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Historicising the Feminist: A Study of Mary Wollstonecraft's Political and Discursive Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis has investigated the life and publications of Mary Wollstonecraft. The thesis is divided into three chapters the first chapter explores the political and social context of late Eighteenth century England in which Wollstonecraft lived the majority of her life. It then moves on to discuss the 'Revolution Controversy' and Wollstonecraft's contribution to that debate. Giving specific attention to *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* as it is Wollstonecraft's first political publication, and was the first published response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Without first publishing *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, Wollstonecraft could not have published her most famous work.

Next the second chapter investigates Eighteenth century education, and how Wollstonecraft ideas on changing the nature of education would help reform society in her eyes. Education was recognized as having special significance by many Enlightenment philosophers, this thesis looks at the contribution of John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau to educational theory, and the ways in which Wollstonecraft responded to their ideas. In the final chapter the inclusive nature of Wollstonecraft's gender theory is considered. Wollstonecraft is widely recognised as publishing what became for many the founding document of modern western feminism. What is given less recognition is that Wollstonecraft was in fact interested in broad social reform, similar to many other Enlightenment philosophers, Wollstonecraft's social theory included changing education and socialisation for both women and men. Society could not be reformed without changing social and educational practices with regard to both

men and women. Wollstonecraft furthered the contemporary debate on the rights of man to include the rights of woman. Wollstonecraft criticised the unnatural distinctions of gender and class, setting out in both *Vindications* the negative consequences for the character of both men and women. Another less recognised aspect of Wollstonecraft's philosophy which this thesis has highlighted is the vital role that religion played, and its implications for her ideas. This aspect of Wollstonecraft's thought has tended to be overlooked by many Wollstonecraft scholars, who try to place Wollstonecraft in some kind of political and social continuum which I think misses the revolutionary and far sighted nature of Wollstonecraft's philosophy. In taking a historicist approach or understanding to Wollstonecraft, by reading Wollstonecraft in the terms of the political and social environment of the late eighteenth century, it becomes easier to understand the radical nature of Wollstonecraft's ideas, and the personal hardships she faced as both a woman and a member of the lower middle class.

INTRODUCTION

The intention in this thesis is to examine the political and social thought of Mary Wollstonecraft in light of the 'Revolutionary Moment', and the opportunity it offered her to envisage a society where all people were equal under God. I emphasise two aspects of the nature of Wollstonecraft's thought which have been given less notice by Wollstonecraft scholars, firstly: the central place that her religious belief held in Wollstonecraft's social and political philosophy. Secondly: the gender - inclusive nature of Wollstonecraft's ideas for social reform. Wollstonecraft could not have written *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* without first writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*. Wollstonecraft's ideal society included equal employment opportunities and political and legal representation for all members of society, both rich and poor, and men and women.

Quentin Skinner raises two issues that have been relevant in an enquiry in to a historical figure and their published works, Skinner discusses the idea that historians sometimes consider the significance of a work or individual in light of modern ideas and influences, leaving no place for the analysis of what the author intended at the time. Wollstonecraft has often been interpreted in this manner. Skinner suggests that intellectual biography is subject to the difficulty of the changing literal meaning of key terms. An extension of this is that such changed terms are then deployed anachronistically in an analysis of an historical individual.¹ This is relevant for Wollstonecraft who is commonly considered or described as a feminist. This is not a term

¹ Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 8, no. 1 (1969).

Wollstonecraft or her contemporaries would have been familiar with. The term 'feminism' first appeared in an English Dictionary in 1851 and feminist, in 1894.² While Wollstonecraft may in fact have been the 'mother' of western feminism, this is not something she would have been aware of herself. Literature can not be removed from cultural practice. In reading and understanding Wollstonecraft, first as a lower middle class woman, with no legal or political representation outside of a male relative, then giving consideration to her position within Joseph Johnson's 'literary family' and the ideas and individuals to which she was exposed. It may be possible to understand the way in which Wollstonecraft communicated her ideas.

Wollstonecraft has been the subject of a number of good biographies, most recently Janet Todd and Lyndall Gordon I draw heavily on their work here.³ Mary Wollstonecraft was born in April 1759 in Spitalfields outside of London. Her mother Elizabeth Dixon was from Ballyshannon in Ireland, and her father Edward Wollstonecraft was the son of a prosperous Spitalfields manufacturer. Mary was the couples' second child and first girl. In 1765 the family, which now included two more daughters Eliza and Everina, shifted to Barking, where another son James was born. Then in 1768 the family shifted again to Beverly in Yorkshire, where they stayed for six years. Here the last child, Charles was born. As the oldest daughter, it Mary's duty to help her mother with household and family duties. These efforts were to go unrewarded, as the oldest child Edward (Ned) was Elizabeth's favourite. In Beverly Mary got the opportunity to attend the local parish school, but gained most of her knowledge through avid reading of any books she could obtain. Here Mary made friends with Jane Arden. Arden's family was

² Oxford English Dictionary Online

³ Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000). And Lyndall Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus* (London: Little, Brown, 2005).

wealthier than the Wollstonecrafts and this was to create problems for the friendship, and provide a first lesson for Wollstonecraft in the unequal class structure of English society. As Mary matured she observed her mother's dependent and unhappy situation as a married woman. Her life involved both domestic drudgery and physical and verbal violence. As Edward Wollstonecraft Sr's farm failed and the family became more financially insecure, his drinking became chronic. When drunk he took these problems out first on his wife and then his daughter Mary when she came to the aid of her mother.

When Mary was 15 the family returned to London, where life really began to offer her opportunities. There she was introduced to Mr and Mrs Clare. Mr Clare was a retired clergyman and the couple were childless. They offered Mary the emotional and intellectual support which was absent in her family life. One day Mary accompanied Mrs Clare to visit a Mr and Mrs Blood. Like Mary's mother, Mrs Blood had a large family, and an alcoholic husband. Mary developed a close friendship with Fanny Blood. Like Wollstonecraft, Fanny was the oldest daughter and relegated to helping her mother take care of the family. Wollstonecraft's family moved again in 1776, this time to Laugharne in Wales. Wales did not offer Mary the same intellectual stimulation as London, and soon she considered leaving home. Aged 19 Wollstonecraft felt trapped in an unhappy and quarrelsome family. Her father had stopped working, and was home all the time, drinking and tyrannising over his wife and family. The family returned to London in 1778, the same year that Mary left home to become a lady's companion, to a Mrs Dawson in Bath. Being a lady's companion was one of the few respectable career options open to an unmarried lower middle class woman. This was not a happy experience for Mary; however, she was to witness the fashionable life of the aristocracy, from which she was

to formulate the beginning of her critique of social inequality. Mary was called from her employment with Mrs Dawson to nurse her dying mother. Elizabeth's dying words haunted the rest of her oldest daughter's short life: "A little patience and all will be over."⁴ This sentiment came to represent the life of the majority of women for Wollstonecraft.

Following the death of Mrs Wollstonecraft the family went in their own directions, and Mr Wollstonecraft remarried. Mary joined the Blood family at Walham Green in London, taking charge of a new family, and continuing her programme of self-education through reading. Mary's independence and peace were shortlived. Her sister Eliza was unhappily married to Meredith Bishop, and following the birth of their first child, suffered a very bad bout of post natal depression. Bishop called on Wollstonecraft to come and nurse Eliza. In the absence of assistance from their brother Ned, Wollstonecraft removed Eliza from the house late at night, leaving behind the baby, which died soon after. Mary now had to support not only herself but also Eliza. With assistance from Mrs Clare and Mrs Burgh the widow of writer and clergyman James Burgh, Wollstonecraft, Fanny Blood and, Eliza founded a school for girls in Newington Green. The school prospered almost immediately.

It was also during this time that Wollstonecraft was to meet the first of two men who made a great difference in her life. Dr Richard Price was a Dissenting Minister of a small chapel at Newington Green. Price was friendly with many of the leading political and philosophical figures of the day, a fellow of the Royal Society, and an authority on

⁴ Gordon, p.28

financial and scientific matters.⁵ During this time Wollstonecraft also befriended the Reverend Joshua Waterhouse. Fanny's suitor Hugh Skeys finally proposed in 1784 and Fanny accompanied him to Portugal. In Autumn 1785, leaving the school in the care of her sisters and Mrs Burgh, Wollstonecraft sailed to Portugal to nurse a pregnant and ailing Fanny. Fanny died soon after her arrival, again illustrating for Wollstonecraft the dependent and uncertain position suffered by the majority of women. Following the death of her closest friend Wollstonecraft returned to England to find that in her absence the school had been mismanaged and had to close. She then accepted a position as a governess, the last respectable position open to her as a middle class female.

Wollstonecraft became the governess to the three youngest daughters of Lord and Lady Kingsborough, the largest estate holders in Ireland. Lord and Lady Kingsborough's marriage was arranged predominantly to combine the two estates: Lord Kingsborough had numerous liaisons with other women, and Lady Kingsborough was a harsh and distant mother to her daughters. Wollstonecraft was unhappy in her position but benefited from access to the large and well endowed library in the house. She also formed a close friendship with the oldest of the three girls, Margaret, with whom she would continue to correspond following her dismissal. Wollstonecraft attempted to reform her charges and further the partial education they had received before her arrival. During her time in Ireland, Wollstonecraft also witnessed the grinding poverty and injustice experienced by the peasants as a consequence of the hierarchical nature of the society. The Kingsboroughs and Wollstonecraft went to Dublin for the season, while here Wollstonecraft had a chance for social contact which had been absent at Michaelstown.

⁵ For a well developed analysis of Richard Price see D O Thomas, *The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

In 1787 following her dismissal, Wollstonecraft returned to Joseph Johnson and his social circle. In contrast to the Kingsboroughs and their privileged social circle, the Dissenting circles in which Wollstonecraft mainly socialised experienced and interpreted English politics and society differently. Excluded by the Test and Corporation Acts from an active political life, the Dissenters were critical of many aspects of English political and social practice. Wollstonecraft would come to share their ideals.

Johnson published Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in 1787, and then soon after published *Mary: A Fiction*, Wollstonecraft's attempt to imagine a different kind of heroine than those common in novels aimed at girls and women. Soon after, Wollstonecraft wrote *Original Stories From Real Life*, inspired by Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton*. In 1788 Joseph Johnson and Thomas Christie founded the *Analytical Review* to which Wollstonecraft became a regular contributor, and this offered here some financial security: she became an independent woman. Through Johnson's frequent dinner gatherings Wollstonecraft came in to contact with many of the leading artists, writers, and free thinkers from England, Europe, and America.

