' she told Johnson. 'Your sex generally laugh at female determinations; but let me tell you, I never resolved to do any thing of consequence, that I did not adhere resolutely to it, till I had accomplished my purpose, improbable as it might have appeared to a more timid mind'.⁶⁵

Johnson was enthusiastic and encouraging of Wollstonecraft's literary endeavours and this was evident by Wollstonecraft's confidence in the passage above. Johnson's encouragement would have also made it somewhat easier for Wollstonecraft to assume a literary occupation, than would have been the case for a radical female writer with no connections to a publisher of radical texts.⁶⁶ Lyndall Gordon argues that Johnson 'cared' for Wollstonecraft and highlights their relationship as being one of dependence on Wollstonecraft's part.

Without your [Johnson's] humane and *delicate* assistance, how many obstacles should I not have had to encounter – too often should I have been out of patience with my fellow-creatures, whom I wish to love! – Allow me to love you, my dear sir, and call friend a being I respect [original emphasis].⁶⁷

Todd further highlights a dependent relationship:

⁶² Todd, p. 117.

⁶³ Gordon, *A New Genus*, p. 125.

⁶⁴ Todd, p. 123.

⁶⁵ Wollstonecraft in Gordon, *A New Genus*, p. 126.

⁶⁶ Mary A. Waters insists that, 'Wollstonecraft's work for Johnson was central to her own intellectual growth; everything that she read and wrote contributed to her fund of knowledge and her cognitive training, laying the groundwork for the books for which she is best remembered'. See Mary A. Waters, "'The First of a New Genus": Mary Wollstonecraft as a Literary Critic and Mentor to Mary Hays', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37, 3 (Spring 2004), p. 416.

⁶⁷ Wollstonecraft in Gordon, *A New Genus*, p. 127.

[O]nce when she [Wollstonecraft] felt ashamed that she had indiscreetly revealed a secret, she turned to Johnson as confessor, giving full hyperbolic vent to her erratic symptoms Johnson himself was not expressive and tended to think that emotions might better be controlled than displayed. So at times he met Wollstonecraft's depressive panics with a touch more detachment than she wished. One night in particular he seemed more stoical than was proper, and she accused him of being 'very unkind, nay, very unfeeling'.⁶⁸

However, as argued above, when Wollstonecraft had misgivings about her writing Johnson was a continual source of encouragement. Johnson and Wollstonecraft worked well together and Johnson's support was most needed by Wollstonecraft during the writing of her first *Vindication*. She felt pressure as a woman undertaking a political piece of writing – one which refuted Burke and supported the French Revolution. Johnson realized this difficulty and encouraged Wollstonecraft to produce the text.⁶⁹ It was a literary work based on Wollstonecraft's dislike of primogeniture and class divisions, as well as being an attack on the political and religious 'mainstream' ideas and institutions evident in eighteenth century England. Furthermore, it was a 'radical' look at these Established orders and international affairs from the eyes of a woman.

The intellectual pursuit Wollstonecraft undertook became popular with the public of eighteenth century England, and this was evident in the fact that there were two editions in quick succession. As Wollstonecraft was a 'radical' intellectual it can be argued that her tract would have been most popular with Dissenters and radicals. However, the nature of the work made it appealing to a range of people; as there is no numerical 'evidence' available from the eighteenth century regarding the reception of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* contemporary scholars can only make educated conclusions on the exact audience most appealed to. It was an attack on aristocracy, an encouragement of Dissent and 'non-normal' conformity, an

⁶⁸ Todd, p. 142. Throughout her biography, Todd refers to Wollstonecraft's depressive and negative behaviour and attitude; however, particular attention is paid to, pp. 116-43.

⁶⁹ Macdonald & Scherf, pp. 9-10.

affirmation that women were entitled to the same rights as men, and an encouragement of the extension of rights to all citizens.

The advertisement for this *Vindication* highlighted Wollstonecraft's purpose for the text immediately. She aimed to 'decipher' the ramblings of Burke and explain, with more clarity, that people deserved more rights than some currently enjoyed in society.⁷⁰ Wollstonecraft stated:

[M]any pages of the following letter [Burke's *Reflections*] were the effusions of the moment; but, swelling imperceptibly of a considerable size, the idea was suggested of publishing a short vindication of *the Rights of Men*.

Not having leisure or patience to follow this desultory writer [Burke] through all the devious tracks in which his fancy has started fresh game, I have confined my strictures, in great measure, to the grand principles at which he has leveled many ingenious arguments in a very specious garb.⁷¹

Wollstonecraft began her discussion by stating the 'wrongs' in Burke, either within his writing or personally.

I glow with indignation when I attempt, methodically, to unravel your slavish paradoxes, in which I can find no fixed first principle to refute; I shall not, therefore, condescend to shew where you affirm in one page what you deny in another; and how frequently you draw conclusions without any previous premises: - it would be something like cowardice to fight with a man who had never exercised the weapons with which his opponent chose to combat, and irksome to refute sentence after sentence in which the latent spirit of tyranny appeared.⁷²

In this excerpt Wollstonecraft was declaring that her work was rational and reasoned – the opposite of Burke's.⁷³ I believe that the 'weapons' which Wollstonecraft utilized were her rationality, which in turn fostered her radicalism.

⁷⁰ Moreover, Mary Poovey claims that Wollstonecraft viewed the *Reflections* as containing 'no reasoned argument at all; it [was] ... merely an expression of Burke's obsessive vanity, a noisy appeal for public attention'. See Mary Poovey, 'Man's Discourse, Woman's Heart: Mary Wollstonecraft Two Vindications', in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 59.

⁷¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 5.

⁷² Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 10.

⁷³ Spence highlights Wollstonecraft's understanding of the phenomena, and use of, 'reason'. He gives examples of Wollstonecraft's 'type' of reason and discusses her ability to interweave reason with religion, pp. 106-07, 109-10, 111-12.

These led Wollstonecraft to have fundamentally different views to Burke – views which disputed the standing of Established institutions in England. *Reflections* supported and reinforced Burke’s ideas regarding the position and integrity of primogeniture and did not advocate for any change to the present social, political, or religious structures. Moreover, Wollstonecraft believed that Burke only had the ‘interests of the rich’ in mind when he wrote the *Reflections*.⁷⁴

It is, Sir, *possible* to render the poor happier in this world, without depriving them of the consolation which you gratuitously grant them in the next. They have a right to more comfort than they at present enjoy; and more comfort might be afforded them, without encroaching on the pleasures of the rich: not now waiting to enquire whether the rich have any right to exclusive pleasures [original emphasis].⁷⁵

Burke argued throughout his *Reflections* that the French Revolution disrupted and endangered the established institutions in England, as well as ‘wrongly’ questioning the validity of the higher classes. Wollstonecraft dedicated a large portion of her *Vindication* suggesting that the higher classes were not entitled to the ‘exclusive pleasures’ which they received. Moreover, she did so within a theological framework.

Wollstonecraft stated that aristocratic men had begun to ‘thank God [they were] not like other men’.⁷⁶ This was understandable as the poorer classes had been reduced to positions of ‘idleness, drunkenness, and the whole train of vices which [Burke] stigmatise[d] as gross’; while the aristocratic classes advanced into positions of power through primogeniture and hereditary inheritance – advances which required no work on their part.⁷⁷ Wollstonecraft stated that, ‘[E]nvy [had] built a wall of separation, that made the poor hate, whilst they bent to their superiors; who, on their part, stepped aside to avoid the loathsome sight of human misery’.⁷⁸ These relationships and the negative attitudes from the aristocratic classes regarding the

⁷⁴ James Conniff, ‘Edmund Burke and His Critics: The Case of Mary Wollstonecraft’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60, 2 (April 1999), p. 306.

⁷⁵ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 55.

⁷⁶ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 16-17.

⁷⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 16-17.

⁷⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 58.

poorer classes and vice versa, did not adhere to the principles of Universal Benevolence or liberty and therefore, Wollstonecraft argued that the privileges of aristocrats needed to be eradicated.

Wollstonecraft argued that all men were born with rights and were all elevated to rational creatures because of this. Men were born above 'brute creation'; however, societal practices undermined these 'natural rights'.⁷⁹ 'Class' structures enabled different rights to be associated with different 'types of people' – with the higher classes claiming sole access to rationality and the lower classes having limited or no legal rights at all. Wollstonecraft stated that these rights were *natural*, as they had not been passed 'from their forefathers but, from God', and therefore, prescription could never take them away from the people.⁸⁰ However, as Wollstonecraft undertook a radical writing on the rights of men and had to argue that these rights were passed from God, it is apparent that contemporary society did not see rights as natural. Moreover, Wollstonecraft argued that this view could only be followed – and it would be going against 'God's will' if it was not adhered to – if a reasoned and rational religion was embraced. After all, it was this religion which would lead to liberty and a 'greater purity of morals'.⁸¹ Moreover, Wollstonecraft stated that at the present time – in the 1790s – happiness did not 'dwell' in society and that the people wandered 'to and fro in a vale of darkness as well as tears'.⁸² Therefore, Wollstonecraft alluded to the 'darkness' present in the 1790s, which was brought on by a religion that was not rational or reasoned. An acceptance of the idea that people were 'created' with natural rights was a step towards lifting the vale of 'darkness' as it would mean a dissemination of liberty and equality. Moreover, Wollstonecraft wrote that she was a tool in lifting the vale as she was using the reason God had given her to communicate 'good'.⁸³

⁷⁹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 14.

⁸⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 14, 51-2.

⁸¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 33.

⁸² Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 33.

⁸³ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 34.

It was reason which Wollstonecraft drew on to analyse the unjust procedures and practices of the clergy and the church.⁸⁴ Wollstonecraft argued that one way of the church acquiring land was the dissemination and encouragement of the idea that a man would be saved from purgatory and damnation if he gifted his property to the church.⁸⁵ Wollstonecraft adhered to the Rational Dissenting principle of a religion without superstition and therefore, did not believe in the existence of Hell or the threat of damnation. Wollstonecraft mentioned Hell at the end of her *Vindication*; however, the context which she placed it in differed from normative eighteenth century understandings of it.

Why is our fancy to be appalled by terrific perspectives of a hell beyond the grave? – Hell stalks abroad; – the lash resounds on the slave’s naked sides; and the sick wretch, who can no longer earn the sour bread of unremitting labour, steals to a ditch to bid the world a long good night ...⁸⁶

Hell in this context was not theological – it was not a place ‘used’ by people who were ‘sentenced’ to spiritual damnation. ‘Hell’ was evident in the eighteenth century within societal conditions and norms – it was evident in the slave trade and the unequal opportunities afforded to different classes, which in turn led to unnecessary discomfort in life. The lack of equality and liberty within England led to hellish social conditions for certain groups within society. Moreover, Wollstonecraft stated that if men listened to the ‘suggestions of reason’ they would undertake to ‘work out [their] ... own salvation’ and would not pay the ‘exorbitant price for absolution’ which was encouraged by priests.⁸⁷ This practice showed no reasoning or rationality and the priests were the only ones to gain; although men were ‘saved’ from purgatory – a superstitious guarantee. Therefore, Wollstonecraft highlighted the unjust nature of the clergy and what she perceived as the purpose behind some evident clerical practices. Burke supported these practices as they

⁸⁴ Sheridan Gilley has undertaken a comparative study of the influence of the church within Enlightened England. As a result he highlights the position and procedures of the church ‘before’ this ‘movement’. See Sheridan Gilley, ‘Christianity and Enlightenment: An Historical Survey’, *History of European Ideas*, 1, 2 (1981), pp. 103-21.

⁸⁵ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 39.

⁸⁶ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 58.

⁸⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 39.

adhered to the past ‘honourable days’ [original emphasis]; however, Wollstonecraft only saw the ‘vale of darkness’ surrounding these procedures. Moreover, it was a means for the ‘higher classes’ to acquire land from the poor, and as the church was closely connected to the monarchy and nobility, those institutions gained more land also.

Once the *Vindication* had been distributed amongst society, Wollstonecraft was accused of being an atheist as people believed that she was attacking religion. However, throughout the *Vindication* Wollstonecraft presented arguments which enforced her adherence and close relationship with religion. She stated:

that the cultivation of the understanding, and refinement of the affections, naturally make a man religious, I am proud to acknowledge What else can render us consigned 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 the Being, of whom we are a faint image? and in this sublime solitude the world appears to contain only the Creator and the creature, of whose happiness he is the source. – These are human feelings; but I know not of any common nature or common relation amongst men but what results from reason.⁸⁸

Wollstonecraft stated that as civilization advanced, people acquired religion and knowledge. Moreover, Wollstonecraft argued that people were a faint image of God and happiness rested on a reverence of Him. She advocated for a strong religious presence in people’s lives as well as in society, but I believe that she advocated for a certain type of religion – one that was rational and reasoned. Moreover, Wollstonecraft argued that reason led people to a ‘type’ of religion which enabled commonalities to exist amongst men – commonalities which could overcome the unjust position of different classes in society and the presence of unjust, unfair institutions. Furthermore, in regard to societal institutions, Wollstonecraft claimed: ‘I only attack the foundation’, as this was where corruption began and was distributed from.⁸⁹ However, the claim that Wollstonecraft was an atheist would have been beneficial for Burke as Wollstonecraft’s arguments would

⁸⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 39-40.

⁸⁹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 49.

have been discredited, and therefore, just like Price, Wollstonecraft as a ‘threat’ would have been overcome – being an ‘atheist’ in the eighteenth century was a negative label.⁹⁰

Wollstonecraft advocated for an Enlightened, rational England, not an England void of religion. She argued that both evil and good were created in the ‘scheme of Providence, when this world was contemplated in the Divine mind’.⁹¹ Wollstonecraft stated that every man should be determined to ‘separate light from darkness’ and to ‘diffuse happiness’.⁹² She saw a happier society emerging from an adherence to these principles. The separation of light from darkness would enable the individual to determine what was evil and what was good; it would lead to an enlightened society. Corruption would diminish in institutions as people within them would seek the ‘good’ path and people would undertake the act of ‘diffusing happiness’. Therefore, Wollstonecraft argued that the ‘remedy’ for societal corruption was found in a rational and enlightened understanding of God. Moreover, Wollstonecraft stated that: ‘[S]miles and premiums might encourage cleanliness, industry, and emulation. – A garden more inviting than Eden would then meet the eye ...’⁹³ The religious imagery is evident and Wollstonecraft viewed an enlightened country resembling something greater than Eden – a place people would be happy to live in. Furthermore, it would be a place where every person had an opportunity to pursue happiness, equality, and industry, as well as virtue and knowledge.

⁹⁰ Green, during his discussion of the ‘Enlightenment’ period, insists that: ‘[M]ore serious problems were posed by the spread of ideas which were either relatively new or hitherto insignificant in England, such as atheism, Socinianism, Arianism and Deism ...’, p. 175. Michael Mullett, in his analysis of ‘radical sects and dissenting churches’ states that: ‘[T]he sectarians, he [Puritan minister Thomas Edwards] wrote, threatened, through what he regarded as the curse of religious toleration, to sever the links between magistracy and religion; they undermined Christianity and championed atheism, endangered the family and upheld licence [sic] along with all forms of immorality’. See Michael Mullett, ‘Radical Sects and Dissenting Churches, 1600-1750’, in *A History of Religion in Britain*, edited by Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils, p. 197. Therefore, atheism was known as a ‘dangerous problem’ and was seen as undermining family, fostering immorality, and endangering religion.

⁹¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 52.

⁹² Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 52.

⁹³ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 56.

Wollstonecraft argued that the enlightened country which came out of a rational and reasoned religion would benefit both men and women. Relationships between both sexes would become more equal and this ‘equality’ would be beneficial to society. Burke had convinced women that God had meant for them to be pleasing; that God did not mean for women to ‘cultivate the moral virtues that might chance to excite respect’.⁹⁴ Moreover, Burke argued that ‘truth, fortitude, and humanity’ were ‘manly’ morals and women ‘should ‘learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, and nickname God’s creatures’’.⁹⁵ Burke argued that these divisions were inscribed by Nature and it was Nature who had made ‘beauty independent of reason’.⁹⁶ However, Wollstonecraft argued that this could not be correct; that Nature could not have created these divisions and Burke was simply exculpating himself from these opinions. Moreover, Wollstonecraft believed that it was the dissemination of these opinions which led women to be ‘*little, smooth, delicate, fair* creatures [original emphasis]’; that made women neglect ‘morals to secure beauty’.⁹⁷ An enlightened society would enable women to acquire the virtue and knowledge given to them by God and it would ‘allow’ them to use it as God intended. Moreover, women would become more moralistic and reasoned through their greater equality; men telling women that they were soft and lacked intellect made women portray these characteristics.

Price and Wollstonecraft – as well as Johnson by association – argued for a change within the political, social, and religious institutions of the eighteenth century in order that a kind, prosperous and benevolent society could exist. A benevolent society would ‘fix’ the inequalities that were experienced by different groups of people and Wollstonecraft highlighted the consequences of this positive step through a theological frame of thought. She argued that the current society was shrouded in darkness due to its beliefs – beliefs which stemmed from a superstitious religion. Wollstonecraft advocated for the dissemination of a rational and reasoned

⁹⁴ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 45.

⁹⁵ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 45.

⁹⁶ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 45.

⁹⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 45.

religion which would encourage equal rights and an untyrannical government and monarch. Moreover, she advocated for the dissemination of ideologies and views which were the opposite of Burke's 'ingenious arguments' and 'slavish paradoxes'. Burke argued that the French Revolution – an event stemming from the desire for equality and untyrannical governments, something Wollstonecraft and Price supported – undermined Established institutions. He argued that British patriotism, the monarch and Established institutions had a rightful primary place within society and should not be undermined. The arguments of Wollstonecraft threatened Burke's beliefs and his thoughts about the 'old system'. Moreover, they were arguments which Wollstonecraft would continue in her next literary work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft used this work to reinforce the need for, and benefits of, an equal and untyrannical government and society. She elaborated on arguments found in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, and did so through theological arguments and the utilization of passages from the Bible. Moreover, Wollstonecraft in her second *Vindication*, more so than the first, explicitly campaigned for equality between men and women. The second *Vindication* came to highlight the damage which inequality caused: it led to a lack of virtue and morals in women, which endangered the foundations of society as women were seen to be the caregivers and primary educators of future generations.

Chapter Three:

‘Religion, pure source of comfort in this vale of tears!’: Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* of female rights¹

This chapter is based on an analysis of Wollstonecraft’s, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. It proposes to determine whether Wollstonecraft used religious language or imagery within her arguments and, if so, to analyse how she utilized a theological framework to do so.² Furthermore, I will highlight the use of religion within her arguments concerning education, the reform of the female character, Nature and rights, the aristocracy, and the institution of marriage. There are a number of instances throughout Wollstonecraft’s work where she referred to passages from the Bible; however, as these references were generally included at the end of a statement or sentence, they are not always included in my analysis. Moreover, the *presence* of Biblical passages begins to highlight Wollstonecraft’s use of religion and a theological ideas. Furthermore, the religious imagery and language discussed in my analysis is vast in scope and the number of references to religion is high. As some have been left out due to limitations on space, this should only further highlight the extent to which Wollstonecraft’s second *Vindication* was theologically informed.

Written in 1792, the second *Vindication* was a political work which advocated dramatic changes to eighteenth century society. The work was written under similar technological constraints and economic pressures as those which Wollstonecraft experienced when she wrote her first *Vindication*. Furthermore, Christine M. Skolnik insists that it was a ‘passionate’ response ‘to injustices which

¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft: Volume 5*, edited by Janet Todd & Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering, 1989), p. 232.

² ‘For although in our secular age, historians of feminism treat Wollstonecraft’s arguments as if it were secular, in fact her feminism was very much an expression of religious belief’. See Patricia Howell Michaelson, ‘Religious Bases of Eighteenth Century Feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Quakers’, *Women’s Studies*, 22 (1993), pp. 282, 289.

she [Wollstonecraft] felt deeply'.³ Skolnik also states that the arguments in the first and second *Vindications* overlapped, as Wollstonecraft argued 'for women's rights within her larger argument about the rights of man, and argue[d] for human rights within her argument of the subjugation of woman'.⁴ Wollstonecraft herself stated her intention as such:

I plead for my sex – not for myself. Independence I have long considered as the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue – and independence I will ever secure by contracting my wants, though I were to live on a barren heath.⁵

Wollstonecraft appealed for a change which would see women occupy a more positive and equal position in society. Amy Elizabeth Smith maintains that Wollstonecraft's purpose in writing this piece was to 'help stimulate conditions that would "improve manners"'.⁶ Wollstonecraft referred to this improvement as a 'revolution in female manners'. She argued that this 'improvement' would be achieved when women were given greater independence, education and rights within society.

Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* included intense refutations to the arguments and writings of a number of authors. These arguments primarily came from the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Milton, James Fordyce and Dr John Gregory. Wollstonecraft quoted these authors' works at length. Their arguments were positive affirmations of those principles which Wollstonecraft was advocating a change to. These authors' discussed the positives of the existing social system,

³ Christine M. Skolnik, 'Wollstonecraft's Dislocation of the Masculine Sublime: A Vindication', *Rhetorica*, 21, 4 (Autumn 2003), pp. 206-07.

⁴ Skolnik, p. 208. Ewa Badowska asserts, however, that Claudia Johnson saw a different relationship between Wollstonecraft's discussions related to rights within the two *Vindications*. She stated: 'Johnson's Wollstonecraft is obsessively preoccupied with the masculinity of men, and her feminist arguments are a mere aftereffect of her "real" interest in manhood. In Johnson's reading, Wollstonecraft blames the erosion of gender codes on the progressive sentimentalization of chivalric manhood (especially by Burke) and the resulting feminization of men'. See Ewa Badowska, 'The Anorexic Body of Liberal Feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 17, 2 (Autumn 1998), p. 292.

⁵ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 65.

⁶ Amy Elizabeth Smith, 'Roles for Readers in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*', *Studies in English Literature*, 32, 3 (Summer 1992), p. 556.

arguing that the position of women within society was 'correct'. Rousseau was a primary target for Wollstonecraft.⁷ He argued that the education system did not need to be changed and insisted that women were weak and naturally inferior to men.

[Rousseau argued that] ... the education of women should always be relative to the men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable: these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy.⁸

Contestations to these arguments were at the core of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*. She utilized these authors' works to highlight the ideologies which were damaging eighteenth century society. Moreover, these views instilled in Wollstonecraft those ideas which she would come to refute. Rousseau was the author who most resembled those ideologies which Wollstonecraft believed reinforced female subordination, thereby making him a main literary opponent.⁹

Throughout this *Vindication* Wollstonecraft advocated for a change to the eighteenth century schooling system in England. Her dislike of the aristocracy spilled over to a dislike of private schooling and Wollstonecraft discussed the evils of this institution at length.¹⁰ Wollstonecraft proposed a national schooling system where the principles of a public school and those of a private school would be incorporated into one entity.¹¹ Wollstonecraft argued that the education available to girls needed to be changed drastically so that their education resembled something

⁷ Caine discusses the arguments of Rousseau and highlights some examples of why he may have been a primary target within Wollstonecraft's refutations. See Caine, *English Feminism*, pp. 18, 31-32.

⁸ Rousseau in Todd & Butler, p. 149.

⁹ Anne K. Mellor maintains that Wollstonecraft attacked Rousseau 'differently'. She claims that Wollstonecraft, 'still cherished Rousseau's political and educational doctrines, his emphasis on the development of both reason and the emotions, and his commitment to individual choice, creative thinking, and the social contract'. See Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 35-36.

¹⁰ See 'On National Education', in Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 229-50.

¹¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 239-40.

similar to that available to boys.¹² The educational structures set down for boys and girls contained very different principles and activities. Male education included lessons in reason, politics, economics and physical exercise, to name some curriculum areas; whereas girls' education involved lessons in domestic duties, such as needlepoint, and lessons in how to be beautiful and an obedient wife.¹³ These areas of study reinforced the social positions available to males and females.

Private schools were generally for male aristocratic children. Wollstonecraft argued that these schools taught boys how to be corrupt, effeminate, and house a yearning for power. The national educational system which Wollstonecraft proposed would remedy these negatives through a wider educational curriculum, greater outdoor education and an underlying education in relationships.¹⁴ The most profound change to the eighteenth century schooling system Wollstonecraft advocated was that it should educate both boys and girls together. Wollstonecraft proposed a school that did not distinguish between gender or class. Orrin Wang insists that this change was not meant to 'efface sexual difference ... instead, [Wollstonecraft was] ... attempting to disrupt the imprisoning codification of sexual identity ...'¹⁵ Wollstonecraft believed that this type of school would benefit the minds of children, the relationships between men and women and husbands and wives, and would allow girls to become more enlightened through the eradication of distinctions of gender and sex. Distinctions between boys and girls would disappear, perhaps except for a distinction related to strength, and the negative stereotypes which

¹² Smith states in her article: 'Wollstonecraft further strengthens her argument advocating reformed female education by issuing challenges to men, also expressed in the semi-imperative mood. She argues that if what she is calling for is so unnatural – if women truly are not rational creatures – then educating them properly will be unproductive. But why not, she questions, try the experiment and find out?', p. 566.

¹³ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 113, 117.

¹⁴ Wollstonecraft foresaw a curriculum which included: '[R]eading, writing, arithmetic, natural history, and some simple experiments in natural philosophy ...; but these pursuits should never encroach on gymnastic plays in the open air. The elements of religion, history, the history of man, and politics, might also be taught by conversations, in the socratic form'. See Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 240. Women should also be taught, in public schools the 'elements of anatomy and medicine, not only to enable them to take proper care of their own health, but to make them rational nurses of their infants, parents, and husbands ...' See Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 249.