On the 14th July 1789 the world as England knew it changed for ever – ordinary French men and women stormed the Bastille, beginning the French Revolution. For Mary, this heralded the potential for a new era in social and political relations. In November during the commemoration of the Glorious Revolution, Dr Richard Price preached a sermon on the Love of the Country. Thus commenced in England what is now known as the Revolution Controversy. Edmund Burke responded to Price's sermon with *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The first of many responses to Burke was Wollstonecraft's. In defence of her mentor Price, Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of*

the Rights of Man, composed in about 6 weeks, and initially published anonymously. Her work received many positive reviews, which led to Johnson publishing a second edition attributing the work to Wollstonecraft.⁶ This positive response to her first political work, gave Wollstonecraft the confidence to venture further in to the world of political publication from which women were generally excluded.

In 1792 Wollstonecraft's most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, was published. Wollstonecraft dedicated the book to Tallyrand, who was involved in shaping French Revolutionary government policy. Wollstonecraft hoped to influence French ideas on female education and citizenship, as well as comment generally on gender relations and their importance for social progress. The second *Vindication* confuted the ideas concerning female character and education of many male writers of the eighteenth century, the most famous of whom was Jean Jacques Rousseau. Although Wollstonecraft approved of some of Rousseau's political and social theories, she was disappointed by Sophie, Rousseau's ideal woman as delineated in *Emile* (1762). Wollstonecraft felt that Rousseau perpetuated the false values and virtues which impeded social progress.

Wollstonecraft travelled to revolutionary France, and arrived as the course of the Revolution was changing and taking on a more violent nature. What Wollstonecraft witnessed in Paris was to alter her ideas on politics and progress, but never entirely dampened her belief in a future state of social equality. During her residence in Paris Wollstonecraft had contact with many leading Girondian members of the Convention and attended meetings herself. Of special note was Madame Roland with whom

⁶ Sylvana Tomaselli, ed., *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Man and a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). p.xxii

Wollstonecraft shared ideas of gender equality. As the Revolution descended into the 'Terror' and many of Wollstonecraft's Girondian friends fell victim to the 'National Razor', Wollstonecraft began to lose hope for the creation of a new politically and socially representative society in France. At this time she was introduced to Gilbert Imlay with whom she had her first real relationship, and a daughter Fanny, named after her lost friend. Imlay protected Wollstonecraft by listing her as his wife and giving her American citizenship. This gave her security when France went to war with England. Imlay's business ventures were unsuccessful however, and he soon left Mary, and travelled to England to further his contacts. During this time baby Fanny contracted smallpox but survived due to Wollstonecraft's careful and practical care. In April 1795 Wollstonecraft followed Imlay to England. Imlay had begun an affair with another woman. He offered Wollstonecraft financial support for Fanny but ended their personal relationship. Wollstonecraft attempted suicide in May 1795 but was rescued. Imlay, in part to help Wollstonecraft recover, and to resolve a business matter of his own, dispatched her to Scandinavia.

This journey would result in the publication of Wollstonecraft's final and most popular work during her lifetime. Scandinavia offered Wollstonecraft opportunities to observe and comment on features both positive and negative in eighteenth century society, and to envisage a future time of social equality. On her return to England in October, Imlay failed to meet her at Dover. Soon after her return she again attempted suicide, this time she jumped from Putney Bridge, again she was rescued. Her relationship with Imlay ended in acrimony, and she returned to the support and protection of Joseph Johnson, and again became editorial assistant to the *Analytical Review*. At the

same time she was reacquainted with William Godwin. This time they were more amicable than at the previous meeting in 1791. This was to briefly offer Wollstonecraft what Gordon describes as the most fruitful experiment, the most successful personal relationship.⁷ Fanny who was now 3 years old took an instant liking to Godwin and played a part in cementing his relationship with her mother. Wollstonecraft and Godwin were to influence each other – being in some ways opposites they complemented each other. They married when Wollstonecraft was six months pregnant on the 29th of March 1797. On Wednesday the 30th of August, Wollstonecraft gave birth to another girl, who was named Mary, known to later generations as Mary Shelley and author of *Frankenstein*. Her mother died of septicaemia on the 10th of September, leaving behind a grieving husband, two young daughters, and an unfinished novel. Godwin published the novel with the alternate endings Wollstonecraft had written and not decided upon. He then wrote *Memoirs of the Author of 'The Rights of Woman'* in which he gave an honest and sentimental exploration of the life of his late wife. Godwin seriously misjudged the times and the increasing conservatism of society. The *Memoirs* ensured that Wollstonecraft was remembered initially not for the positive contributions she made to society, and the support she gave to her friends and family, but for the socially and morally unorthodox events of her personal life. Following Godwin's *Memoirs*, Wollstonecraft's work was ignored or ridiculed. Early First Wave Feminists did not want to be associated with the ideas of Wollstonecraft, because of this, although they shared some of her ideals. Wollstonecraft was discovered by some individual women through their own research most notably Emma Goldman and Virginia Woolf who both discuss Wollstonecraft in their published works. In the 1960's and 70's during second wave

⁷Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus*. p.330

feminism Wollstonecraft was finally recognised, evidenced by a spate of biographies and studies. Most of these have focussed on Wollstonecraft's place within the feminist canon. While not wishing to diminish the significance of this scholarship, it is also important to view Wollstonecraft in the political and discursive contexts of her time. This thesis attempts to supply some of this significant context in the hope that doing so emphasises still further the achievements of this remarkable thinker.

In the first chapter of this thesis I give a brief history of seventeenth and eighteenth century England, as it relates to an understanding of the published works of Mary Wollstonecraft. Then I move on in the second part of the chapter to explore the Revolution Controversy and the implications for England of the French Revolution. Firstly I discuss Price's Sermon, then the famous response of Edmund Burke. Next I discuss *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, and the rare opportunity that the Revolution offered a woman to publish a work of a political nature. I give attention to the way in which Wollstonecraft counters Burke's use of sentimental language, and his defence of a political and social system that perpetuated poverty, inequality, and the false distinctions of property, rank, and birth. Finally I give a brief discussion of Burke's most well known respondent Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*.

Chapter 2 looks at education - both the education that existed in eighteenth century England and the ways in which education was envisaged by Wollstonecraft as a tool for social change. Education was a favourite topic of philosophers attempting to change the nature of society. I discuss the important educational experiments undertaken during the 1650's. Following examining the revolutionary visions of John Locke and Jean Jacques Rosseau, this chapter explores how Wollstonecraft extended the ideas of

Locke and Rousseau to include girls as well as boys. Both boys and girls shared a rational nature from God, and should both have an education, in order to reach their full potential.

This then is the starting point for chapter three which is concerned with Wollstonecraft's gender vision and its divergence from the social reality which she experienced. In her published works, Wollstonecraft was concerned with the ways in which her society maintained women in positions of dependence. Wollstonecraft's gender project was wider than this, however. This chapter illustrates Wollstonecraft's ultimate concern not with female equality but with the reformation of human society.

CHAPTER ONE: ENGLISH POLITICS

I

This chapter has two purposes. Firstly it will to introduce and outline the political and social context in which it is necessary to read and understand Mary Wollstonecraft and her social milieu. Following this historical discussion will be an exploration of the early Revolution Controversy. Within this discussion I will explore the contribution of Wollstonecraft's mentor Richard Price and Price's prominent opponent Edmund Burke. I will then examine Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* in the context of the issues raised by Price and Burke. Wollstonecraft's social and religious theory differed markedly from Burke's and I will illustrate how Wollstonecraft refuted Burke's interpretation of politics, society, religion, and virtue. Lastly this chapter looks at Thomas Paine.

In many respects the English were some of the freest citizens in eighteenth century Europe. England experienced civil war and turbulent social change during the civil war and Interregnum of the seventeenth century. Then in 1688 without violence or bloodshed England replaced the unpopular Catholic monarch James II with William III, the Dutch Stadtholder in what was known as the Glorious Revolution. Despite this seemingly peaceful transition English society was divided by a number of factors that were to prove a recurring problem throughout the eighteenth century, and receive particular notice in light of first the American Revolution, and then the French Revolution.

Following the execution of King Charles I in January 1649, a republic was established, during which time England experimented with different social and political

ideals. In this period a number of different Protestant sects arose. England's republic proved shortlived; at the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 there was a promise of peace and a return to social stability. Many problems faced the Cavalier Parliament: how to unite a factionalized nation, continue to build on the overseas expansion under the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, and ensure that England never again faced the political and social disruption of a revolution. Measures passed by the Cavalier Parliament to try to end religious and social division were to further enflame them in the course of the eighteenth century. The Clarendon Code as it was known comprised the Corporation Act (1661), the Act of Uniformity (1662), the Conventicle Act (1662), the Five Mile Act (1665), and the Test Acts (1661, 1673). Instead of returning England to a nation united under the Anglican religion of the Church of England, the Clarendon Code alienated the different Protestant religious sects, ensuring that religious dissent would continue to divide the English nation. The Corporation Act legislated that only people who had taken the sacrament of the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the Church of England within the last year were eligible for civic or municipal office. Under the Test Act all office holders were required to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, repudiate the doctrine of transubstantiation and receive the sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England. This applied to both civic and military office holders. This resulted in Dissenters being excluded from positions in the military, government, and civic organizations such as the Bank of England, the South Sea Company, and as office holders in hospitals, alms- houses, and work- houses.⁸

⁸ Goodwin, Albert. *The Friends of Liberty: The English democratic movement in the age of the French revolution*. Hutchinson & Co Ltd (London, 1979) p.77 B. W. Hill, ed., *Edmund Burke on Government, Politics, and Society* (Sussex: Harvester Press Ltd, 1975). Hill also explores the effects of the Test and Corporations Acts on English politics and economics pp.167-216