¹⁵ Wang, p. 134.

surrounded female intellect and their ability to reason would diminish.¹⁶ Wollstonecraft argued that once women were educated – and through their close association with boys from a young age – a woman would marry someone she genuinely loved and her attitude towards her home and her children would become considerably more positive.¹⁷ The mother would nurse her children and would not be in constant want of material objects as her mind would have developed beyond this perceived ‘need’.¹⁸

Wollstonecraft argued that children, and mostly female children, were under constant supervision by either their parents or a nanny and were never left to develop their minds by themselves. She insisted that, ‘[T]he child is not left a moment to its own direction, particularly a girl, and thus rendered dependent – dependence is called natural’.¹⁹ Wollstonecraft actively drew on the works of Rousseau to argue that the education, however meager, which female children received, led them to the docile and dependent role which would mark their later life. According to Rousseau, female children were fond of dolls from birth. Wollstonecraft refuted this, maintaining that if they were never given a chance to be fond of anything else, especially anything ‘male’, how else were they to be perceived? Wollstonecraft argued that mature men could not step outside the environment which surrounded them, and therefore maintained that the activities and characteristics of young female girls were determined by the confines of their surrounding influences, not by anything considered to be from ‘nature’.²⁰ Wollstonecraft further argued that ‘[G]irls and boys, in short, would play harmlessly together, if the distinction of sex was not inculcated long before nature

¹⁶ The only distinction which Wollstonecraft saw as remaining was that of strength, which she argued was a ‘correct’ definition of the difference between men and women.

¹⁷ Wollstonecraft argued that the close association of boys and girls would mean that a genuine respect would grow between the two. Also, that a partner would be taken where there was evident fondness and affection, and not due to a marriage arrangement between parents. As the children became virtuous through their extended education, Wollstonecraft believed that their parents would allow them ‘to choose companions for life themselves’. See Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 240, 237, 245.

¹⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 237-38, 240, 246-49.

¹⁹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 110.

²⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 111.

[made] any difference'.²¹ However, girls continued to receive a less than 'meaningful' education and this became a main point of contestation for Wollstonecraft.²²

According to Wollstonecraft society had not been 'formed in the wisest manner'; and further, arguments that justified the deprivation of natural rights to men or women were insulting and damaged common sense.²³ These arguments can be found throughout the first *Vindication*. Moreover, in the second *Vindication* Wollstonecraft criticized 'popular' male writers of the time period who wrote on the issue of male and female rights. Most male authors did not advocate a change regarding the rights afforded to women, but believed that the status quo was correct. Wollstonecraft attacked Rousseau's *Emile* by asserting that Rousseau's hypothesis regarding the state of society was 'unsound'. Women, Wollstonecraft argued, were not given a chance to acquire divine perfection; Rousseau argued that divine perfection was achieved by women through 'the work of man'. Wollstonecraft continued by refuting the argument that God had created 'all things right' – that the state of society, and the position of women within it, was correct since God had created it as such – and this was an argument which Rousseau alluded to.

A curse it might be reckoned, if the whole of our existence were bounded by our continuance in this world; for why should the gracious fountain of life give us passions, and the power of reflecting, only to imbitter our days and inspire us with mistaken notions of dignity? 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.

Rousseau exerts himself to prove that all *was* right originally: a crowd of authors that all *is* now right: and I, that all will *be* right [original emphasis].²⁴

Therefore, Wollstonecraft maintained that God did not intend women to live as inferior beings to man.²⁵ Wollstonecraft believed in 'the perfection of God';

²¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 112.

²² By 'meaningful education' I understand Wollstonecraft to mean that girls should have an education which more closely resembled that of boys. Wollstonecraft drew attention to her dislike of the outdoor/indoor separation in regards to boys' and girls' education, with girls remaining inside and boys having time outside. She was also disputing, through this process, the works of male authors who wrote about female education. See Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 131-32.

²³ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 82.

²⁴ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 83-84.

however, the inferior position of women, created and upheld through societal norms, went against this 'perfection'. Why had God given women the means of reflection and passions if they were not meant to be used? Moreover, the physical and intellectual attributes afforded to women by society did not include reflection or the display of passions. Therefore, all was not 'right' in society. Moreover all could '*be* right' if social reform was enacted; if the changes Wollstonecraft wrote about were put into action. Once these changes were undertaken society would advance to a state that was closer to what God had intended, one where women were able to use all the attributes which God had given to them. What exactly God had given to women and how he intended them to live, however, were contested issues.

The position of women in society throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was determined by Scriptural interpretations. Over this period, however, men began to voice their individual interpretations of the Bible and what they believed Scriptural 'stories' *really* meant. The interpretations from these centuries were passed on to the eighteenth century in the form of societal norms and behavioural characteristics. Moreover, these different interpretations contributed to the development of the large number of religious sects which began to gather numbers and attention within the theological-political environment of eighteenth century England.²⁶ John Calvin, an active theological writer during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, reinforced the public/private divide in his writings. He argued that procreation was part of God's plan and believed that men and women were equal in spiritual terms only; women were confined to a subordinate role in 'life here and now'.²⁷ Calvin insisted that women's subordination was ordained by God, and 'nature' showed that it was correct. He

²⁵ Badowska discusses this inferiority in terms of hunger and appetite: 'not only are women figured as the food that is to satisfy men's hunger – women are "standing dishes to which every glutton may have access"', p. 293.

²⁶ Throughout this period the number of 'heretical' religious sects expanded and dissenting religion came to include: Muggletonians, Calvinists, Presbyterians, Papists, Hutchinsonians, Methodists, Independents, Baptists, Arians, Anabaptists, Shakers, Socinians, Arminians, Lutherans, Moravians, Huguenots, and Episcopalians. See Porter, p. 108.

²⁷ Clark and Richardson, pp. 147-48.

stated that 'women were to stay at home, keeping house and raising children'.²⁸ Martin Luther, also in the sixteenth century, interpreted Scripture in a similar way. According to Luther women were made for the home. He argued that in 'God's plan' women were the only ones fit to raise children; that men were unworthy when it came to caring for children. The job of childrearing, as perceived through the Word of God, enabled Luther to argue that the one aim in a woman's life was to bear and raise children, going as far as arguing that, '[S]hould it [childbirth] mean your death, then depart happily, for you will die in a noble deed and in subservience to God'.²⁹ Therefore, woman's subservience had been 'written' into 'God's plan' and men argued that this submissive behaviour needed to be upheld. Gary Kelly argues that: 'Nature as biology was invoked, not for the first or last time, to extend woman's physical roles as mother and wife to the moral and social domain of the domestic affections'.³⁰ Therefore, 'God's plan' was upheld by another argument invoked by writers – that female subordination was correct as determined by Nature and it took its rightful place in the moral, social and domestic spheres.

Traditionally, the inequality of women was shown to be a consequence of Eve's sin in Paradise. It was claimed that women were punished for this sin in present society through their subjection to man. This subjection extended to an argument that marriage was further a 'natural' state in society because women were, and had to continue to be, the 'medicine' and 'antidote' for man. Without marriage, men would be more likely to engage in fornication, which was a sin and therefore, women were the 'medicine' in curing this act and preventing it from taking place. Luther argued that men were 'compelled to make use of this [woman's] sex in order to avoid sin'.³¹ In this avoidance of sin, men subjugated women to a secondary and somewhat invisible role. Women became an extension of men and had no rights or thoughts of their own. Everything that was man, in the event of marriage, became

²⁸ Clark & Richardson, p. 148.

²⁹ Clark & Richardson, p. 159.

³⁰ Kelly, p. 15.

³¹ Clark & Richardson, p. 164.

woman also. The changing of names after marriage was also explained by the sin which Eve had engaged in, and again Luther argued:

[N]o animal thought out a name for itself; all were assigned their names and received the prestige and honor of a name from their lord Adam. Similarly even today, when a woman marries a man, she loses the name of her family and is called by the name of her husband This is an indication and a confirmation of the punishment or subjection which the woman incurred through her sin.³²

Therefore, the subjection present in male/female relationships and within marriage stemmed from arguments found in the Bible. Women were, first and foremost, viewed as man's 'plaything', something which man had to make use of to avoid sin. The institution of marriage was important to uphold as it enabled 'God's plan' of childrearing to take place, as well as enabling women to be the 'medicine' for men and keeping the public/private divide in check.

The late-seventeenth century and eighteenth century has been credited as being the age of Enlightenment. This age encouraged men to further question theological institutions and to argue that religion should be personally sought by an individual, not disseminated to them by the church. It was also marked by a shift towards a rational and reasoned religion. Priests began to be viewed suspiciously and their role within religion was questioned. Richard Baron, in the eighteenth century, pledged to 'emancipate the minds of men, and to free them from those chains in which they have been long held to the great disgrace both of reason and Christianity'; therefore, pledging to eradicate ties between priests, religion and individuals.³³ The church was also increasingly viewed as damaging religion. Ties between the state and the church were viewed negatively as state intervention in religion became increasingly known as 'meddling'.³⁴ Questions concerning the placement of the church within society again highlighted the shift which was taking place towards a 'personal' type of religion, one where the individual personally sought a relationship with God. Moreover, the importance placed on a personal

³² Clark & Richardson, p. 168.

³³ Porter, p. 111.

³⁴ Porter, p. 106.

relationship with God theoretically gave women greater movement within religion, although not as much as that enjoyed by men, as women no longer had to be religious only through her husband. Furthermore, theological arguments which claimed a subordinate female role as natural, some deriving from the sixteenth century, were the arguments and beliefs which Wollstonecraft attempted to disestablish as they continued to be passed from one generation to the next. Wollstonecraft's interpretation of Scripture led to, and through her personal relationship with God encouraged, her arguments for more positive and equal male/female relationships and for the institution of marriage to be based on equality.³⁵ Wollstonecraft reinterpreted society through *her* understanding of Scripture and provided the public with a different assessment of the environment of eighteenth century England, and the influence of religion on it.

The political, religious and aristocratic institutions dominating eighteenth century English society were highlighted by Wollstonecraft as factors hindering the existence of a 'rightful society'; a society which God had intended to exist. Wollstonecraft discussed the king, church and state, army, sailors and the clergy to show their weaknesses and what it 'meant' to be a part of these groups. Wollstonecraft's main argument was that men were affected by the employment in which they were engaged: '[I]t is of great importance to observe that the character of every man is, in some degree, formed by his profession'.³⁶ Wollstonecraft argued that as society became more enlightened there would need to be a determined effort to rid society of men who, because of their profession, were made foolish or vicious. In other words, Wollstonecraft argued that the corruption which took place in society was due to the behaviour of men in the more 'luxurious' classes.

³⁵ Wollstonecraft drew on the arguments of James Fordyce throughout her discussion of the unfair state of marriage in her second *Vindication*. Fordyce's arguments reflected those views and ideologies which Wollstonecraft campaigned against. See James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), cited in 'Animadversions on some of the writers who have rendered women objects of pity, bordering on contempt', in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft: Volume 5*, edited by Janet Todd & Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering, 1989), pp. 162-66.

³⁶ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 87.

Thus, as wars, agriculture, commerce, and literature, expand the mind, despots are compelled, to make covert corruption hold fast the power which was formerly snatched by open force. And this baneful lurking gangrene is most quickly spread by luxury and superstition, the sure dregs of ambition. The indolent puppet of a court first becomes a luxurious monster, or fastidious sensualist, and then makes the contagion which his unnatural state spread, the instrument of tyranny.³⁷

Her use of the word gangrene highlighted the negative influences ‘people of luxury’ – the aristocracy and eighteenth century ‘power’ institutions – had on society. Wollstonecraft saw these ‘ranks’ as poisonous to the many communities present in eighteenth century England. The only perceived means of halting their societal advancements and stopping the spread of ‘luxury’ was to disestablish their foundations and influence. In other words, ‘gangrene’ could not be cured, but must be removed; the effect of the aristocracy could not be remedied, the power the institutions exercised had to cease to exist.

The gangrene analogy which Wollstonecraft used was also directed at male professions. Wollstonecraft argued that men and women were encouraged to display different characteristics and intellectual capabilities. She asserted that from infancy women were taught to be soft in temper, obedient and weak and were taught these characteristics through their education and the examples of their mothers.³⁸ Moreover women were ‘enjoyable’ if they did not display intellect or reasoning; these characteristics were only ‘allowed’ in men.³⁹ Female softness, obedience, and weakness meant that women were deemed to have been ‘designed by sweet grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man’.⁴⁰ Women were ‘domestic brutes’ and kept, in Wollstonecraft’s belief, in a ‘state of childhood’.⁴¹ Rousseau insisted that in marriage husband and wife were made into one entity due to the reliance of the wife on the husband. The two individuals,

³⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 87.

³⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 88.

³⁹ Michaelson insists that within Wollstonecraft’s theology, ‘reason is God-given, but since it *has* been given, it is ours to use’ [original emphasis], p. 290. Therefore, both men and women had been given reason and both should be able to choose whether, and when, they use it.

⁴⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 88.

⁴¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 88-89.

when they were combined in marriage, were described as a ‘graceful ivy, clasping the oak that supported it, ... [forming] a whole in which strength and beauty would be equally conspicuous’.⁴² However, Wollstonecraft stated that both husband and wife were ‘overgrown children’ who led each other through a society that was flawed with inequalities.⁴³ Wollstonecraft maintained that women had been taught, through their education and societal norms, that their main ‘objective’ in life was to please man. Therefore, women did not look up to heaven and live by the eye of God, but only lived by the eye of man; determined to ‘preserve their station in the world’.⁴⁴ Wollstonecraft stated that ‘one need not come from heaven to tell us the consequence’ of these underlying actions – normative acts which led to corruption and contributed to the enslavement of women.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Wollstonecraft argued that the foundation of marriage was dangerous as it did not rest on an equal relationship.⁴⁶

It was argued throughout the eighteenth century that the unequal relationship between men and women and the presence of ‘female enslavement’ was natural as it adhered to characteristics set down by Nature and this ideology was evident in some of Burke’s arguments which Wollstonecraft refuted in the first *Vindication*. Therefore, it was Nature which had made women inferior to man and had made women lack the ability to reason. Women were inferior, first and foremost, because they had been created for men, and Milton, in his work *Paradise Lost*, argued that this view was correct. Wollstonecraft however, refuted Milton’s assertions. She questioned the validity of the idea that women were ‘created’ to save man.