Charles II did not have a legitimate heir, his brother James was therefore in line for the throne. James was a Catholic. There were many attempts to politically exclude James from becoming King leading to division within both parliament and society over the legality of exclusion on religious grounds.⁹ At the same time there was concern over the growing power of King Louis XIV of France, and the potential threat of a return to Catholicism.¹⁰ King Charles died in 1685 and was succeeded by his brother James. In the same year King Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes which had protected the rights of French Protestants. Many Protestant refugees arrived in England.¹¹ Fear of popery united different political and social factions in England, as King James attempted to rule with Royal Prerogative, ignoring the legal power of parliament. Mary of Modena, James' consort gave birth to an heir. This triggered what became known as the Glorious Revolution. Leading politicians in England invited William of Orange the Dutch stadtholder to invade and eject King James.¹² In November 1688, James abdicated and William became King of England. Despite the peaceful nature of the transition the political events following the Glorious Revolution did not in any way prove a permanent solution and continued previous political and social divisions, which would again prove divisive during the American and French Revolutions. The Bill of Rights negotiated in the revolutionary settlement of 1688-9 secured triennial parliaments, security of property, and broad toleration of religious dissent. William III accepted this and was responsible for initiating change in the financial structure of the English government and economy with the establishment of the Bank of England in 1694. According to Maurice Ashley,

⁹ Coward, p.285

¹⁰ Coward, p.274

¹¹ Coward, p.274

¹² Coward, p.300

William's main concern was the war in Europe, and preventing the French mastery of Europe. William proved an able general, but he was not a congenial King. He did not have good relations with members of government.¹³ Coward also highlights King William's determination to involve England in the European warfare against King Louis XIV and the threat of Catholic hegemony in Europe created political rivalry and division in parliament.¹⁴

Despite the political and social inequalities created by the Clarendon Code, religion and Enlightenment were in less conflict in England than in the Catholic nations. In many respects religion was a matter of private judgment and did not prevent the spread of ideas or concepts that questioned either religious or government authority. According to Porter "Enlightenment in Britain took place within, rather than against, Protestantism."¹⁵

Over the course of the eighteenth century England experienced what has become known as the Industrial Revolution which resulted in growing class identity in society. Urbanization caused by the rise of industry and increasing enclosure of common land in the countryside led to the growth of cities, in particular London. Mark Kishlansky describes London as "a world of its own"¹⁶ it was the political, legal, economic, and social capital of Great Britain. Asa Briggs argues that although there was no universal transformation, and England in the 1780s was still predominantly an agricultural and trading nation, she does point to the fact that industry was gradually developing however

¹³ Maurice Ashley, 'The Stuarts', in *The Lives of the Kings & Queens of England*. Edited by Antonia Fraser (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993) pp.245-251

¹⁴ Coward, p.307

¹⁵ Porter, p.99

¹⁶ Kishlansky, Mark. *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714*. Penguin Books, (London, 1996)

small and localised at first.¹⁷ In 1695 the Licensing Act lapsed and was not renewed, this resulted in an increasingly free press, the spread of ideas, and questioning of political and social inequalities with less fear of prosecution.¹⁸ As the population of larger cities grew coffee houses, taverns, debating clubs, societies, and assembly rooms arose; leading to the increasing political awareness of urban dwellers through the spread of questions and theories on the nature of politics, religion, and society. These different social spaces, catering to varied class and political allegiances, provided a forum for discussion and the spread of theories and concepts related to political and social reform.

Another factor resulting from increasing commercialization and industrialization was the rise of a middle class with financial capital not the traditional landed wealth of the aristocracy. Excluded from political representation and the social and familial networks of the aristocracy, both the working class and the middle class began to develop a sense of identity and class consciousness. Money was a way to increase one's standing in English society as class boundaries were less rigid in England than in Europe: "Men could not be parted from their property, capital was allowed to ferret where it would, and new riches could be manicured into respectability."¹⁹ Relationships of dependence in familial, social, and political relations, especially primogeniture, resulted in unnatural distinctions in society which would come under increasing scrutiny in light of specific events in the mid and late eighteenth century. Briggs develops a clear and precise summary of the slow transformation of English society at all levels. Kinship and family

¹⁷ Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783 – 1867. A History of England in Eleven Volumes*, General Editor W.N. Medlicott. Longman London, first published 1959. This edition 1979. pp.17-18

¹⁸ Linda Colley identifies the lapse of the Licensing Act as the time when printing houses were established with more frequency in England and the unifying effect the rise of newspapers had on Great Britain, pp.40-41.

¹⁹ Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2000). Along with E.P. Thompson, Porter identifies the 1790s as a critical period in the formation of a united working class. P.359

remained as important in the late eighteenth century as it had historically. Other forms of social relationships were in a period of transition: “The traditional view of society was troubled during the course of mounting eighteenth – century debates on three basic social questions – the size of the population, the state of the poor, and the provision of education.”²⁰ High taxation and lack of political representation which were in part responsible for the revolt of the thirteen colonies were issues that created divisions in England as well.²¹ Increasing knowledge of different political and social theories from philosophers such as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, James Burgh, Richard Price, Edmund Burke, and many others continued the development of class identities, and political awareness. Harsh penal laws, press gangs, game laws, and the enclosure of common land continued the unnatural distinctions in English society²², and helped to fuel the increasing political and social divisions which would come to a head during the course of the French Revolution.²³

Porter in *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* devoted a whole chapter to the increasing secularizing of English society, highlighting the importance of the changing nature of how people understood the world around them. Porter explains that middle and lower class citizens began to question the traditional

²⁰ Briggs, p.15

²¹ Goodwin, pp32-64. Goodwin presents a clear connection between the American Revolution and British radicalism.

²² Adam Smith in the *Wealth of Nations* was one of the first writers to identify that people not government comprised a nation state. Smith identified the importance of education, and also discussed problems resulting from low wages being paid to the lower classes. Paul Hyland with Olga Gomez & Francesca Greensides, ed., *The Enlightenment: A Source Book and Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003). pp.192-200

²³ Isaac Kramnick identifies how the dissenters, excluded from positions within government, aware of their marginality in society, used their exclusion to develop their unique position as free to enquire, question, and experiment contributing to the growth of the economy and the development of an identifiable politically aware middle class. Who envisaged that “A public order managed by men of merit and achievement would in turn reward others for industry and effort.” Isaac Kramnick, "Religion and Radicalism: English Political Theory in the Age of Revolution," *Political Theory* 5, no. 4 (1977). p.159

relationships between the state, the church, and classes within society.²⁴ Porter also explores changing attitudes to health and nature remarking that people were less likely to look to God or Satan as an explanation for affliction and adversity. As well as increasingly secular attitudes to health, people also looked to secular explanations for risk management. Insurance expanded as an industry both for business purposes and for protection of personal property and goods.²⁵ Changing attitudes to liberty and privilege resulted not only in challenges to political institutions but also called for reform of the Poor Laws and a rationalizing of the penal system including rational and consistent sentencing, treatment of prisoners, and design of prisons. John Howard and Jeremy Bentham both championed reform of prisons and hospitals.²⁶ Increasing commercialization as well as promoting the development of a consumer economy also resulted in the expansion of roads and passenger coach services, and the postal service; this helped encourage the increasing spread of information, improved travel, and an increasing unity of the nation as travelling distances were decreased.²⁷

²⁴ The rise of the public sphere has been researched by a number of historians. While I do not intend to discuss this topic in depth, for the purposes of this thesis it has been necessary to note the development of the public sphere, the increasing political and social awareness of the middle and lower classes; In order to understand the impact this had on English society in the eighteenth century, and how Mary Wollstonecraft during her employment with the *Analytical Review* contributed to discussion and was influenced by these developments. Jurgen Habermas fully explores the development of a public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. See also .James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. William Beik and T.C.W. Blanning, *New Approaches to European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²⁵ Porter, p.208

²⁶ Porter, pp420-1. John Howard was particularly influential long term in changing the way prisoners were treated and the buildings in which they were imprisoned. Howard's role in reform is explored fully in John Freeman, ed., *Prisons Past and Future, Cambridge Studies in Criminology* (London: Heinemann, 1978). Howard's influence is also discussed by Robert Alan Cooper in *Ideas and Their Execution English Prison Reform Eighteenth Century Studies, Vol 10, No.1 (Autumn, 1976)*, pp73-93.

²⁷ Neil McKenderick explores the full impact on English society of the consumer revolution and the link to the industrial revolution. McKenderick notes in particular the class mobility in English society compared with France. McKenderick identifies also the rapid growth of London and the effects this had on the English economy.

Briggs illustrates how the slow but sure changes brought about by mechanization of the textile industry; the easily accessible resources of coal and iron, and the introduction of steam power were to change English society as a whole. Briggs also shows the inter-connected nature of town and country. Growing urban centres were dependent on the countryside for production of food and as a source of labour.²⁸ As slow as the changes to English society were, the American Revolution resulted in increasing political awareness. It highlighted for dissenters and the middle and lower classes not only their combined position of dependence but the continued political corruption at home in England, which led to renewed demands for parliamentary reform. B. W. Hill suggests that at the time of the start of the American Revolution few English people understood what a wealthy nation America had become.

“Few British people...had any concept that the colonies, which only one hundred years before had been straggling and stockaded outposts, had now become a large and prosperous nation; that in Philadelphia, indeed, they possessed the second largest city of the empire.”²⁹

America had developed into a commercially successful and independent nation; it was not a struggling colony needing support from England. Failure to realise this change was one of the causes of the Revolution. The American colonists developed a written constitution, and provided for equal representation, and manhood suffrage. Increased dissatisfaction with the lack of reform in England combined with the effects of debating societies, newspapers, and the spread of the writings of political philosophers such as John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau to a wider section of the population led to

²⁸ Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783 - 1867*, ed. W. N. Medlicott, *A History of England in Eleven Volumes* (London: Longman, First published 1959 this edition 1979). See pp.8-66 which cover the English economy and society in the 1780s.

²⁹ B.W. Hill, ed. *Edmund Burke on Government, Politics and Society*. Harvester Press In association with Fontana, (Sussex, 1975)

heightened political awareness and calls for reform. Specifically desired were the abolition of the property qualification, the introduction of a secret ballot, and equal electoral districts in order that the new commercial cities gained appropriate representation for their size. There were also calls for legislation to be put in place for annual parliaments in an attempt to counterbalance attempts by King George III to rule without recourse to parliament. Finally, reformers called for payment of members in order that becoming a member of parliament was not just the prerogative of the wealthy.³⁰

The climate of political crisis and confusion developing in late eighteenth century Britain was further exacerbated by political mismanagement in India. After the loss of the American colonies, problems developed with the administration of India under the control of the East India Company. This resulted in attempts by members of the Whig party to initiate reform of the government of India through the English parliament and called for the impeachment of Warren Hastings the governor-general of Bengal. This highlighted again the influence of patronage and political mismanagement at the highest levels in the English government.³¹ Like the revolution in America, the Indian crisis gave people reason to reflect on the political inequalities in England itself. During 1788-89 King George III suffered from his first bout of what is now known to have been a symptom of porphyria. The uncertainty created by King George's illness increased the

³⁰ J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty 1660-1832: Political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American world*. Cambridge University Press. (Cambridge, 1994.) Clark outlines the links between England and the North American colonies, the political discourse and the origins of the concepts of sovereignty, natural and common law, and the American rejection of the British form of government. Clark highlights the Dissenters and the influence of Dissenting ideas in the American colonies prior to and during the revolution.