⁴² Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 91.

⁴³ ‘The traditional childlike role so many [women] were playing, according to Wollstonecraft, was precisely what was impeding their progress as a sex, and indeed, all humanity’s progress’, Smith, p. 561.

⁴⁴ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 201-02.

⁴⁵ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 91. This particular reference to heaven is found in *Matthew* 15:14. ‘The speaker is Jesus, who has “come from heaven”’.

⁴⁶ Wollstonecraft described the unjustness of marriage and society through a ‘case study’ which she included in her work. It described the unjust marriage relationship and the effect which society had on the institution of marriage. She ended by highlighting the negative effect which marriage and social constraints had on women. See Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 117-18. Furthermore, Wollstonecraft stated: ‘[T]his is the natural death of love, and domestic peace is not destroyed by struggles to prevent its extinction’. See Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 119.

Normative social arguments claimed that men were in danger of ‘sinking into absolute brutality’ and that women were created to ‘rub’ ‘off the rough angles of his character’.⁴⁷ Therefore, not only were women merely created to be ‘playthings’ for men, but women were also responsible for educating men in refinement and civility in order to ‘save’ man from, and impede the spread of, brutality. Wollstonecraft stated that her refutations of eighteenth century normative ideals and ideologies would lead people to view her as an atheist.⁴⁸ However, it was religion which Wollstonecraft drew on to contest Milton’s arguments. Wollstonecraft argued that it was not possible that God had merely created women for those purposes alluded to above, as all ‘natural’ female positions inevitably led women into inferior and secondary roles. She insisted that God was ‘above’ women in a hierarchical structure – if there was to be one – not men and further demonstrated this stance by stating,

[C]an she [women] believe that she was only made to submit to man, her equal, a being, who, like her, was sent into the world to acquire virtue? – Can she consent to be occupied merely to please him; merely to adorn the earth, when her soul is capable of rising to thee?⁴⁹

Wollstonecraft therefore claimed that both men and women were sent to Earth to ‘acquire virtue’ and both men and women should have the means of acquiring these attributes. She suggested that it was incorrect for societal norms to encourage women to accept that ‘merely’ pleasing men was their ‘natural’ occupation. Women were man’s equal, and therefore, it was unnatural for women to accept the secondary and subordinate position offered to them by society. Moreover, Wollstonecraft insisted that her soul was capable of rising to God. She claimed that her soul was connected to her Creator and consequently, Wollstonecraft ‘consent[ed] to be occupied’ with attaining those attributes which God had sent her to Earth to obtain, thereby strengthening her soul’s connection with God. Furthermore, Wollstonecraft reinforced her argument that it was unnatural for a

⁴⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 136.

⁴⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 148-49.

⁴⁹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 136.

woman to merely ‘adorn’ the Earth to ‘please him’. The questions from the above quote augmented Wollstonecraft’s disdain of hierarchical societal orders. She went on to argue that:

[W]e should rather endeavour to view ourselves as we suppose that Being views us who seeth each thought ripen into action, and whose judgment never swerves from the eternal rule of right. Righteous are all his judgments – just as merciful!⁵⁰

Wollstonecraft looked up to and ‘obeyed’ God as he was ‘righteous’ and ‘merciful’ – He was the Being who could ‘rightfully’ view and judge her actions. Wollstonecraft urged women to view themselves as God viewed them – as equal, virtuous, moral beings – and in so doing, she highlighted the irreligious characteristics placed on women. The ‘correct’ way for women to act in society had been determined by men, *not* by God – this was the view Wollstonecraft was attempting to disseminate to society. God had created men and women equal, but men had placed women in a subordinate position and had taken away those attributes which God had given them at Creation.

The positive attributes which God had ‘given’ women – such as virtue and intellect – were replaced with characteristics designed to keep women in subordinate positions – such as weakness and softness, as discussed above. Anne K. Mellor insists that within Wollstonecraft’s argument for a ‘revolution in female manners’ was her attempt to detail the ‘dominant bourgeois gender definition of the female as the subordinate helpmate of the male’.⁵¹ At the core of societal acceptance of this subordinate female position was ongoing female dependence on men and the weakness attributed to women. It was believed that women had an innate dependence on men due to their ‘weak’ constitutions; but in turn, they were perceived as being ‘weak’ due to their dependence on men. Therefore, the ongoing reinforcement of the idea that women were inevitably weak, and their ‘need’ for male protection, encouraged the continuation of the ‘subordinate helpmate’ label

⁵⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 205. Wollstonecraft used the scriptural chapters of *Psalms* 19:9, 119:75 when she stated that God’s judgments were merciful.

⁵¹ Mellor, p. 35.

which was associated with women. However, Wollstonecraft perceived two different ‘types’ of weakness. As shown above, weakness was argued to be an inevitably ‘natural’ characteristic in women. Wollstonecraft also found that weakness was a foundational principle within the constitution of a deity. However, the two interpretations were different.

Gentleness of manners, forbearance and long-suffering, are such amiable Godlike qualities, that in sublime poetic strains the Deity has been invested with them; and, perhaps, no representation of his [God’s] goodness so strongly fastens on the human affections as those that represent him abundant in mercy and willing to pardon. Gentleness, considered in this point of view, bears on its front all the characteristics of grandeur, combined with the winning graces of condescension; but what a different aspect it assumes when it is the submissive demeanour of dependence, the support of weakness that loves, because it wants protection; and is forbearing, because it must silently endure injuries ...⁵²

Therefore, Wollstonecraft utilized Scripture to argue that gentleness and weakness *could* be shown to be ‘amiable Godlike qualities’.⁵³ God’s abundant mercy and his willingness to pardon was ‘classified’ as gentleness and was viewed as a positive attribute. Wollstonecraft herself described the existence of this characteristic positively – associating it with ‘grandeur’ and ‘winning graces of condescension’. Wollstonecraft contrasted the ‘gentleness’ characteristic found in deities with the form which it took when it was associated with women. The two different ‘types’ of gentleness were opposites of each other. Weakness in women was negative and it enabled the continuation of their subordinate positions within society. Weakness in deities however, was positive and was attributed to goodness and gentleness.⁵⁴ Furthermore, this gentleness/weakness characteristic in women led to a continuation of the image of women as man’s ‘toy’ and ‘helpmate’ and the continued domination of men over women in society, religion, and marriage.⁵⁵

⁵² Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 101-02.

⁵³ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 101-02.

⁵⁴ Skolnik claims that, ‘[W]omen are loved, but not esteemed, for their weakness, and they are cultivated for sweetness rather than courage’, p. 218. She argues that Wollstonecraft used ‘Burke’s *topoi* of the sublime and the beautiful’ as definitions of gender constructions. The masculine ideal was ‘constructed as useful, moral, and awe-inspiring in accordance with the sublime, while women [were] described as ornamental, pleasing, and subordinate in accordance with the beautiful’, p. 218.

⁵⁵ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 102, 123.

Women were made to ‘follow’ men and look to them for guidance and support, whether financial or social, as a further consequence of their weakness and their ‘inability’ to act independently.⁵⁶ Women were given the ‘opportunity’ to follow their fathers, brothers or husbands. Wollstonecraft emphasized the presence of this view by arguing that women did not adhere to ‘the spirit of a law, divine or human’, as they were encouraged to follow those men which were closest to them.⁵⁷ Furthermore, women, and it can be taken as a collective, were not attached to ‘the spirit of a law’ because they were not able, or allowed, to be distinguished as a single entity from men. Again, Wollstonecraft argued that a person should only obey God.

The High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, doubtless possess many attributes of which we can form no conception; but reason tells me that they cannot clash with those I adore – and I am compelled to listen to her voice For to love God as the fountain of wisdom, goodness, and power, appears to be the only worship useful to a being who wishes to acquire either virtue or knowledge It follows, then, I think, that from their infancy women should either be shut up like eastern princes, or educated in such a manner as to be able to think and act for themselves Why do they [men] expect virtue from a slave, from a being whom the constitution of civil society has rendered weak, if not vicious?⁵⁸

Wollstonecraft, through this passage, was reinforcing her view that the position of women was inaccurate as it went against God’s virtue. Societal norms, in establishing that women were naturally and correctly inferior, underestimated God’s moral excellence and subverted the truthful Word of God and position of women. It was God, and only God, that Wollstonecraft would ‘worship’ as He was the only ‘fountain of wisdom, goodness, and power’. Therefore, it becomes apparent that Wollstonecraft’s ‘feminisms’ originated within her understanding of God. Moreover, her ‘feminisms’ are strengthened by her argument that woman should enjoy greater equality, in order that they will be able to ‘rightfully’ acquire

⁵⁶ Mellor states, ‘[L]ate eighteenth-century middle- and upper-class English women were taught to be primarily concerned with arousing and sustaining ... male sexual desire in order to capture the husbands upon whom their financial welfare depended’, p. 36.

⁵⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 201.

⁵⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 115-16.

virtue and knowledge. The insistence by society that women had to be virtuous could not materialize if they were not ‘allowed’ to obtain virtue or have an individual association with it. In addition, Wollstonecraft argued that women, through their subordinate position, had become dangerously competitive in order to obtain what little ‘power’ they could.⁵⁹ Smith comments on this ‘competitiveness’ when she states that, ‘[T]emporary power can be obtained by acting the traditional role of the weak, delicate female ...’⁶⁰ Furthermore, Jenny Davidson argues that, ‘[F]alse modesty forces women to deceive others as well as themselves, bestowing power on women only within a system of tyranny and dependence’.⁶¹

This weakness ‘act’ not only affected the status of women within the present society, but it was also believed that it impinged on the chance of the female soul journeying to heaven. Without the acquisition of reason and knowledge – and Wollstonecraft believed that God had placed men and women on Earth to acquire reason and knowledge – the female soul was not guaranteed heavenly salvation in the afterlife. Patricia Michaelson argues that,

[F]or Wollstonecraft, equality between the sexes is based on reason; the burden of her entire argument is to show that *all* human beings are, first and foremost, “rational creatures” [And that] [R]eason leads to virtue – and virtue is crucial solely and explicitly because we expect an afterlife [original emphasis].⁶²

Wollstonecraft insisted that reason connected the ‘creature with the Creator’ and therefore she questioned how female souls were to be ‘heavenly’ if women were

⁵⁹ Wang describes this practice as ‘women’s empowerment or victimization’ and argued that power was ‘constituted by a different combination of codes of age, class, and gender’, p. 132. Therefore, different ‘types’ of power were achieved depending on individuals’ gender, class, and age. Badowska also stated that the ‘perils of embodiment for women consist, for Wollstonecraft, precisely in this paradox: to gain the transient power and freedom, a (genteel) woman is reduced to sheer physicality – an embodiment that is also an enslavement’, p. 287. For a woman to obtain power, Badowska argues, she had to lose her physicality, which in turn enabled the characteristic ‘weak’ to be placed on her. This weakness characteristic was a form of enslavement as its implications hindered women in society.

⁶⁰ Smith, p. 561.

⁶¹ Jenny Davidson, “‘Professed Enemies of Politeness’: Sincerity and the Problem of Gender in Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* and Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*”, *Studies in Romanticism*, 39, 4 (Winter 2000), pp. 611-12.

⁶² Michaelson, pp. 287, 291.

unable to display their own reason.⁶³ The souls of men acquired the ‘stamp’ of rationality from birth, and they were further ‘rationalized’ through their education and professional life.⁶⁴ Women were continually described as ‘creatures of sensation’ and Wollstonecraft stated that she did not see a ‘trace of the image of God in ... sensation’; therefore, women were placed in a remote position to God through their association with this characteristic.⁶⁵

Theological remoteness was also experienced by women in regards to their actual religion as some were not given the means to choose which religion they followed. Rousseau stated that:

[E]very daughter ought to be of the same religion as her mother, and every wife to be of the same religion as her husband; for, though such religion should be false, that docility which induces the mother and daughter to submit to the order of nature, takes away, in the sight of God, the criminality of their error.⁶⁶

Rousseau declared that it was a ‘crime’ for women to follow the religion of their fathers or husbands simply because it was *their* religion. However, this ‘crime’ was remedied due to the docility of women. Therefore, as long as women were docile and obedient they would be excused from error. Moreover, female submission was prescribed by Nature and Wollstonecraft stated that this obedience had been enforced by the ‘male line from Adam downwards’.⁶⁷ Therefore, Wollstonecraft asserted that female subordination was not a contemporary phenomenon to her period, but could be found throughout past societies.

Wollstonecraft argued that the lack of autonomy which women were able to exercise in religion would inevitably lead to the degradation of religion itself. She insisted that the threat of degradation was evidence that the treatment of women and the domineering position of men were unjustified occurrences. The treatment

⁶³ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 122.