³¹ Hill presents a brief analysis of Burke's role in the impeachment of Warren Hastings, and how the close personal relationship between King George and Warren Hastings determined the outcome of the trial, further illustrating the corrupt nature of political relations in England. pp.263-4

growing divisions within the Whig party. King George had attempted to rule without recourse to the elected officials in parliament, this resulted in divisions between factions in the Whig party. These splits developed further with events in America, India, and climaxed during the illness of King George. Some members of the Whig party including Burke supported the Prince of Wales expecting he would become Regent. King George recovered before this came about.³² At the same time as these events were taking place in England, revolution broke out in France. Within England there was a mixed response to events in France, initially even the Prime Minister William Pitt supported the establishment of the National Assembly.

II

Tom Furniss identifies the importance for England of the initial stages of the French Revolution:

“The French Revolution was a drawn-out process rather than a single event. But the dramatic events of the Revolution’s early phase provoked one of the most important political debates in British history. The “Revolution Controversy” of 1789-95 was as much about the implications of the Revolution for Britain as it was about the Revolution itself.”³³

³² The Regency Crisis and the ongoing divisions in the Whig Party are discussed by Frank O’Gorman in *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832*. St Martins Press (London, 1997) In particular chapters 8 &9 discuss the nature of the reign of King George III, his relations with parliament, and the developing divisions within the Whig Party. Burke’s particular role and the effects of the publication of *Reflections* are discussed by O’Gorman in *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy*. Pp108-9.

³³ Furniss, p.59

The first shot fired in this discursive war was Dr Richard Price's sermon entitled *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* presented to the London Revolution Society on November 4th 1789. Price was a well-respected member of the Dissenting community; he had been involved in appeals for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.³⁴ H. T. Dickinson identifies Price and Joseph Priestley, in particular, as welcoming the French Revolution and hoping it would further the cause of political and religious reform in England.³⁵ Price defended the rights of the American colonists to self-government in *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* published in 1776, in which he defended the argument that every community had a right to self government. For his support of the American colonists, Price was offered American citizenship in October 1778. He declined the offer but D.O. Thomas believes that America became "Price's spiritual home"³⁶ Price saw the potential for the American colonists to develop a society in accordance with his belief in the improbability of human nature.³⁷ For Price the contrast with England - where there was a society of inherited wealth, unequal social relations, and limited opportunity for advancement was highlighted by American events.³⁸ Price was not a republican; he did not wish to abolish the monarchy or the House of Lords. What concerned Price were the issues of unequal political representation and lack of a

³⁴ Furniss, p.59

³⁵ Dickinson, pp17-18

³⁶ D.O. Thomas, *The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price* p.262

³⁷ Isaac Kramnick identifies the importance of Price and his political ideas for the American colonists with "But what absorbed Americans in the decades around the revolution were Wilkes and the writings of the Reverends Price, Priestley, and Burgh. These were the radical kinsmen of the American patriots, holding the eastern flank in the battle against tyranny, corruption, and unrepresentative government." p.506

³⁸ Price in *A Discourse* explores this in a discussion on adulation and the negative consequences for both a king and the public resulting from improper ideas of self and inherent superiority. Price also identified that the English king was entitled to reverence and obedience, but that position came from the community, it was the majesty of the people.

written constitution in which political and legal rights of all individuals were safe guarded.³⁹

Price envisaged religion in terms of an individual responsibility to God to contribute meaningfully to society. Price therefore did not separate religion and politics. “Price always understood his own involvement in social and political problems as the discharge of the duties he owed to the deity.”⁴⁰ Barbara Taylor discusses the religious nature of the writings of both Price and Wollstonecraft and the promise inherent in the French Revolution. “Seen through this lens, the revolutions in America and France appeared to herald not only a global libertarian upheaval but also the arrival of the divine millennium as foretold in *Revelations*.”⁴¹ Taylor goes on to identify how Price and Priestley regarded this period as the “prophesied Last Days preceding God’s earthly reign.”⁴²

Price further developed the idea of love of country by suggesting that the duty to love one’s country did not imply that it was in any way superior to any other country or that the laws and constitution of one’s country were superior to any other. His rationale is pointedly political: “there are few countries that enjoy the advantage of laws and governments which deserve to be preferred.”⁴³ Price felt that love of country entailed working to improve and advance the political and social institutions of that country. Price then moved from discussing the idea of love of country to the wider issues of the opportunity he believed the Glorious Revolution had offered English citizens. Price

³⁹ Price in *A Discourse* specifically identifies the “inequality of our representation” and partial liberty was as corrupting and unrepresentative as no liberty. Price however maintained hope that there would be political progress and that it could not be claimed that there had been no advances towards the goal of equal political representation.

⁴⁰ Thomas, p.298.

⁴¹ Taylor, p.151

⁴² Taylor, p.151

⁴³ Price, p.2

believed that the Glorious Revolution was an unfinished project. He felt that it had shown that citizens had the right to freedom of religious worship, the right to resist power if abused, and the right to choose their governors.⁴⁴ First Price discussed religion and the current conditions of religious worship in England. He pointed out that the established Church of England was over two hundred years old and that the Liturgy or the Articles of Faith had failed to develop in accordance with knowledge in other areas. Price advocated the importance of public forms of worship for developing virtue and widening social bonds and understanding between individuals. That the current conditions within the Church of England did not foster social and personal virtue concerned Price as a reformer, he saw the church perpetuating the current social order and continuing to keep the majority of citizens ignorant. Price believed that religious worship was an important aspect of society, that religion however should further the obligations of virtue and support a spirit of community and social development.⁴⁵ Price held a positive belief in the potential for good in human nature, people had been given the potential by the deity to develop as virtuous and caring individuals with a wide understanding and concern not just for themselves and their family but for their community and the wider world.⁴⁶

Price continued his criticism of English society by a development of the two other concepts he believed the Glorious Revolution had offered the English people: the right to choose governors, and the right to cashier them for misconduct. Price does not just develop an argument that a person in a position of authority is at the mercy of the people.

⁴⁴ Price established that the Glorious Revolution was an unfinished project and that the Revolution society of which he was a member identified that the Glorious Revolution had established the rights to liberty of religious worship and to freely choose representative governors.

⁴⁵ Price, p.5

⁴⁶ Goodwin gives a good analysis of the religious and civil ideas of Price. In particular Price's idea of virtue and the need for political education. P.107 Price in *A Discourse* identifies religion as rational and that as a lover of one's country it was a duty to enlighten it. Price links religion and politics in an overall view of society as a whole.

He insists that people in society are required to live by the laws of that society and to respect the people who are chosen to govern it. At the same time society and civil government is fundamentally an agreement between free individuals.

“Civil government (as I have before observed) is an institution of human prudence for guarding our persons, our property, and our good name, against invasion, and for securing to the members of a community that liberty to which all have an equal right, as far as they do not, by any overt act, use it to injure the liberty of others. Civil laws are regulations agreed upon by the community for gaining these ends, and civil magistrates are officers appointed by the community for executing these laws. Obedience, therefore, to the laws and to magistrates is a necessary expression of our regard to the community. Without it a community must fall into a state of anarchy that will destroy those rights and subvert that liberty which it is the end of government to protect.”⁴⁷

Price believed in the idea that government officials represented the people who elected them, and if they did not carry out that function or attempted to abuse their position the people had a right to call them to account for their actions. Living in a society involved the forgoing of certain rights, it was part of living in society that people had a responsibility to each other, and to protect the interests of each other they could not just follow their individual interest at the expense of other people. Price was aware however of the natural tendency of people in positions of power to be overcome by the idea of power. He makes clear his concern about power relations within society and the potential for abuses through two comments he made about power and the potential for abuse. Price was concerned that the unequal relations that existed in society presented opportunities for abuse.

“These extremes are adulation and servility on one hand, and a proud and licentious contempt on the other. The former is the extreme to which mankind in general have been most prone, for it has oftener happened that men have been too passive than too unruly, and the rebellion of Kings against their people has been more common and done more mischief than the rebellion of people against their Kings.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Price, p.6

⁴⁸ Price, p.6

If a monarch or ruler acted responsibly and looked after the interests of those they represented they should be respected and obeyed. It was only when a ruler abused a position of power, or if the interests of people were not being addressed that they had a right to protest. Established power relations involving a situation where an individual is regarded as holding a position of power over other people can lead to corruption or abuse by the person in power, and it can also result in a person who held a lower position debasing themselves in regard to the individual who holds a higher position.

“Adulation is always odious and when offered to men in power it corrupts them by giving them improper ideas of their situation, and it debases those who offer it by manifesting an abjectness founded on improper ideas of themselves.”⁴⁹

This outcome does not benefit either person, neither individual would look to educate themselves or change their situation to further develop their knowledge of the world and the deity. People needed avenues to improve themselves through education and vocation. Yet the current social structure did not allow for such development.⁵⁰ Price took the opportunity that he perceived the commemoration of the Glorious Revolution offered for a reassessment of the current level of development or progress in English society. Price makes specific reference to the American Revolution in which people had questioned an unrepresentative and absolutist monarchy and had developed a constitution and representative government, in which all free property owners were entitled to vote.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Price, p.6

⁵⁰ Kramnick explores the dissenting ideal of education, and how government according to the dissenters required talent and ability which were not assigned at birth but which developed with education and opportunity. pp.517-9

⁵¹ Isaac Kramnick in this article explains fully the role the dissenters played in establishing a commercial economy, expanding the school curriculum, and questioning the hierarchical nature of society, and the development of a middle class ideology see in particular pp.506-10.

“The inadequateness of our representation has been long a subject of complaint. This is, in truth, our fundamental grievance, and I do not think that any thing is much more our duty, as men who love their country, and are grateful for the Revolution, than to unite our zeal in endeavouring to get it redressed. At the time of the American war, associations were formed for this purpose in London and other parts of the kingdom, and our present Minister himself has since that war directed to it an effort which made him a favourite with many of us. But all attention to it seems now lost, and the probability is that this inattention will continue and that nothing will be done towards gaining for us this essential blessing till some great calamity again alarms our fears, or till some great abuse of power again provokes our resentment or, perhaps, till the acquisition of a pure and equal representation by other countries (while we are mocked with the shadow) kindles our shame.”⁵²

Here Price highlights the influence the American Revolution had on English society, and how quickly it was forgotten. Further to this point Price explored the nature of English society by discussing the increasing inequalities between individuals, how the developing commercial society had led to increasing luxury, debt, and vice among the wealthier levels of society, and how this was increasing resentment among less well off members of society.

“It is too evident that the state of this country is such as renders it an object of concern and anxiety. It wants (I have shewn you) the grand security of public liberty. Increasing luxury has multiplied abuses in it. A monstrous weight of debt is crippling it. Vice and venality are bringing down upon it God’s displeasure. That spirit to which it owes its distinction is declining, and some late events seem to prove that it is becoming every day more reconcilable to encroachments on the securities of its liberties. It wants, therefore, your patriotic services and, for the sake of the distinctions it has so long enjoyed, for the sake of our brethren and companions and all that should be dear to a free people, we ought to do our utmost to save it from the dangers that threaten it, remembering that by acting thus we shall promote, in the best manner, our own private interest as well as the interest of our country, for when the community prospers the individuals that compose it must prosper with it.”⁵³

⁵² Price, p.10

⁵³ Price, p.12

Here Price illustrates the way in which his philosophy involved an active connection between religion and society. It was through a duty to the deity that people should work to improve the society in which they lived. It was only after exploring the nature of the Glorious Revolution and the potential that it had offered English society, that Price moved on in the concluding stage of the speech to introduce the topic of the French Revolution. Price seems to suggest that the French, following the example of the Americans, were looking to further the rights of man and replace an absolutist monarchy with a more representative form of government. Nowhere in his speech does Price advocate revolution or overturning the English government; Price does, however, draw attention to the possibility that if no action is taken in regards to furthering political representation and opportunities for education and progress within society, then revolution may spread. Reform and change are implicit in Price's conclusion. Price seemed to envisage liberty, reason, and conscience as developing as a positive force for peaceful change.

“I see the ardour for liberty catching and spreading, a general amendment beginning in human affairs, the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience. Call no more (absurdly and wickedly) reformation, innovation. You cannot now hold the world in darkness. 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.”⁵⁴

Nowhere does Price advocate overturning the system through violent revolution. From a position of natural right, Price seems to suggest that mankind had rights which successive governments have taken away. Without a correction of these abuses revolution

⁵⁴ Price, p.12

will spread not because of a desire to overturn the political system but through a desire for increasing equality between individuals.

Edmund Burke was a well- respected politician who had advocated changes to laws relating to insolvency, the press gang, enlisting soldiers for life, and initially he supported the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Burke did not, however, support calls for reform of parliamentary representation which, according to R.R. Fennessy, he treated as “an attack on the British constitution”⁵⁵ According to James Conniff, Burke saw himself as a moderate; he was in favour of gradual reform.⁵⁶ Burke believed that the state church helped preserve culture and the structure of the state; despite this connection Burke did not believe that there should be a link between religion and politics.⁵⁷ One of the grounds on which Burke attacked Price was that he preached political reform from the pulpit.⁵⁸ Edmund Burke’s political actions and opinions seemed to many contemporaries to be contradictory. His attack on the French Revolution appeared at odds with his earlier support for the American colonists during the Revolution, and then his support for the Regency Bill during the illness of King George III.⁵⁹ Burke supported independence for the American Colonies recognising the unrepresentative manner in which the colonists had been treated by the English parliament. Burke supported the Regency Bill during the

⁵⁵ R.R. Fennessy, *Burke, Paine And The Rights of Man: A Difference of Political Opinion*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), p.82

⁵⁶ James Conniff, ‘Edmund Burke and His Critics: The Case of Mary Wollstonecraft’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60 no.2 (1999), pp299-318

⁵⁷ A good analysis of Burke’s complex interpretation of religion and politics is presented by Michael W. McConnell in his article Establishment and Toleration In Edmund Burke’s “Constitution Of Freedom.” *The Supreme Court Review*, University of Chicago Press 1996 pp393-462. In particular p.429.

⁵⁸ Edmund Burke, *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*. Dolphin Books Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York, 1961.

⁵⁹ Frank O’Gorman, *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy*. (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973) O’Gorman claims that Burke was more concerned with the effect the French Revolution may have on England than the events themselves. “Burke was mainly concerned with the French Revolution as a practical example and a timely illustration of the dangers of radicalism to Englishmen.” p.109

illness of King George, when the French people indicted King Louis XVI, Burke accused the French nation of not respecting the tradition of monarchy. Burke's differing attitude toward King George and King Louis could be seen as hypocrisy or an attempt by Burke to maintain a position within government by supporting the heir to the throne.

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 was published in 1790 in response to Price's sermon. In *Reflections*, Burke aimed to refute two of the arguments that Price presented in his sermon, firstly that the Glorious Revolution gave English people the right to choose their kings or to cashier them for misconduct. Secondly, Burke disputed the existence of a Bill of Rights in the form Price presented in his sermon. Burke was concerned that a comparison between the Glorious Revolution and the French Revolution made the French Revolution seem less innovatory than was the case, and the Glorious Revolution as having brought about changes that did not actually occur.

“The Revolution was made to preserve our antient indisputable laws and liberties, and that antient constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty. If you are desirous of knowing the spirit of our constitution, and the policy which predominated in that great period which has secured it to this hour, pray look for both in our histories, in our records, in our acts of parliament, and journals of parliament, and not in the sermons of the Old Jewry, and the after-dinner toasts of the Revolution Society. – In the former you will find other ideas and another language. Such a claim is as ill-suited to our temper and wishes as it is unsupported by any appearance of authority. The very idea of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror.

We wished at the period of the Revolution and do now wish, to derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers.”⁶⁰

Burke venerated history and tradition; he never questioned hereditary rights and privileges. Burke’s understanding of the state was similar to an idea of family; he seemed to believe that the same loyalty owed to family was owed to the state. Burke never appeared to question whether, under primogeniture, the most able individual in the family ought to inherit the property or wealth. In the same way Burke believed that the current form of political representation adequately provided for the interests of all citizens.

“In this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our alters.”⁶¹

According to B.W. Hill, Burke believed in the sanctity of existing political institutions and that the establishment of the Church of England was sacred and not to be profaned by lay philosophical ideas or concepts. Hill believes that Burke considered himself a “philosopher in action,”⁶² that is, that theoretical positions did not interest Burke; he had a practical approach to politics and society. Burke was concerned with political and social stability, and his written works were responses to particular

⁶⁰ Burke, p.43

⁶¹ Burke, p.46

⁶²Hill, B.W. *Edmund Burke on Government, Politics and Society*. Selected and edited by B.W. Hill in Association with Fontana Books. Harvester Press (Sussex,1975) Hill, p.8

circumstances.⁶³ Burke seems to have had a low opinion of the general public, he did not credit them with the rational ability afforded them by Price in *A Discourse*. Burke's literary style in *Reflections* continues that used in his earlier publication *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) in which he appealed to the feelings of his audience not their reason. Burke found it more appealing to relate to feeling and emotion than reason.

“Were all these dreadful things necessary? Were they the inevitable results of the desperate struggle of determined patriots, compelled to wade through blood and tumult, to the quiet shore of a tranquil and prosperous liberty? No! nothing like it. The fresh ruins of France, which shock our feelings wherever we can turn our eyes, are not the devastation of civil war; they are the sad but instructive monuments of rash and ignorant counsel in time of profound peace.”⁶⁴

In this statement Burke not only attempts to appeal to the feelings of his intended audience, he also ignores the suffering of the French people. Burke seems to imply that the French Revolution was the product of a number of advocates of the rights of man looking to purposefully foment rebellion, ignoring the fact that prior to the Revolution the French people were suffering innumerable hardships and inequalities. In his respect for tradition Burke does not seem to give credit to the possibility that a new constitution or progressive ideas of more extensive representation may lead to a more peaceful and prosperous society. Burke accused the French people of a lack of respect for the past and tradition. He felt that the French had a foundation on which they could have built and the violent events of the Revolution were destroying that possibility.

⁶³ Hill, p.11

⁶⁴ Burke, p.51

“You might have repaired those walls; you might have built on those old foundations. Your constitution was suspended before it was perfected; but you had the elements of a constitution very nearly as good as could be wished.”⁶⁵

Burke’s main concern in *Reflections* seemed to have been a defence of the English system of government and a defence of his theory of society. Burke was concerned that the violence and social unrest of the French Revolution could spread to England. He felt that the discussion of abstract individual rights and a connection made between the American Revolution and the French Revolution was a threat to the stability of society. Burke only advocated independence or government reform if the system was corrupt. His support for the American colonists, and India came after careful consideration of the circumstances, and he only supported independence as a final solution when the established government was failing or totally corrupt.⁶⁶ Ongoing philosophical discussion in parliament and at public meetings and clubs was inappropriate and potentially dangerous. Burke felt that the philosophers oversimplified ideas and that human nature and society was in fact more complex than they suggested. Burke did not support the idea of a rigid political philosophy, he delineated between a theorist and an active politician. Burke was suspicious of philosophers involving themselves in politics, without actually being a member of parliament. Burke did not approve of the philosophy of natural rights, but believed in an inherited political tradition handed down for posterity. Burke believed society and the supporting institutions

⁶⁵ Burke, p.47

⁶⁶ Hill, p.38

developed over time, the political process took time and natural rights theorists looked to over turn or undermine the state.⁶⁷

Burke had an in depth and wide- ranging appreciation of British political history and tradition. He believed that the present must be interpreted in terms of the past. Burke believed that the British and the American colonists shared a long history of struggle against the encroachment of monarchical government upon their political liberty. In *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* (1770) Burke discussed the idea that parliament had a duty to refuse to support a government that was not acceptable to the people and that the House of Commons should think itself accountable to its constituents.⁶⁸ In *On American Taxation* (1774) Burke argued that America should be at liberty to organise taxation for itself, it should not be taxed from England. In a *Speech on the Conciliation with the Colonies* (1775), Burke established that as descendents of Englishmen the American colonists had the same freedoms as the English, and if the Americans were expected to pay tax to England then they could expect political representation in parliament.⁶⁹ Although Burke did not initially support American independence he assented to it when there appeared to be no alternative.⁷⁰ Burke also believed that “the races of India had codes of law and bodies of custom justified by indigenous historical development which convinced him that British government in India had failed disastrously by ignoring them.”⁷¹ Burke had a deep respect for tradition and was sceptical about challenging established institutions of government. India had traditional forms of

⁶⁷ For an explanation of Burke’s political and social view of natural rights in contrast to prescriptive or traditional rights developed over time see R.R. Fennessy, *Burke, Paine and the Rights of Man* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963). Pp71-84.