⁶⁴ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 122.

⁶⁵ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 132.

⁶⁶ Rousseau in Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 156-57.

⁶⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 157.

afforded to women went against the principles of God. Moreover, Rousseau highlighted ‘crimes’ which women participated in due to societal conventions. This treatment could not be beneficial to the foundation of religion; however, these treatments were upheld through the very belief that they were. She asked, ‘[I]f it [religion] be merely the refuge of weakness or wild fanaticism, and not a governing principle of conduct, drawn from self-knowledge, and a rational opinion respecting the attributes of God, what can it be expected to produce?’⁶⁸ Therefore, Wollstonecraft suggested that religion was losing its positive moral foundations. She insisted that religion was no longer a ‘governing principle of conduct’; women were instructed in what behaviour and conduct was moral and ‘right’ by men, not by religion. Moreover, religion produced negative characteristics and attributes in individuals because it increasingly adhered to and disseminated the principles of weakness and fanaticism. In addition, women were viewed as naturally irrational and lacking intellect, and therefore, they were incapable of forming their own opinion of God, something wholly necessary to the foundations of a moral and righteous religion.

Wollstonecraft concluded her *Vindication* by drawing similarities between Dissenting religions and women. Wollstonecraft argued that both Dissenters and women were subject to a similar kind of oppression.⁶⁹ She stressed the importance of a ‘revolution in female manners’ which would see women acquire a social status somewhat similar to that status which men could attain.⁷⁰ Wollstonecraft stated that the ‘faults’ associated with women, and those which society saw as damaging, was primarily the result of ‘their education and station in society’.⁷¹ Wollstonecraft therefore asserted, that equality as the standard principle within society would enable, and encourage, women to ‘change their character, and correct their vices and follies, ... [as they would be] allowed to be free in a physical, moral, and civil

⁶⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 184.

⁶⁹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), pp. 265-66.

⁷⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 265.

⁷¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 266.

sense'.⁷² Moreover, women would acquire greater autonomy over the religious element in their lives. Therefore, Wollstonecraft was establishing a connection between the positive affect which female equality would have on the foundations of religion.

However, there are contemporary debates regarding the plausibility of the connection between religion and feminism. Michealson claims that the influence of religion on feminism is a contested ideal.⁷³ 'Feminist theologians' have debated whether religion, and more generally Christianity, has any possible 'empowerment' for women. Moreover, it is asserted that, 'since Christianity is rooted in a patriarchal past, it can never shed patriarchal values' and, therefore, can it ever be 'kind' to feminist arguments?⁷⁴ However, as the eighteenth century was overtly religious and theological, I have argued that religion was a necessary and integral element within the *Vindication*. Religion gave Wollstonecraft the necessary framework to argue for equality and highlight the negative position of women within society. When Wollstonecraft advocated a 'revolution in female manners', she argued that it would enable equality to prevail within society.⁷⁵ Moreover, Wollstonecraft used religion in her arguments to refute established societal norms, which themselves were argued through a theological framework.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was a text which advocated drastic social change, which would enable women to occupy a somewhat similar social position as that which was attained by men. Wollstonecraft highlighted the boundless superiority – established at birth and reinforced through education, occupations, and societal norms – which had become synonymous with 'man'. The superiority of men and subsequent inferiority of women were established, written and disseminated through a theological framework. Wollstonecraft, although associated with atheism by her contemporaries, drew on a theological framework, utilizing her

⁷² Todd & Butler (Volume 5), p. 266.

⁷³ Michealson, p. 291.

⁷⁴ Michealson, p. 291.

⁷⁵ Smith, pp. 557, 562, 567.

relationship with God and the Bible, to demonstrate that the current relations between men and women were fundamentally dangerous to the very foundations of religion. She extensively challenged and criticized those widely adhered to beliefs regarding the 'natural' position of women. Moreover, she did so by utilizing religious language and imagery. This chapter has drawn on those instances of explicit religious inference to demonstrate that religion was an integral, though widely overlooked, element within Wollstonecraft's 'feminist' arguments. In addition, this chapter has highlighted some of the fundamentally important contextual principles regarding the time period in which she lived. Some of the main 'theorists' of the eighteenth century have been discussed in order to determine the extent of religious thinking in the period, and to consider some essential elements which influenced Wollstonecraft's ideas and works. Moreover, the context established the extent to which religious thought was disseminated and accepted; religious thought which became the basis of Wollstonecraft's refutations. The eighteenth century context becomes ever more important in considering the religious elements within Wollstonecraft's next literary work. A historical text written amidst the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft drew on past historical events, as well as her personal anxieties over contemporary events being undertaken around her, to portray the influence which religion had on the 'civilization' of France and its influence on the onset of the Revolution itself. The next chapter will highlight Wollstonecraft's religiosity towards the Revolution and demonstrate the extent to which she understood the actual terms of the Revolution within a theological framework.

Chapter Four:

‘Their patriotism expiring with their popularity’: The French Revolution and Mary Wollstonecraft¹

This chapter will take Wollstonecraft’s text, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe*, as its main literary theme. It will analyse this text, regarded as a ‘philosophical history’, to determine the extent to which Wollstonecraft used theology to understand the principles and events of the French Revolution. Moreover, the very nature of her arguments will be discussed as this underlies Wollstonecraft’s changing, but ever present, relationship with God. Furthermore, Wollstonecraft’s opinions and continued negative attitude towards the clergy and church will be alluded to as these go some way in explaining the ‘type’ of theological ideologies she followed. Moreover, they were an extension of her arguments regarding these institutions which were found in her *Vindications*.

An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe was written by Wollstonecraft in 1794.² Wollstonecraft went to France so that she could put distance between herself and a Swiss painter, Henry Fuseli. For twelve months after the publication of her second *Vindication* Wollstonecraft had occupied her time writing reviews for the *Analytical Review* and harbouring growing affections for the married Fuseli. Wollstonecraft proposed that she should move in with the Fuseli household as she found it increasingly difficult to get through one day without seeing the Swiss painter.³

¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft: Volume 6*, edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering, 1989), p. 144.

² Jane Rendall, “‘The grand causes which combine to carry mankind forward’: Wollstonecraft, History and Revolution”, *Women’s Writing*, 4, 2 (1997), p. 161. This is the full title for Wollstonecraft’s work, however, from this point I will refer to it as the *View*, as it is referred to in this journal article.

³ Todd, pp. 197-99.

Sophia Rawlins, Fuseli's wife, rejected the proposal and Wollstonecraft was embarrassed by what had taken place.

Wollstonecraft arrived in France in December 1792 with her own beliefs of what a revolution would mean for the country and the people. She believed that the negativity and unfairness surrounding education and female rights, and the unjust nature of the church and aristocracy, would be remedied through revolutionary measures. Wollstonecraft foresaw a more equal and enlightened country and people emerging from the ruins of the French Revolution. However upon arrival in France Wollstonecraft saw that the events taking place would not enable this to happen.⁴

When I first entered Paris, the striking contrast of riches and poverty, elegance and slovenliness, urbanity and deceit, every where caught my eye, and saddened my soul ... The whole mode of life here tends to render the people frivolous.⁵

Wollstonecraft witnessed a society which was not enlightened or fair. Nor did the activities of the people signal the coming of an enlightened society. Soon after arriving Wollstonecraft witnessed the procession of people making their way, along with King Louis XVI, to his trial. Louis showed dignity, something Wollstonecraft did not expect to see and the people continued to use violence and disorder. These actions made Wollstonecraft question her beliefs regarding the outcome of the Revolution.⁶ Claire Tomalin states that Wollstonecraft 'was to see not only shops plundered but the presses of unpopular journalists destroyed: it was scarcely the freedom she or [William] Godwin had in mind when they praised the Revolution'.⁷ The enlightened France Wollstonecraft believed that she would see was, in reality, non-existent.

⁴ Tom Furniss, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's French Revolution', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, edited by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 64.

⁵ Todd, p. 205.

⁶ Todd, p. 207.

⁷ Tomalin, p. 182.

In a letter to her publisher Joseph Johnson who was still in England, Wollstonecraft further highlighted the misgivings she had about the Revolution. Writing in early 1793, she stated:

[B]efore I came to France, I cherished, you know, an opinion, that strong virtues might exist with the polished manner produced by the progress of civilization; and I even anticipated the epoch, when, in the course of improvement, men would labour to become virtuous, without being goaded on by misery. But now, the perspective of the golden age, fading before the attentive eye of observation, almost eludes my sight; and losing thus in part my theory of a more perfect state, start not, my friend, if I bring forward an opinion, which at first glance seems to be leveled against the existence of God!⁸

Wollstonecraft viewed the actions of the populace, not as extending the arm of freedom and equality, but as hindering the progress of civilization.⁹ Wollstonecraft believed that the Revolution would enable the French people to refine their civilization and that their society would come to resemble a ‘perfect state’. However, this was not the reality Wollstonecraft was confronted with. Her belief in the possible existence of a ‘perfect state’ resembled Price’s arguments regarding Providentialism.¹⁰ Price believed in the presence of divine providence, meaning that God cared for His creatures in such a way as to enable them to carry out the plans for which they had been created.¹¹ Therefore, the French people’s *ability* to bring about revolutionary events had been given to them by God on their creation; it was God who had given the society the means to enact these changes. However, Wollstonecraft’s questioning of the people’s actions and her belief that the ‘golden

⁸ Todd, p. 208.

⁹ Spence insists that progress would cease to happen, as the speed by which the people had rid themselves of despotism and were seeking to establish ‘popular sovereignty’ was too fast. He argues that Wollstonecraft believed that, ‘[T]o recover from the depraving influences of the old regime, the French people should be led through stages of moral improvement by means of a gradual alteration of their laws and institutions, until they were ready for popular sovereignty’, p. 119. Throughout this discussion Spence stresses Wollstonecraft’s belief in ‘gradualism’ as the ‘proper’ means for gaining a ‘perfect state’. See Spence, pp. 117-20. Spence also discusses Price’s and Joseph Priestley’s views on ‘gradualism’, p. 108.

¹⁰ Although not explicitly about Price’s belief in Providentialism, see Gregory I. Molivas, ‘Richard Price, the Debate on Free Will, and Natural Rights’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 58, 1 (January 1997), pp. 105-23. This work gives the reader insight into Price’s and, more broadly, the eighteenth century’s views on God’s will and free will.

¹¹ This meaning of ‘divine providence’ is taken from Clark, pp. 87-89. Also refer to Spence, pp. 108, 109-10, 113 for a discussion of Price’s and Wollstonecraft’s ‘relationship’ to Providentialism.

age' was fading questioned this Providentialism. Moreover, when Wollstonecraft questioned the people's actions she felt that it could be viewed as her questioning the providence of God. If the actions of the people were 'wrong', then the Revolution – which had been 'planned' by God – could be perceived as wrong, and therefore the very existence of God could be called into question. Moreover, the events which had taken place and the actions and behaviours of the populace led Wollstonecraft to question the validity of the Revolution.¹²

The *View* is a historical work. During the late eighteenth century literary works began to focus more extensively on the idea of the 'progress of "civilization"'.¹³ Works on this topic were authored by men and Wollstonecraft utilized a 'masculine voice' in the *View* to write on the concept of French 'civilization'.¹⁴ Jane Rendall argues that this type of history was philosophical and focused on the tension between 'the increasing wealth of nations and the pursuit of political virtue and liberty'; and Wollstonecraft stated that the *View* was a history written from 'a philosophical eye'.¹⁵ Philosophical history, in the context of the eighteenth century, was a study of civilization and of progress, covering those topics which would highlight how institutions and society came to be the way they were.¹⁶ Within this 'type' of history also existed 'conjectural' history which 'was itself a philosophical version of the stadial history of historians, ... where it is presumed that society

¹² Wollstonecraft did not support the actions taken by revolutionaries in France. Todd argues that Wollstonecraft did not believe in street marches or rallies during the Revolution. Also, that Wollstonecraft's environment and the people with whom she came in contact influenced her views about the Revolution. See Todd, pp. 211-13.

¹³ Rendall, p. 156.

¹⁴ Wollstonecraft wrote a large portion on the "civilization" of mankind after she had written the majority of her history. See Todd & Butler (Volume 6), pp. 145-48.

¹⁵ Rendall, pp. 155-56.

¹⁶ Nicholas Phillipson, 'Providence and Progress: An Introduction to the Historical Thought of William Robertson', in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, edited by Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 55. Robertson is an example of an eighteenth century philosophical historian and of his work Phillipson states: 'Indeed, his work can be read as an enormous history of the origins of modern European civilization, as a history which dealt with the birth of the modern state system, the growth of royal power, the rise of reformed religion, and the spread of empire in an age which was being transformed by commerce, learning, and politeness', p. 55.

advances through stages'.¹⁷ This advancement of society through 'certain common stages of progress from barbarism to confinement' was studied by such eighteenth century figures as David Hume, Adam Smith, William Robertson, Lord Bolingbroke, and Henry Home (Lord Kames).¹⁸ Of religion, philosophical history focused on the belief that a primitive type of Christianity could be traced along the lines of progress and civilization. This tracing led Robertson, among others, to determine that a certain amount of understanding regarding the Word of God was given to people of a civilization depending on what stage of progress they had attained.¹⁹ Once the people had reached a certain 'point' in their civilization, through the acquisition of material goods and commerce, a greater understanding of the Word of God was given to them which in turn advanced their civilization until the next 'point' was reached.