⁶⁸ Burke in Hill, p.105

⁶⁹ Burke in Hill, p.174

⁷⁰ Burke in Hill, pp.159-187.

⁷¹ Hill, p.60

government and the East India Company had disregarded these and that was what had led to the political mismanagement. In the impeachment proceeding against Warren Hastings, Burke stated that if England undertook to govern an independent nation “we must govern them upon their own principles and maxims, and not upon ours.”⁷² This respect for traditional forms of government, and understanding of the present in terms of past events, as well as his fear of the effects of the French Revolution on England coloured Burke’s interpretation of events in France. “French history over the past two centuries would have permitted the setting up of a constitutional monarchy...”⁷³ It is in part this interpretation that induced Burke to respond negatively to the establishment of the National Assembly. Burke’s response to the French Revolution initially distanced him from members of the Whig party such as Fox who welcomed the French Revolution. Burke opened *Reflections* with a demonstration of how the French were not creating representative government but creating conditions for anarchy. He argued that the Glorious Revolution had been mainly preservative in its aims and had not deviated more than was necessary from the traditional pattern of English government. Burke spent much of *Reflections* describing the interdependent relationship of church and state, and how this was not being followed by the French constitution – makers.⁷⁴

In the time between Price’s sermon in November 1789 and the publication of *Reflections* a year later the French Revolution had begun to diverge from the initial relatively peaceful stages Price had commented upon in his sermon. Burke therefore attacked Price for defending violent actions of the revolutionaries which had not taken place when Price wrote *A Discourse*. Earlier than other members of the Whig

⁷² Burke in Hill, p.264.

⁷³ Hill, p.60

⁷⁴ Hill, pp38-40

government, however, Burke did see the potential for the French Revolution to become a wider European revolution undermining the foundations of civil government and society. Burke did not share the opinion of some of his colleagues- or the early respondents to *Reflections*- that the French would establish a constitutional monarchy.⁷⁵ Burke may, in the long term, have estimated the situation more clearly than either his colleagues or a number of people who responded to *Reflections*. This did not prevent Burke being isolated from the Whig party because of his opinions. The existing divisions in the Whig party developed further with Burke's publication. Many Whig party members including Fox and Sheridan supported the publication of some of the replies to *Reflections*. Fennessy discusses the major respondents to Burke; in his commentary on James Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791) Fennessy notes that

“Even people who respected Burke and admired his book as an intellectual *tour de force* might well believe that Mackintosh's version represented a saner and truer estimate of the situation in France: they might also feel that it was closer to the opinion that one should expect from an English Whig.”⁷⁶

Throughout *Reflections* Burke disputed the idea that there was any connection between the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the revolution in France. Rather, Burke related the revolution in France to the English civil war:

“These gentlemen of the Old Jewry, in all their reasonings on the Revolution of 1688, have a revolution which happened in England about forty years before, and the late French revolution, so much before their eyes, and in their hearts, that they are constantly confounding all the three together.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ As Fennessy remarks: “On the contrary, they thought that the French were, following the example of England by imposing constitutional limitations on their monarchy, and by reforming the church. They were genuinely unable to understand how Burke could see the slightest grounds for alarm in the political situation either of France or of England.”⁷⁵

⁷⁶ Fennessy, pp.195-6.

⁷⁷ Burke, p.28

With this statement Burke attempted to discredit Price and the dissenters by connecting Price's argument in *A Discourse* to the social and political turmoil of the Interregnum. Burke seemed to interpret the political activities of the dissenters and their calls for reform as an attempt to return England to that instability. Burke's belief in the sanctity of existing political institutions, and the interdependence of state and the church, in part led to his view of the Dissenters as undermining that interdependence. Burke was also concerned by the cordial relations between leading Dissenters such as Price and Priestley and members of the Whig party. Burke seemed to feel that this connection was furthering the divisions in the Whig party and could lead to the Whigs surrendering their independence.⁷⁸

Burke's negative estimation of the French Revolution may not have been unwarranted. Burke criticised the Dissenters for wanting to change or overturn what he considered a viable political system. Burke attacked the French, when the French political structure had blatantly failed. Yet Burke failed to understand French political conditions. He was concerned with discrediting the political ideas of Richard Price, not with analysing the conditions in France; Burke could not see that political structures sometimes needed to change to meet new challenges or social conditions. His approach to responding to Price's sermon and events in France, however, not only created distance between Burke and members of the Whig government, it generated over fifty critical responses from differing sides of the political and social spectrum.

Mary Wollstonecraft was the first person to respond publicly to *Reflections*. Wollstonecraft objected to the personal attack on Richard Price, and what she and other

⁷⁸ Goodwin pp. 99-135 gives a full description of the state of relations within the Whig Party and Burke's interpretation of the relationship between members of the Whig Party and leading Dissenters.

respondents interpreted as a hypocritical attitude to the treatment of King Louis and Queen Marie Antoinette after Burke's support of the Regency Bill during King George's illness. Wollstonecraft highlighted the attitude of liberal ambivalence towards Burke with her comparison of Burke with both Cicero and King Richard III. "You were the Cicero of one side of the house for years" and "Richard is himself again! He is still a great man, though he has deserted his post, and buried in eulogiums, on church establishments, the enthusiasm that forced him to throw the weight of his talents on the side of liberty and natural rights, when the will of the nation oppressed the Americans."⁷⁹

A Vindication Of The Rights Of Men, In A Letter To The Right Honourable Edmund Burke; Occasioned By His Reflections On The Revolution In France (1790) was initially published anonymously. After the first anonymous publication, the second edition was published with Wollstonecraft's name. A copy was sent to Dr Richard Price who, although close to death, responded positively to his supporter on the 17th December, admitting that he was not surprised to find that Wollstonecraft was the author of the work:

"..he had not been surprised to find a composition which he had heard ascribed to some of our ablest writers, appears to come from Miss Wollstonecraft. He is particularly happy in having such an advocate; and he requests her acceptance of his gratitude for the kind and handsome manner in which she has mentioned him."⁸⁰

Wollstonecraft opened *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* with her definition of the sublime and the beautiful and made clear her intention to write from a position of reason not sentiment, identifying Burke's use of sentiment for political purposes and

⁷⁹ Wollstonecraft, p.45

⁸⁰ Price in Lyndall Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus*. (London, Little, Brown, 2005) p.143

countering it with a language and attitude of reason. Having signalled to Burke and to her readers that her intention for the work was to present a reasoned account of the rights of man and to respond to Burke's interpretation of those rights and the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft proceeded to criticise Burke for his unreasoning veneration of the past. As well as confronting Burke for his uncritical interpretation of the past, Wollstonecraft also questioned his views on religion and society. Sylvana Tomaselli outlines the idea that Wollstonecraft believed that God had created a world where all was right and man had marred the work. From this perspective Burke venerated "...not the creation, but all aspects of its corruption by men and human institutions."⁸¹

From this idea of Burke venerating the corrupt work of man Wollstonecraft shifted her argument to confronting Burke's perceived respect for antiquity for antiquity's sake. Wollstonecraft again phrased her summation of Burke's position in the language of reason:

"that we are to reverence the rust of antiquity and term the unnatural customs, which ignorance and mistaken self - interest have consolidated, the sage fruit of experience: nay, that, if we do discover some errors, our feelings should lead us to excuse, with blind love, or unprincipled filial affection, the venerable vestiges of ancient days."⁸²

From her interrogation of Burke's interpretation of the past, Wollstonecraft proceeded to question what was impeding the progress of European civilisation, and how far back in history men should look for the establishment of their rights. In a similar manner to Burke, Wollstonecraft does not develop a sustained argument but changes her

⁸¹ Wollstonecraft, p.xxiii

⁸² Wollstonecraft, p.8

point of criticism regularly. She does, however, respond at length to what she interpreted as Burke's defence of the hereditary system of property ownership and government. In *Reflections*, Burke defended the hereditary system as preserving the social order. Wollstonecraft interprets this as a defence of the aristocracy, who secure in the ownership of their property, rank in society, and position almost above the law, are not concerned by the inequity of their position. As an instance of this unjust system, Wollstonecraft criticises penal law and pressing men for sea service.

“Our penal laws punish with death the thief who steals a few pounds; but to take by violence, or trepan, a man, is no such heinous offence. – For who shall dare to complain of the venerable vestige of the law that rendered the life of a deer more sacred than that of a man?”⁸³

Wollstonecraft's understanding of the false hierarchy in society and how this affected social relations is presented in all her published works. In her criticism of Burke's veneration of tradition and rank, I believe she was trying to illustrate that Burke's defence of tradition will in time create a revolution in England. It is implied that Burke, who was criticising the French nation for their attempts to create a new system of government, should be more attentive to conditions in England.

Wollstonecraft defended Price against Burke's criticism of his political and religious views. Price was a well respected member of the Dissenting community and on good terms with many members of the government of which Burke was a part.