Wollstonecraft began the *View* with a discussion of the 'infancy of man'.²⁰ Englishmen, Wollstonecraft wrote, were beyond infancy as they had a constitution which they were proud of; whereas Frenchmen did not have a constitution and were in a state of infancy because their liberty was still restrained by despotism.²¹ Governments reinforced despotism because they focused on the needs and wants of the aristocracy and did not protect the weak.²² In the opening pages, Wollstonecraft described past downfalls of governments and societies suggesting that the French Revolution was the result of societal and governmental breakdowns.²³

¹⁷ Murray G. H. Pittock, 'Historiography', in *The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment*, edited by Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 263. Moreover, Spence claims that, 'Wollstonecraft seems aware of the assumption of Scottish conjectural history, that societies pass through similar stages of economic development', highlighting Wollstonecraft's knowledge of conjectural history, pp. 124-25.

¹⁸ Pittock, pp. 262-63. Furthermore, Spence has stated that Wollstonecraft drew on Robertson's work – 'View of the Progress of Society in Europe from the Subversion of the Roman Empire, to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century' – within her *The Female Reader* to discuss the consequences of the advancement of commerce, therefore drawing a 'relationship' between Wollstonecraft and those works placed under the title of 'philosophical histories'. See Spence, p. 114.

¹⁹ Phillipson, pp. 67-70.

²⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 15.

²¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 17.

²² Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 17.

²³ Wollstonecraft's discussion of past events in order to write about, and understand, the Revolution is a device used by philosophical historians. Phillipson states: '[T]he conventions of philosophical

Wollstonecraft traced societal and governmental breakdowns to the foundations upon which they were first built. She stated that Rousseau ‘forcibly depicted the evils of a priest-ridden society, and the sources of oppressive inequality’.²⁴ Nicholas Phillipson claims that philosophical historians such as Robertson argued that a civilization was freed from superstition through the use of priestcraft.²⁵ Moreover, Robertson ‘was profoundly interested in the stultifying effects of priestcraft, in the power of material progress to release the mind from the bondage of superstition, and in the future progress of Christianity ...’²⁶ Robertson therefore traced the advancement of civilization to the arrival or establishment of priests. However, that was where the positive influence of priestcraft ended. Robertson maintained that superstition and priestcraft had damaged the continued progress of civilization.²⁷ This is where Rousseau came in. From the context of the eighteenth century, Rousseau viewed priests within society negatively and argued that they led to ‘oppressive inequality’, not societal advancements. Wollstonecraft added her opinion on the matter stating that the ‘notion of “original sin” [was] a superstitious fabrication upon “which priests have erected their tremendous structures of imposition ...”’²⁸ Therefore, once philosophers of the eighteenth century ceased to positively assess the influence of priestcraft on the progress of civilization, they were left with a priestcraft which hindered societal advancement and was seen to oppress all but aristocratic groups in society.

Within her discussion of the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft argued, in theological terms, that men began to realize that their happiness was connected to the happiness of society as a whole; that men now saw this as ‘clear as the light of

history allowed a historian to begin with an introductory account of the origins of the constitution, the wars, or the people about whom he was writing’, p. 60.

²⁴ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 18.

²⁵ Of this term ‘priestcraft’ Isabel Rivers asserts: ‘[I]n the freethinkers’ characteristic terminology the priests exercise a trade called priestcraft, by means of fraud, cheat and imposture making the people the victims of superstition and prejudice’. See Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780: Volume II: Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 8.

²⁶ Phillipson, p. 56.

²⁷ Phillipson, p. 73.

²⁸ Wollstonecraft in Furniss, p. 69.

heaven'.²⁹ Wollstonecraft went on to assert that men would now '*do unto others, what they wish they should do unto them* [original emphasis]' and this was a scriptural reference to the Biblical *Matthew*.³⁰ Moreover, Wollstonecraft argued that men should come to embrace an 'enlightened moral love of mankind' and that this needed to be disseminated throughout society.³¹ Furthermore, Wollstonecraft wrote that,

[W]e must get entirely clear of all the notions drawn from the wild traditions of original sin: the eating of the apple, the theft of Prometheus, the opening of Pandora's box, and the other fables, too tedious to enumerate, on which priests have erected their tremendous structure of imposition, to persuade us, that we are naturally inclined to evil ...³²

Wollstonecraft argued that the dissemination of these 'fables' hindered the existence of an enlightened society. Moreover, a belief that evil hindered enlightenment was false; it was religious governance which was a barrier to an enlightened society.

Throughout the *View* Wollstonecraft maintained that in pre-Revolutionary France the people were subjected to a society and government which did not display reason. She stated that society believed, '[T]he priest was to save their souls without morality; the physician to heal their bodies without medicine; and justice was to be administered by the immediate interposition of heaven: - all was to be done by a charm'.³³ Wollstonecraft insisted that equality and enlightenment among society was only possible through the acquisition of reason and rationality.³⁴ Moreover, a grasp on reason would mean that the 'image of God implanted in our

²⁹ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 20.

³⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 21.

³¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 21.

³² Todd & Butler (Volume 6), pp. 21-22.

³³ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 113.

³⁴ Mark Philp discusses the actions and ideologies of radical individuals in the 1790s in England. He draws comparisons between the beliefs and presence of Dissenting sects and eighteenth century arguments for the decline of radicalism within society. See Mark Philp, 'Rational Religion and Political Radicalism in the 1790s', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 4 (1985), pp. 35-46.

nature ... [would be] now more rapidly expanding'.³⁵ Therefore, Wollstonecraft argued that an acceptance of reason within French society would lead to the dissemination of a rational religion which would benefit mankind and foster emancipatory principles.

Wollstonecraft claimed that religious institutions in France did not support the dissemination of a rational religion. Wollstonecraft wrote that there were two hundred thousand priests in France and that they were all reckless and overindulgent.

[The priests] indulged themselves in all the depraved pleasure of cloaked immorality, at the same time they embruted the people by sanctifying the most diabolical prejudices; to whose empire every consideration of justice and political improvement was sacrificed.³⁶

Wollstonecraft insisted that religion was being corrupted by priests as they themselves were corrupt and dishonest. The 'diabolical prejudices' which the priests disseminated to society had been accepted by the people of France without question. Wollstonecraft suggested that religion should be held partly responsible for the lack of 'justice and political improvement' evident in France. She continued by arguing that priests only pretended to worship Scripture and religion, when in fact their lives had become 'a mockery of the doctrines'.³⁷ Priests, Wollstonecraft believed and insisted, did not live religiously and as God had intended.

Wollstonecraft observed that the church was no better than priests in upholding religion within society. She stated that 'every diocess [sic] ... [had] become the centre of a petty despotism'.³⁸ Parish priests felt oppressed in their ability to be promoted to office and this led them into contests with each other and established contempt for the monarch. This was important as it affected which 'side' each priest supported during the Revolution – either the people or the government,

³⁵ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 22.

³⁶ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 51.

³⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 51.

³⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 52.

although this is simplifying the matter. Wollstonecraft claimed that the priests would 'side' with whoever would benefit their social position more. She asserted that 'the independent pride of the dignitaries of the church' and the fact that the 'power of the church was in the wane' also affected which 'side' the clergy took in the Revolution.³⁹ Wollstonecraft argued that,

from the time of their [the parish priests'] election, [they were] a corps in reserve for the third-estate; where they sought for the consequence they were denied in their own chamber, finding themselves more nearly allied by interest, as well as inclination, to this order than to the rich pastors, who, separating the sheep from the goats, bade them stand aloof, as possessing less riches – the holiness of that body, as of all others.⁴⁰

Wollstonecraft was highlighting the corruption and greed which underpinned the priests actions, as riches and wealth could determine who they chose to support. Moreover, with no financial independence of their own, the lower clergy had to support the upper clergy and aristocracy, lest they found themselves removed from their church and therefore without the financial support that was connected to their religious position. The nobility followed similar paths to the clergy and Wollstonecraft stated that these two groups formed a distinguished presence in society due to their high numbers. She stated that the nobility and the clergy saw the rest of society as 'merely the grass of the land, necessary to clothe nature; yet only fit to be trodden under foot'.⁴¹ Therefore, priests and nobility did not have any intention of supporting the people. The ongoing superiority of nobles and priests allowed them to unjustly dominate society without their actions being questioned.⁴²

In the closing pages of the *View* Wollstonecraft used religious language and theology more than within her entire work. She argued that the traumatic events

³⁹ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), pp. 52-53.

⁴⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), pp. 52-53.

⁴¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 61.

⁴² Wollstonecraft argued earlier in the work that people support things that they do not understand, and this lack of understanding was due in part to the lack of education which 'common people' received as a consequence of their inferior status. Therefore, people were dominated by the nobility and Wollstonecraft argued that this was true of the clergy, consequently demonstrating their corrupt nature. See Todd & Butler (Volume 6), pp. 19-20.

which the French had been confronted with during the Revolution were consequences of their past behaviour; or the ‘degeneracy of the French national character’ – the only such instance when Wollstonecraft adopted this explanatory device.⁴³ Tim Furniss claims that Wollstonecraft was using her radicalism in order to determine how the Revolution had gone wrong and ‘what lessons could be learned from it’.⁴⁴ Wollstonecraft wrote,

[W]hen justice, or the law, is so partial, the day of retribution will come with the red sky of vengeance, to confound the innocent with the guilty. The mob were barbarous beyond the tiger’s cruelty: for how could they trust a court that had so often deceived them Let us examine the catalogue of the vices of men in a savage state, and contrast them with those of men civilized; we shall find, that a barbarian, considered as a moral being, is an angel, compared with the refined villain of artificial life.⁴⁵

Wollstonecraft’s mention of ‘the day of retribution’ is one instance of her use of religious language and imagery, drawing on the belief that God had set down a day when he would judge the people on Earth. Wollstonecraft described this day as containing the ‘red sky of vengeance’ which would be a symbol that the Day of Judgment had come. This suggests that Wollstonecraft believed that the French people were witnessing a type of Judgment Day due to their past actions. Moreover, Wollstonecraft compared the actions of people in a barbarous state to the actions of those in a civilized state. She argued that the behaviour of the French people was not ‘acceptable’ as they were part of a civilized society. However, the cultivation of civilized practices within French society had not led to a refinement of manners or behaviour; it had in fact led the French society to resemble a savage state. The people had not acted in a civilized manner to their King, to the nobility – whose only fault in some instances was their name – nor to their neighbours. Wollstonecraft concluded by using the metaphor of a diseased body to explain French society. France had become a ‘contaminated body’ attempting to regenerate itself.⁴⁶ The outcome of this regeneration, Wollstonecraft concluded, would only be determined by ‘the philosophical eye, which looks into nature and weighs the

⁴³ Furniss, p. 70.

⁴⁴ Furniss, p. 68.

⁴⁵ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), pp. 234-35.

⁴⁶ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 235.

consequences of human actions'.⁴⁷ Whose 'eye' it would be was not stated; however it was likely that Wollstonecraft may have been referring to the 'day of retribution' when human actions would be judged by God.

Although Wollstonecraft did not extensively use religion in her *View*, her concluding remarks were scattered with religious language and imagery. Wollstonecraft argued that the French clergy – as she had argued about the English in her *Vindications* – were corrupt and damaged religion more than they 'saved' it. Wollstonecraft insisted that this corruption was able to be dispersed to the public precisely because of their lack of reason. The public believed what was disseminated amongst them about things that they themselves did not understand. Therefore, not only did religion and religious institutions need reform but French society needed to be reformed also. It was only through enlightenment and reason that the French public could embrace rational religion and overcome the corruption in their society. Moreover, Wollstonecraft applied her arguments from her second *Vindication*, regarding the dissemination of a reasoned and rational religion, to French society. She argued, through a discussion of 'civilization', that the French people were in a state of barbarism. If they were to cease their violent behaviour and embrace enlightened, rational thinking, they could 'move' toward greater civility and refinement in behaviour. It was this greater refinement and civility which Wollstonecraft encountered when she traveled to Scandinavia, a journey which resulted in the production of a work containing letters from her travels. These letters highlight Wollstonecraft's religiosity and her view of foreign landscapes through a theological framework shrouded in Wollstonecraft's personal experiences of and relationship with God.

⁴⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 235.

Chapter Five:

‘To be born here, was to be bastilled by nature’: Mary Wollstonecraft’s travels through Scandinavia¹

The environment surrounding the writing of this text was vastly different to that which Wollstonecraft encountered in France. As a result the religious language and imagery which Wollstonecraft utilized throughout her text was fundamentally different; however it was still evident. This chapter will utilize Wollstonecraft’s theological allusions to discuss the presence of a religion which had become more personally expressive. Moreover, it will highlight the changing nature of Wollstonecraft’s relationship with God. In addition, it will suggest that ‘movements’ which have come to be associated with eighteenth century writings – such as Romanticism – can be gleaned from this text.

Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark was published in 1796. As the title indicates, it was a travel piece made up of letters which Wollstonecraft wrote during her time in those three countries.² Wollstonecraft primarily traveled to Sweden, Norway and Denmark to attend to a business deal of Gilbert Imlay’s which had fallen through.³ However, Mary A. Favret describes the purpose of Wollstonecraft’s traveling differently; she stated

¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft: Volume 6*, edited by Janet Todd & Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering, 1989), p. 295. Wollstonecraft wrote: ‘We were a considerable time entering amongst the islands, before we saw about two hundred houses crowded together, under a very high rock – still higher appearing above. Talk not of bastilles! To be born here, was to be bastilled by nature – shut out from all that opens the understanding, or enlarges the heart’, Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 295.

² Within my research for secondary sources I have come across Per Nystrom, *Mary Wollstonecraft’s Scandinavian Journey* (Göteborg : Kungl. Vetenskaps- och Vitterhets-Samhället, 1979). Although not used within my text, it is helpful as Nystrom elaborates on information within Wollstonecraft’s letters, from places which she visited to social elements which she mentioned.

³ Spence states that Wollstonecraft specifically went as Imlay’s ‘representative on a case of commercial fraud’, p. 123.

that it ‘was a voyage of escape, money and love’.⁴ Favret argues that Wollstonecraft was escaping the gender constraints of the eighteenth century, the existence of societal ‘negatives’ evident in the time period, such as poverty or abandonment, and her own emotions.⁵ She went with Fanny, her daughter to Imlay, and Marguerite, Fanny’s caregiver – although Fanny and Marguerite were not with Wollstonecraft for most of her travels. The book is set out chronologically with each ‘chapter’ representing a letter written from whichever town/region Wollstonecraft was in.⁶ Each letter analysed the political and economic context of a place Wollstonecraft encountered. Deborah Weiss argues that this context ‘would have been interpreted by Wollstonecraft’s original readers as “masculine” in nature’, as women did not engage with such topics.⁷

Wollstonecraft began her travels in Norway and descriptively wrote about what she came in contact with. She wrote of the voyage to Norway, the trouble she encountered attempting to land, the ‘types’ of people who occupied the country and the scenery she saw. Wollstonecraft described the landscapes informally and with a great deal of figurative language. For example, in her second letter she wrote:

during a summer, sweet as fleeting, let me, my kind strangers, escape sometimes into your fir groves, wander on the margin of your beautiful lakes, or climb your rocks to view still others in endless perspective; which piled by more than giant’s hand, scale the heavens to intercept its rays, or to receive the parting tinge of lingering day – day that, partly softened into twilight, allows the freshening breeze to wake, and the moon to burst forth in all her glory with solemn elegance through the azure expanse.⁸

⁴ Mary A. Favret, ‘*Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark: Traveling with Mary Wollstonecraft*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, edited by Claudia L. Johnson, p. 212.

⁵ For example, Favret states: ‘[W]e begin to understand the traveler’s flights less as examples of freedom and more as efforts to escape ...’, p. 215. This is one of many such examples of Wollstonecraft’s attempted efforts to ‘escape’.

⁶ Of this work, Spence comments: ‘Wollstonecraft’s observations of social life in Scandinavia are linked to her theory of progress, which is briefly set out in the appendix, where she expresses her ‘conviction of the increasing knowledge and happiness of the kingdoms’ that she passed through’, p. 123.

⁷ Deborah Weiss, ‘Suffering, Sentiment, and Civilization: Pain and Politics in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Short Residence*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 45, 2 (June 2006), p. 205.

⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 252.

In this excerpt it is evident that Wollstonecraft used religion to help her describe the landscapes which she saw. Instead of merely writing that the rocks were tall, or comparing them with something familiar, such as a building or landmark, Wollstonecraft described the tallness of the rocks by stating that they reached heavenwards.⁹ Within the landscape Wollstonecraft saw a spiritual reality. Furthermore, landmarks reminded her of her connection with God. In one of her last letters Wollstonecraft again mentioned the heavens in a description of a rock formation. She wrote: '[R]ock aspiring towards the heavens, and, as it were, shutting out sorrow, surrounded me, whilst peace appeared to steal along the lake to calm my bosom, modulating the wind that agitated the neighbouring poplars'.¹⁰ The rock formation connected her to heaven as well as calming her. Wollstonecraft credited the formation with the ability to shut out sorrow, while the lake was able to 'transport' peace and calm the wind.

In Sweden Wollstonecraft again used religion to describe a place which she was passing through. Wollstonecraft referred to Paradise in her description of a Swedish town. She claimed that people – and I understand her to be referring to educated English people – had a perceived image of the 'primitive inhabitants of the world' and the land where they had lived. Wollstonecraft wrote,

[S]o far from thinking that the primitive inhabitants of the world lived in a southern climate, where Paradise spontaneously arose, I am led to infer, from various circumstances, that the first dwelling of man happened to be a spot like this ...¹¹

She went on to state that people in a southern climate did not worship the sun as a god or demi-god arguing that, therefore, the first inhabitants could not have lived in a southern climate. Wollstonecraft inferred the superiority of people in a southern climate and the inferiority of people in a northern climate due to this perceived worship. In a southern climate the sun was a regular occurrence; therefore, the

⁹ Wollstonecraft also stated that when viewing one landscape 'she opened [her] bosom to the embraces of nature; and [her] soul rose to its author, with the chirping of the solitary birds ...' Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 267.

¹⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 343.

¹¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), pp. 263-64.

Earth's first primitive population could not have come from the south as it was the north who were led to 'adore a sun so seldom seen'.¹²

Wollstonecraft's discussion of religion often began in her letters through a mentioning of her soul. Karen Hust states that women were often connected to, and were sometimes synonymous with, nature in the eighteenth century.¹³ Hust goes on to argue that 'if women have souls, they must have reason'.¹⁴ Therefore, Wollstonecraft's ongoing reference to her soul and its activity could be seen as a way for her to claim her own ability to reason. Furthermore, it could enable her to demonstrate her placement within the boundaries of 'male intellectual abilities'.¹⁵ In one such letter, while describing the landscape around her, Wollstonecraft stated that her 'very soul diffused itself in the scene'.¹⁶ She stated that her soul 'glided' to the sea, 'melted into the freshening breeze', and took flight to the 'misty mountains'.¹⁷ Again, Wollstonecraft's description of the natural environment she encountered was informal and written in figurative language. Viewing the landscape this way enabled Wollstonecraft to connect with God. She stated that her 'gliding' soul turned away from the landscape below and looked through the 'fleecy clouds' to bow before her Creator. Therefore, Wollstonecraft saw the foreign natural environments which she encountered in religious terms. Wollstonecraft, it seems from her letters, was also reconnecting with God through the natural environment, something that may not have been possible for her in urban England. In order to further understand the figurative language used by Wollstonecraft a link to eighteenth century Romanticism needs to be made.

¹² Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 263.

¹³ Karen Hust, 'Facing the Maternal Sublime: Mary Wollstonecraft in Sweden', in *Mary Wollstonecraft's Journey to Scandinavia: Essays*, edited by Anka Ryall and Catherine Sandbach-Dahlstrom (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 2003), pp. 141-44.

¹⁴ Hust, p. 144.

¹⁵ Weiss, p. 205.

¹⁶ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 280.

¹⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 280.

Romanticism was a 'movement' which came out of, and was influenced by, the Enlightenment.¹⁸ The dates for this 'movement' differ among scholars with different writers placing the start date at different periods throughout the eighteenth century. Aidan Day states that,

the dates vary somewhat, but both sources [the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* and *A Glossary of Literary Terms*] agree on a center of gravity for Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth ... Both agree that Romanticism gave a special importance to individual experience, that the faculty of imagination was of special significance and that this faculty was celebrated along with a profound sense of spiritual reality.¹⁹

Marshall Brown, however, insists that 'Romantic' writing was evident in the mid-eighteenth century and in some cases in the late seventeenth century. He states that,

Romantic nature feeling – affectionate dwelling on particulars, along with dreaming or daydreaming in dark grottoes, amid vast wildernesses, or on high mountains – is widespread in the writing of the second half of the eighteenth century, and it can easily be traced further back ...²⁰

Brown's definition for the 'start date' of Romanticism highlighted an aspect of this 'movement' which is evident in the writings of Wollstonecraft – the importance of nature. It is difficult to define the exact principles which made up this 'movement'; however, there is a marked shift in the texts of eighteenth century writers away from reason and towards a more private and individual writing.²¹ This private and individual writing comes from the emotions and spirituality of the author and their 'newfound' relationship with nature. Robert Mayo claims that,

[U]nderneath many of the 'nature' poems of the magazines is the familiar conviction that nature is beautiful and full of joy; that man is corrupted by civilization; that God

¹⁸ The writings of eighteenth century figures can be drawn on to acquire a greater understanding of this 'movement'. See *Romanticism: An Anthology*, edited by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) and *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, edited by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

¹⁹ Aidan Day, *Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 4.

²⁰ Marshall Brown, 'Romanticism and Enlightenment', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, edited by Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 28.

²¹ Brown, p. 30. Brown explores the relationship between Enlightenment and Romanticism. In so doing, he argues for the differences between the two and highlights what Romanticism was through stating what it was not.

may be found in nature; and that the study of nature not only brings pleasure, therefore, but generates moral goodness.²²

It is this precise sense of Nature which Wollstonecraft engaged with during her travels to Sweden, Norway and Denmark. It is also this beauty which uplifted Wollstonecraft throughout her travels so that the reader can see a marked difference in her emotional state from the beginning to the end of her *Letters*. Moreover, Wollstonecraft's 'finding' of God within the natural landscapes is understood better through the Romantic context. Christine Chaney maintains that the landscapes Wollstonecraft encountered allowed to her perform a type of confession; Wollstonecraft was able to associate her emotions with the natural landscapes in order to 'come to terms' with what she was feeling personally.²³

The times when Wollstonecraft makes a connection between the interior world of her feeling and consciousness and the external world come in unique and unpredictable ways throughout the text But as the text moves forward and Wollstonecraft's sorrow and hopelessness increase, many more things, from the sight of a father returning home to his family or even the sight of excessively dirty city streets, prompt outpourings from her heart.²⁴

In this case, it is not only the natural landscapes which Wollstonecraft drew on in her 'confession' but also everyday occurrences, such as the father returning home. Wollstonecraft was therefore constructing a work which was deeply individual and personal, a marker for the Romantic period. Within this construct of the Romantic period the notion of the 'sublime' also needs to be alluded to. The notion of the 'sublime' was used to describe a state of being which a person felt when they viewed natural landscapes and environments. According to Burke, "[S]ublimity is the note which rings from a great mind", and [when] "the soul is raised by true sublimity, it gains a proud step upwards, it is filled with joy and exultation, as though itself had produced what it hears" or, in the writings of Wollstonecraft,

²² Robert Mayo, 'The Contemporaneity of the *Lyrical Ballads*', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 69 (1954), cited in Day, p. 40.

²³ Weiss argues that, although not explicitly stated by Wollstonecraft, the emotions which she had to 'deal with' were caused by her separation from, and rejection by, Imlay. See Weiss, pp. 205-06.

²⁴ Christine Chaney, 'The Rhetorical Strategies of "Tumultuous Emotions": Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written in Sweden*', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 34, 3 (Fall 2004), p. 292.

what it saw.²⁵ Sublimity was more than feeling joy, admiration, or fear when viewing a landscape. It could uplift one's soul, 'extend [man's] very Being', intensify one's emotions, and dispose the mind of rational thinking, all while leaving one in a state of fear and awe.²⁶ It was sublimity which Wollstonecraft felt when viewing large landscapes during her travels. It was also this state of being which was partly 'responsible' for the numerous connections between Wollstonecraft's soul and God.

In Frederikstad, Norway, Wollstonecraft again engaged with the natural environment in such a way as to enable her to connect with God. Wollstonecraft 'went to heaven' through the natural environment she viewed. The reflections Wollstonecraft felt however were less positive than the ones she had previously experienced.

The impetuous dashing of the rebounding torrent [of the falls] from the dark cavities which mocked the exploring eye, produced an equal activity in my mind: my thoughts darted from earth to heaven, and I asked myself why I was chained to life and its misery?²⁷

Wollstonecraft wrote that she was able to stretch her hand towards eternity and grasp at immortality.²⁸ She was reinforcing the connection between her soul, God and heaven. However, this connection came from her feelings of disdain over the state of her life and the misery she felt. Past connections had been through positive experiences and the result of the calming qualities of the natural environments. Therefore, it is evident that both positive and negative feelings aroused by the natural environments could trigger the 'flight' of Wollstonecraft's soul from Earth to heaven. Moreover, mentioning her soul's activity when viewing natural

²⁵ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, edited by James T. Boulton (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1958), p. x1v.

²⁶ Burke, pp. xlviii, lii, liii.

²⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 311.

²⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 311. Again, Wollstonecraft's connection can be associated with, and placed within, the eighteenth century understanding of the 'sublime'. For reference to some major contributors on the subject in the eighteenth century see Walter John Hipple Junior, *The Beautiful, The Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957).

landscapes made it easier for Wollstonecraft to describe emotions which she was feeling. Her description of the landscapes using religious terms highlights Wollstonecraft's continued relationship with God and heaven, especially within the context of the "sublime". That natural landscapes, rather than the Scriptures or Bible, could evoke these emotions in Wollstonecraft provides an insight into her changing relationship with God.