“In reprobating Dr. Price's opinions you might have spared the man; and if you had had but half as much reverence for the grey hairs of virtue as the accidental distinctions of rank, you would not have treated with such indecent familiarity and supercilious contempt, a member of the community whose talents and modest virtues place him high in the scale of moral excellence.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Wollstonecraft, p.14

⁸⁴ Wollstonecraft, p.17

In this defence of her mentor, Wollstonecraft not only attacks Burke for his respect for the false distinction of rank and not the virtuous, well-meaning work of an individual who has gained recognition through his actions and beliefs, not an accident of birth. Price was worthy of respect not because of his position in society, which in the eyes of Wollstonecraft counted for little, but for his contributions to his society through his published works and defence of the rights of individuals. Price had contributed to society through his published works and sermons; he had worked to reach his God-given potential, not to look for wealth or recognition. Wollstonecraft, like her mentor, had a long term vision of progress not just involving an individual's responsibility to themselves in this life, but the responsibility they owed to God to improve themselves for a place in the afterlife. From here, Wollstonecraft continued her response to Burke's interpretation of history and his idea of what society owed to the memory of the past. Wollstonecraft also confronted Burke on the idea of interest and influence in parliament and the church.

“You must have known that a man of merit cannot rise in the church, the army, or navy, unless he has some interest in a borough; and that even a paltry exciseman's place can only be secured by electioneering interest.”⁸⁵

Here Wollstonecraft questioned Burke's idea of society and equality; people could only become office holders through a position of privilege or through the influence of someone in a position of power. This was not a society in which people could -through education and hard work- reach their potential; it was a corrupt society in which people held positions of power because of their birth or relationship to a person in a position of

⁸⁵ Wollstonecraft, pp, 20-21

power. Wollstonecraft moved on from a criticism of hereditary privilege to the idea of the artificial affection that it created, and the negative effect this had on society.

“Who can recount all the unnatural crimes which the laudable, interesting desire of perpetuating a name has produced? The younger children have been sacrificed to the eldest son; sent in to exile, or confined in convents that they might not encroach on what was called, with shameful falsehood, the family estate. Will Mr Burke call this parental affection reasonable or virtuous? – No; it is the spurious offspring of over –weening, mistaken pride – and not that first source of civilization, natural parental affection, that makes no difference between child and child, but what reason justifies by pointing out superior merit.”⁸⁶

Primogeniture did not encourage true family affection or create an environment in which all children - both boys and girls - were educated and able to contribute in a meaningful way to family and society. Younger siblings were not given the same opportunities as an oldest son, and daughters were not necessarily given an education in the same way as their brothers. Wollstonecraft had experienced this inequality first hand, and *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* outline her alternative vision of society. Sapiro devotes a chapter to what she calls natural and unnatural distinctions, in which she discusses Wollstonecraft’s critical analysis of eighteenth century society. In particular Sapiro notes that Wollstonecraft’s writing was comparative and integrative in nature, defining different social relationships as systematically inter- related.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Wollstonecraft, pp.21-22

⁸⁷ Sapiro, pp81-82

Wollstonecraft's particular concern was relationships between men and women; In the First *Vindication*, she identified artificial family affection which arose from primogeniture, and the results this had on social and familial relations. Wollstonecraft makes her criticism clear with her point that property and property ownership control society:

“Property, I do not scruple to aver it, should be fluctuating, which would be the case, if it were more equally divided amongst all the children of a family; else it is an everlasting rampart, in consequence of a barbarous feudal institution, that enables the elder son to overpower talents and depress virtue.”⁸⁸

Wollstonecraft's concern for the vulnerable position of women in society led her to respond in particular to Burke's comment on the furies of hell, the women Burke described as furies of hell were working class women trying to earn a living, secondly Burke defended the honour of Queen Marie Antoinette of France, after ignoring the duty due to the Queen of England during the recent indisposition of her husband King George III. Burke's attack on the working class women illustrated for Wollstonecraft, Burke's lack of understanding of the effects of social inequalities created by the hierarchical society that he defended in *Reflections*. Wollstonecraft seemed to believe Burke held a limited opinion on the improvability of society. Burke criticised people for their actions, without considering the reasons for which people may have acted.

“Probably you mean women who gained a livelihood by selling vegetables or fish, who never had had any advantages of education; or their vices might have lost part of their abominable deformity, by losing part of their grossness. The queen of France – the great and small vulgar, claim our pity; they have almost insuperable obstacles to surmount in their progress towards true dignity of character; still I have such a plain downright understanding that I do not like to make a distinction without a difference.”⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Wollstonecraft, p.23

⁸⁹ Wollstonecraft, p.30

In this passage Wollstonecraft not only defends the working class women struggling to survive who were just as entitled to pity as the aristocratic and royal members of society, but she argues that had they been given the same opportunities for education and position within society they would have behaved differently. How can an individual be expected to develop virtue and social feeling and responsibility when they have no opportunity to do so? In the final sentence, Wollstonecraft also comments on the false distinction of rank: there is no actual difference between a member of the royal family or aristocracy and any other person. Why should they be entitled to different opportunities to other members of society? Wollstonecraft also tried to point out Burke's seeming hypocrisy in defending the position of Queen Marie Antoinette after supporting the idea of a regency, thus ignoring the position of the English Queen. Wollstonecraft accused Burke of attempting to further his political standing by supporting the regency before giving King George time to recover.

“You were so eager to taste the sweets of power that you could not wait till time had determined, whether a dreadful delirium would settle in to a confirmed madness; but, prying into the secrets of Omnipotence, you thundered out that God had *hurled him from his throne*, and that it was the most insulting mockery to recollect that he had been a king, or to treat him with any particular respect on account of his former dignity.”⁹⁰

Throughout both *Vindications* and *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, Wollstonecraft developed an argument that “Institutionalised inequality of power creates a society in which independence and virtue cannot be nurtured.”⁹¹ For Wollstonecraft public and private were interconnected: the family was both social and political. This view led her to reject Burke's interpretation of domesticity and patriotism. Sapiro presents the first *Vindication* as an attempt to develop a practical model of

⁹⁰ Wollstonecraft, p.27

⁹¹ Sapiro, p.86

political and social morality involving the appropriate division between public and private spheres within society.⁹² Wollstonecraft went on to further discuss her ideas on education, religion, and progress of civilization in which she developed her theory of a link between reason and virtue. She attempted to illustrate that Burke defended a political and social structure that stopped the growth of virtue, Wollstonecraft interpreted Burke's version of domestic feeling as instinct. According to Wollstonecraft, reason and feeling were mutual concepts "Though it is from the heart that all that is great and good comes, it must be an educated heart."⁹³ Wollstonecraft refuted Burke's view of feelings, "Sacred be the feelings of the heart! Concentred in a glowing flame, they become the sum of life; and, without his impregnation, reason would probably lie in helpless inactivity, and never bring forth her only legitimate offspring – virtue."⁹⁴ Reason was the path to virtue. Wollstonecraft then employed the language of feeling not reason to show to Burke how she believed he had underestimated human nature and potential. Wollstonecraft made clear her point by questioning Burke's understanding of virtue.

"If virtue be an instinct, I renounce all hope of immortality; and with it all the sublime reveries and dignified sentiments that have smoothed the rugged path of life: it is all a cheat, a lying vision; I have disquieted myself in vain; for in my eye all feelings are false and spurious, that do not rest on justice as their foundation, and are not concentrated by universal love."⁹⁵

With this passage Wollstonecraft illustrated her wider understanding of human nature and human potential, as well as criticising Burke's ambiguous or ill defined theory

⁹² Sapiro, p.216

⁹³ Jones, p.45

⁹⁴ Wollstonecraft, p.31

⁹⁵ Wollstonecraft, pp. 33-34.

of the relationship between religion and society. For Wollstonecraft, religion was not intended to maintain a narrow social hierarchy, it was a personal bond between an individual and God. When people were educated to understand this relationship and the opportunity it offered them for furthering their potential; society would then develop as a group of equal individuals with similar opportunities and aims. When religion was used as a vehicle for social control and justification of continuing inequality society was at risk from the revolution Burke feared when he published *Reflections*.

From there Wollstonecraft went on to address Burke's criticism of the French developing a National Assembly from the ranks of the ordinary people and not furthering the already existing aristocratic method of government.

"Time only will shew whether the general censure, which you afterwards qualify, if not contradict, and the unmerited contempt that you have ostentatiously displayed of the National Assembly, be founded on reason, the offspring of conviction, or the spawn of envy. Time may shew, that this obscure throng knew more of the human heart and of legislation than the profligates of rank, emasculated by hereditary effeminacy."⁹⁶

This interrogation of Burke's estimation of the National Assembly not only questions Burke on his own terms, it illustrates Wollstonecraft's vision of potential for social progress and equality present in the French Revolution. Wollstonecraft furthers her argument with Burke's support of hereditary privilege, contempt for the lower classes, and his continuing corroboration of the slave trade, all of which, Wollstonecraft felt went against the dictates of reason, and threatened the potential for social progress.

"Did the pangs you felt for insulted nobility, the anguish that rent your heart when the gorgeous robes were torn off the idol human weakness had set up, deserve to be

⁹⁶ Wollstonecraft, p.41

compared with the long-drawn sigh of melancholy reflection, when misery and vice are thus seen to haunt our steps, and swim on the top of every cheering prospect?”⁹⁷

Wollstonecraft concluded *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* with a final criticism of Burke’s support for hereditary nobility and continued social inequality, and illustrated a belief in the potential for the French to develop a representative government that took account of the needs of every citizen. “Whether the one the French have adopted will answer the purpose better, and be more than a shadow of representation, time only can shew. In theory it appears more promising.”⁹⁸

Wollstonecraft presents a more optimistic and affirmative estimation of human nature and potential in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, than Burke illustrated in *Reflections*. Wollstonecraft continued this outlook - if in a some what more guarded manner in *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794) in which she explored the path the revolution was following in more depth. And although she concluded that the French people were not developed enough as a nation for a democratic government, the groundwork had been set down for future progress at a more gradual pace.

“A change of character cannot be so sudden as some sanguine calculators expect; yet by the destruction of the rights of primogeniture, a greater degree of equality of property is sure to follow...As a change also of the system of education and domestic manners will be a natural consequence of the revolution, the French will insensibly rise to a dignity of character far above that of the present race; and then the fruit of their liberty, ripening gradually, will have a relish not to be expected during it’s crude and forced state.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Wollstonecraft, p.62

⁹⁸ Wollstonecraft, p.63

⁹⁹ Tom Furniss, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft’s French Revolution’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, edited by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 59-81

Unlike a number of her contemporaries Wollstonecraft continued to hold out a belief that the French Revolution would result in a more progressive and equal society than the one the French were attempting to replace, and that the French Revolution had made people in other European nations aware of the possibility for changing the hierarchical and unequal nature of their society and government. As Furniss puts it:

“Like Wordsworth after her, Wollstonecraft abandoned the idea that social progress could be brought about through changing the political system. But unlike him and others, Wollstonecraft retained – but only just, and only at times – her belief that a just society would emerge from the Revolution in which the rights of men, and of women, would be the origin and end of government. In so arguing, Wollstonecraft offers one of the most profound discussions of revolutionary politics to emerge out of the Revolution Controversy.”¹⁰⁰

Wollstonecraft continued to express her belief in the potential for social development and progress in *A Short Residence*. In her journey in Scandinavia took the opportunity it presented her to further develop her observations on human nature and society, and the potential for progress.