Wollstonecraft also drew on religious language and imagery to describe 'man-made' structures, utilizing the 'sublime' to detail the feelings which certain structures produced. During her travels in Sweden, Wollstonecraft commented on the physical appearance of churches in certain towns which she visited. For example, Wollstonecraft detailed the appearances of the two churches which were present in Tonsberg. She discussed the architecture of the buildings and how they encouraged certain emotions in a person. For example, Wollstonecraft stated that one of the churches had a 'gothic respectability about it' but could not inspire grandeur because 'to render a gothic pile grand, it must have a huge unwieldiness of appearance'.²⁹ A church in Windsor produced different emotions in Wollstonecraft. She stated that this structure was grand due to it being 'whitewashed and scraped till it [had] become as bright and near as the pots and pans in a notable house-wife's kitchen'.³⁰ However, Wollstonecraft also stated that the cleanliness of the structure took away the 'somber hue' which it had previously produced. Before the church was whitewashed Wollstonecraft stated that,

the pillars within had acquired, by time, a somber hue, which accorded with the architecture; and the gloom increased its dimensions to the eye by hiding its parts; but now it all bursts on the view at once; and the sublimity has vanished ...³¹

²⁹ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 277.

³⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 278.

³¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), pp. 277-78. For an understanding of the sublimity which Wollstonecraft mentioned see Burke, and especially refer to Part II 'Magnitude in Building', p. 76 and 'Light in Building', p. 81. Also see Part IV 'Why visual objects of great dimensions are sublime', p. 137.

These details were important as it was one of Wollstonecraft's aims when writing the *Letters*. Chaney insists that Wollstonecraft set out to write a text about Sweden, Norway and Denmark which was detailed and rich in descriptions. Wollstonecraft also stated this intention in her Advertisement for the work.³² Therefore, she wrote detailed descriptions about the changes which had been made to the churches and the emotions which they produced.

As well as changes to religious structures, Wollstonecraft also mentioned changes to religion itself. When Wollstonecraft passed through Norway, she wrote that the people were 'becoming tolerant' in relation to religious matters and advancing towards 'free-thinking'.³³ Wollstonecraft stated that '[O]ne writer has ventured to deny the divinity of Jesus Christ, and to question the necessity or utility of the Christian system, without being considered universally a monster, which would have been the case a few years ago'.³⁴ The inclusion of the phrase 'free-thinking' could highlight Wollstonecraft's use of Enlightenment principles to assess religious changes. Moreover, the term 'free-thinking' deviated from theological thought found in rational religion. This rational religion advocated that people believed the Bible to be the true and only word of God and the Christian God to be the true and faithful Creator.³⁵ The move away from this 'type' of religion was influenced in part by intellectual and social changes in the eighteenth century, as people began to look for God in other places, such as nature, and they were no longer happy with simply taking the Bible as it was. Louis Dupre stated that 'reason [could no longer] serve as the foundation of faith'. He gave the opinion of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper) as an example and stated that he believed that 'religion is not, or is not primarily, a matter of reason but of the heart'.³⁶ Therefore, Wollstonecraft was

³² Chaney, p. 292.

³³ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 276.

³⁴ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 276.

³⁵ David A. Pailin adheres to these terms of rational religion when he stated that, '[I]t is, furthermore, not only 'unjust and unreasonable' to expect people to believe things with greater assurance than the evidence justifies: it is also 'impossible' for them so to believe', p. 216. See David A. Pailin, 'Rational Religion in England from Herbert of Cherbury to William Paley', in *A History of Religion in Britain*, edited by Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils, pp. 211-33.

³⁶ Louis Dupre, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 245, 254.

adhering to the emerging belief that truth was not found in the Bible alone and that God was present and available to individuals' outside of the Bible and the Church. These new beliefs, distinct from rational religion, were also able to be stated in public without the threat of persecution, as in the case of Norway above.

The ninth letter which Wollstonecraft wrote contained an increased amount of religious material and language compared with other letters. In this letter Wollstonecraft described church attendance and some differences between Norwegian and English religious practices. Wollstonecraft commented:

[T]he people of every class are constant in their attendance at church; they are very fond of dancing: and the Sunday evenings in Norway, as in catholic countries, are spent in exercises which exhilarate the spirits, without vitiating the heart.³⁷

The religious practices which Wollstonecraft observed had evident similarities with those in other countries due to the religion followed by the population. Although Wollstonecraft saw similarities between the religious practices which Norwegian people and people from other countries engaged in, she preferred some of the religious activities evident in Norway. Wollstonecraft wrote that on the Sabbath Norwegians enjoyed dancing in the evening and that Sunday labour was 'gay'. She preferred these activities to the 'stupid stillness which the streets of London ... inspired where the sabbath is so decorously observed'.³⁸ Moreover, Wollstonecraft did not favour the policing of the Sabbath which took place in England. She wrote that activity on the Sabbath would be beneficial to the English character and would 'stop the progress of methodism'.³⁹ Wollstonecraft stated that when she passed through Sweden she was surprised to see that the 'fanatical spirit' of Methodism had gained support. Wollstonecraft called the Swedes a 'deluded people'. She

³⁷ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 287.

³⁸ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 287.

³⁹ Methodism is defined as: '[A] section of the Evangelical Revival (Revivalism) led by John Wesley (1730-91) and George Whitefield (1714-70) John Wesley described Methodism as "the religion of the Bible," and the Bible remains the fundamental authority of belief and practice. Methodists believe in salvation through faith and work, and in God's forgiveness of personal sin. Public affirmation of belief in Jesus Christ the Savior and faithful membership of the church are especially important'. See *The Wordsworth Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1999), p. 699.

encouraged the way that Norwegians observed the Sabbath – with dancing and fun. In her descriptions of the Swedes, who were similar to the English in their observance of the Sabbath, Wollstonecraft wrote that they,

actually lose their reason, and become miserable, the dread of damnation throwing them into a state which merits the term: and still more, in running after their preachers, expecting to promote salvation, they disregard their welfare in this world, and neglect the interest and comfort of their families: so that in proportion as they attain a reputation for piety, they become idle.

Aristocracy and fanaticism seem equally to be gaining ground in England, particularly in the place I have mentioned [Yorkshire]: I saw very little of either in Norway.⁴⁰

Thus, Wollstonecraft compared the observance of the Sabbath in three countries: England, Norway and Sweden. Of these three, Wollstonecraft was most positive about the way which the Norwegians observed the Sabbath, and she wrote about the negative effects which silent observance, as in England and Sweden, had on people and their country. She ended her observation by writing that religion did not interrupt employments in Norway and people were able to undertake work on the Sabbath; whereas in England and Sweden, where people were not able to undertake any activity on the Sabbath, religion was perceived by Wollstonecraft as an interruption. Moreover, Wollstonecraft's encouragement of work on the Sabbath highlighted her ongoing opinion regarding laziness. Although, the fact that there was to be no work on a Sunday was determined by the Church and Scriptures, Wollstonecraft saw it as encouraging laziness in the population. Moreover, it is interesting that Wollstonecraft associated fanaticism with the aristocracy. In her two *Vindications* and the *View*, Wollstonecraft highlighted her dislike of social and political institutions, as she believed that they upheld and disseminated corrupt religious and moral ideas and practices. It was within this passage that Wollstonecraft again alluded to these arguments; however, she positively asserted that these corrupt institutions were not present in Norwegian society as they were in English society.

⁴⁰ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 288.

Wollstonecraft stated that ‘little attention’ was paid to education in Norway.⁴¹ Many children were taught to read and write and taught the basics of arithmetic. The only exception to this lack of extensive education was the catechism. Wollstonecraft observed that each child was carefully taught the Christian religion through the catechism and they were ‘obliged to read in the churches, before the congregation, to prove that they are not neglected’.⁴² Therefore, education revolved around religion with the main form of learning being the catechism.

Wollstonecraft’s use of religion within her *Letters* was of a personal nature. Wollstonecraft described the state of religion in the countries which she passed through and in a few instances made comparisons between these European countries and England. She alluded to the ‘first primitive’ population, church attendance and observation of the Sabbath, and the religious foundations of education. Moreover, Wollstonecraft used religion at length in her descriptions of nature and natural landscapes. Religion was used by Wollstonecraft to describe what she saw, for example, when she wrote that a rock formation was reaching to heaven to explain the height of that structure. Wollstonecraft, in her descriptions, also mentioned her soul and how it interacted with the landscape, for example, when it merged with the wind or flew to the mountains. Her descriptions of the landscape, as a result of her theological thought, were not formal descriptions. Wollstonecraft personalized what she saw and felt different emotions due to different landscapes, which followed the principles of sublimity. It is through her *Letters* that one is able to better perceive the breadth of Wollstonecraft’s religion and her relationship with God.

⁴¹ Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 277.

⁴² Todd & Butler (Volume 6), p. 277.

Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to redress the scholarly elision of religious elements within four of Wollstonecraft's texts. The eighteenth century context in which Wollstonecraft was embedded has been a fundamental unit of analysis as the social, religious and political climate of eighteenth century England was important in the development of Wollstonecraft's thoughts and arguments. Chapter One stressed the extent to which religion was fundamental to political and social structures, highlighting the continuing influence of ideas which had been determined during past religious upheavals. It noted the importance of Dissenting religions, both to Wollstonecraft and, more generally, to the religiosity of England. 'Class', the aristocracy and the nature of employment – dynamic and ambiguously defined – were also explored as central themes in Wollstonecraft's works. The place of women within society was also discussed so as to indicate the societal norms and collective inferiority which Wollstonecraft would call into question.

Chapter Two primarily discussed those figures that were influential to the writing of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* – namely, Richard Price, Edmund Burke and Joseph Johnson. Biographical information – including information on these men's political and religious affiliations – was covered in this chapter to determine their relationship to Wollstonecraft and the ideals which they may have transmitted to her. The *Vindication* aimed to demonstrate that all men were born as rational creatures and with natural rights. Societal groups – such as political parties and the aristocracy – however, wrongly undermined this rationality and individual rights through their ability to keep 'lower classes' in inferior positions. This chapter highlighted and analysed these fundamental societal arguments by drawing on religious elements evident throughout the text. These religious elements further suggest the extent to which this work was conceived in a politico-theological environment.

An extension of this environment and these arguments were found in Wollstonecraft's second major political work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Chapter Three highlighted how this text extended Wollstonecraft's 'natural rights' arguments so as to include the natural rights of women. In combating the fundamentally religious underpinnings of eighteenth century gender norms Wollstonecraft utilized Scripture and religious imagery and language to argue that the secondary status of women was damaging to society and religion, as God had not created women inferior to man, but He had, in fact, credited women with positive, amiable characteristics. Moreover, Wollstonecraft highlighted the damaging effect which 'power' institutions – such as the aristocracy, clergy and Monarch – had on religion, and how this corruption had become manifest in society.

Chapter Four explored Wollstonecraft's concern with the negative effect of 'power' institutions on society in her, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe*. She saw the onset of the Revolution as a result of the corruption exhibited by the aristocracy, monarch, politicians and clergy. Moreover, she argued that the Revolution was a means by which God was punishing the irreligiosity which had become paramount in France. For Wollstonecraft, the Revolution was a type of French 'Judgment Day'. This chapter highlighted what Wollstonecraft deemed as the Revolution's 'cure' – a 'cure' embodying a reasoned and enlightened religion, as well as a dismantling of 'power' institutions. A reasoned and enlightened religion was one of the fundamental elements by which Wollstonecraft insisted equality could be achieved. Her foundational emancipatory arguments were cemented within a theological framework. These means would also strip society of corrupt institutions and allow for the 'gangrene' of moral perversion to be remedied.

Chapter Five analysed Wollstonecraft's, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. It was a text developed within the changing

environments posed by her travels in Scandinavia. It highlighted the changing nature of Wollstonecraft's religiosity and showed how her deeply personal relationship with God was expressed in the discourses of 'romanticism' and 'sublimity'. Her discussions of towns and peoples were undertaken through a theologized understanding of the physical environment. This chapter proposed that Wollstonecraft's extensive and explicit mentioning of her soul's activity was a medium by which she was able to explain, and engage with, the physical environment surrounding her. It also highlighted Wollstonecraft's turn away from a religion that was explicitly rational, and her movement towards a religion that was founded on personal experiences of God through Nature, an idea gaining some credibility in late eighteenth century England.

All four texts examined in this thesis can be seen as incorporating similar ideas and fundamental arguments. All advocated – either explicitly or implicitly – equality as the means through which social and religious corruptions could be 'cured'. Moreover, all texts, it has been demonstrated, were conceived within a theologico-political environment and all utilize religious language and imagery within their refutations of societal norms. The extent to which religion was fundamental to the development of Wollstonecraft's ideas, and to the continuation of her radicalism, further emphasizes this general hiatus in Wollstonecraftian scholarship. This thesis however, has been necessarily limited in the range and depth of its analysis. Further investigations into Wollstonecraftian religiosity are needed. Such studies will enrich both our understanding of Wollstonecraft's general discursive intentions and of late eighteenth century British culture. They may also provide useful insights into the supposed incompatibility of Christianity and feminism.

List of Sources

This List of Sources is set out under the following headings:

Primary Sources

- I. Newspapers/Journals
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