“A people have been characterised as stupid by nature; what a paradox! Because they did not consider that slaves, having no object to stimulate industry, have not their faculties sharpened by the only thing that can exercise them, self-interest. Others have been brought forward as brutes, having no aptitude for the arts and sciences, only because the progress of improvement had not reached that stage which produces them.”¹⁰¹

In this passage Wollstonecraft illustrated her ongoing faith in the future progress of society; with the reservation, however, that progress needed to come from within each society. Education and the growing spirit of enquiry that seemed to be the product of the Enlightenment would help to advance human understanding and lead in time to further development of an equal and virtuous community of individuals. In the *Historical and*

¹⁰⁰ Furniss, pp. 68-9

¹⁰¹ Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*, pp.29-30.

Moral Overview, Wollstonecraft wrote that change would not be sudden, but the events of the revolution would in time bring about a gradual and beneficial change in character.¹⁰²

Unlike Price, Burke, and Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, wrote for a working class audience. Paine had experienced revolution in America, and according to Keane, had welcomed the early stages of the French Revolution interpreting it in light of the American Revolution.¹⁰³ Fennessy like Keane believes that Paine's experiences in America shaped his theory of natural rights and society.¹⁰⁴ This gave Paine a different understanding of events in France than Price, Burke or Wollstonecraft. Paine was resident in France in late 1789 and early 1790; however he does not - in either his personal correspondence or in *A Rights of Man*- refer to the social, industrial, or economic conditions, that he must have witnessed.¹⁰⁵ Like Wollstonecraft, Paine was to a large extent self - educated, and had been employed in low paid positions. As was the case with Wollstonecraft, this background surely led to Paine's positive attitude to the lower classes of whom Burke was so dismissive in *Reflections*: "The occupation of a hair-dresser, or of a working tallow chandler can not be a matter of honour to any person - to say nothing of other more servile employments."¹⁰⁶ Paine who started his working life as a stay maker must have found this and subsequent comments offensive. For example, Burke then went on to claim that "such descriptions of men ought not to suffer oppression from the state; but the state suffers oppression, if such as they, either

¹⁰² Wollstonecraft in Furniss, p.75

¹⁰³ Keane, pp.282-3

¹⁰⁴ Fennessy, pp.171-3

¹⁰⁵ Fennessy, p.175

¹⁰⁶ Burke, p.62

individually or collectively are permitted to rule.”¹⁰⁷ Jennifer Mori identifies Paine as belonging to a republican tradition of English political thought with which he combined a vision of commercial progress and representative government. While censuring monarchy, war, and organised religion.¹⁰⁸ Paine, in common with Wollstonecraft, and contrary to Burke did not believe that the aristocracy made the best governors and supported a republican form of government. Another point on which Paine and Wollstonecraft would have agreed was the rights of woman. Thomas Paine was the only revolutionary leader in America to show a sustained interest in the rights of woman

“*An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex* (1775) broaches this issue: Man with regard to [woman], in all climates, and in all ages has been either an insensible husband or an oppressor”¹⁰⁹

Paine openly attacked the establishment of Monarchy, Church, and State. Paine recognised the uncertain position of the working class and a peasantry vulnerable to enclosure, guild and craft restrictions, and attempts by employers to keep wages low. “Paine taught unenfranchised working men to throw off their habitual deference to the political views of their social superiors.”¹¹⁰ Paine’s response to *Reflections- The Rights of Man*- was published in February 1791; and on the 13th November 1791 Paine attended a dinner at the house of Joseph Johnson at which both Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin were present.¹¹¹ On this occasion Wollstonecraft and Godwin were mutually displeased with each other:

¹⁰⁷ Burke, p.62

¹⁰⁸ Mori, p.33.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Paine in Lyndall Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus*, (London: Little, Brown, 2005), p.130

¹¹⁰ Goodwin, p. 174. Goodwin discusses the important role of Paine in the revolution controversy and the connection with the Society for Constitutional Information.

¹¹¹ Gordon, pp.143-4

“I had little curiosity to see Mrs Wollstonecraft, Godwin said, ‘and a very great curiosity to see Thomas Paine.’ Paine turned out to be rather quiet; Mary, not. ‘I ..heard her, very frequently when I wished to hear Paine,’ Godwin repeated.”¹¹²

Wollstonecraft was writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* during this time, and it is hard to imagine that she and Paine did not, in the course of the conversation discuss the rights of women. Like Wollstonecraft, Paine in *The Rights of Man* expresses disappointment and surprise at Burke’s response to the French Revolution. Some time following Burke’s speech in favour of reconciliation with the American colonists, Burke and Paine began correspondence. Paine wrote Burke a letter giving him a first hand account of events in Paris.¹¹³ From Burke’s perspective the tone of the letter had strong parallels with Price’s *Discourse*, devoted more to developing an attack on the British constitution, than an analysis of the French Revolution. According to John Keane, Burke “suspected that both men were bent on fomenting civil resistance in England.”¹¹⁴ Like Wollstonecraft, Paine found fault with Burke’s use of sentimental and feeling language instead of presenting a critical and reasoned account of his views on the events and wrote in a clear style available to all readers.¹¹⁵

“I know a point in America called Point – no – Point; because as you proceed along the shore, gay and flowery as Mr. Burke’s language, it continually recedes and presents itself at a distance before you; but when you have got as far as you can go, there is no point at all. Just thus it is with Mr. Burke’s three hundred and fifty-six pages. It is therefore difficult to reply to him. But as the points he wishes to establish may be inferred from what he abuses, it is in his paradoxes that we must look for his arguments.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Gordon, p.144

¹¹³ Keane, John. *Tom Paine: A Political Life*. (Boston, Little Brown And Company, 1995) pp283-4

¹¹⁴ Keane, pp283-4

¹¹⁵ Keane, pp294-5

¹¹⁶ Thomas Paine, *RIGHTS OF Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*. Edited with an introduction by Mark Philp. Oxford University Press. Oxford, 1995. p.100

Fennessy suggests that Paine intended *Rights of Man as Common Sense* for an English audience, setting out a clear and reasoned account of the issues and the consequences.¹¹⁷

Like Wollstonecraft, Paine accused Burke of expressing certain opinions because he received a government pension.

“With respect to a paragraph in this work, alluding to Mr Burke’s having a pension, the report has been some time in circulation, at least two months; and as a person is often the last to hear what concerns him the most to know, I have mentioned it, that Mr. Burke may have an opportunity of contradicting the rumour, if he thinks proper.”¹¹⁸

In *Reflections*, Burke had refuted the idea that Price presented on the settlement of 1688 – that it gave the English people the right to choose their governors. Paine argued that that was exactly what the parliament of 1688 had done, and had then restricted its own successors. Paine also condemned Burke for his lack of distinction between men and principles:

“Mr Burke does not attend to the distinction between men and principles; and therefore, he does not see that a revolt may take place against the despotism of the latter, while there lies no charge of despotism against the former.”¹¹⁹

This point seems to be a criticism of Burke’s understanding of the past and what he believed the present generation owed to its ancestors. In a more political language than Wollstonecraft, Paine questioned Burke’s view of society and how Burke defended a social and political system that only represented a small percentage of the population. Neither Price, nor Wollstonecraft, nor Paine advocated violent reform they all defended what they saw as the unfinished potential of the Glorious Revolution and the opportunity

¹¹⁷ Fennessy, p.180

¹¹⁸ Paine, p.88

¹¹⁹ Paine, p.97

it offered for further social and political reform. All believed it was necessary to understand the past and the relationship that the present generation had with the past; however, society was not static and unchanging. Paine believed that man did not establish society to become worse off than he was before, but to secure the rights that he had. Natural rights were the foundation of civil rights and civil authorities must protect or operate within a framework of natural and civil rights. Here Paine identifies society as protecting the rights of citizens. According to Philp, Paine envisaged a contract of association among equals, whereas, Burke's civil contract had people submitting to a ruler, rather than the people being sovereign.¹²⁰ Paine confronted Burke in regard specifically to the idea that an implicit contract was not the same as a written constitution.¹²¹ For Paine a civil government was a republican government, aristocracy could not be a good form of government, because wisdom was not inherited. Following generations were not bound by decisions of their predecessors unless they consented to them.¹²²

Paine presents in the *Rights of Man*, a more political analysis of both Burke and the French Revolution, than Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft, following Price, understood social and political duties in light of duties owed to God. Paine on the other hand presents a political analysis of the French Revolution and Burke's response to the revolution, more in terms of the history of the American Revolution. Changing economic and social conditions would inevitably mean there was a need for change in the way that the society was administered or the people would feel that their interests were not being taken care

¹²⁰ Mark Philp, Paine, *Past Masters*. General Editor Keith Thomas. Oxford University Press (Oxford, 1989) pp.64-67

¹²¹ Paine, pp.122-3

¹²² Fennessy, p.174

of. Living in a society led to certain natural rights being given up in order that people were able to live in peaceful relations with each other, this compromise however also involved government being the guardian of other natural rights. A government should be elected to represent and safeguard the interests and rights of its constituents not to protect the unjust tyranny of a small percentage of that society. It was this lack of representation which had resulted first in the American Revolution and was playing a role in events in France.

Similarly to Price, Burke, and Wollstonecraft, Paine took an active interest in the indisposition of King George III; and the struggle between the Royal Court and Parliament regarding the Regency of George, Prince of Wales. For Paine the madness of King George “symbolized the decadence of the British body politic as a whole.”¹²³ In the conclusion to the first part of *Rights of Man*, Paine contrasts representative and hereditary forms of government. Including a criticism of the idea of a mixed government that existed in England, Paine felt that in “mixed Governments there is no responsibility: the parts cover each other till responsibility is lost; and the corruption which moves the machine, contrives at the same time its own escape.”¹²⁴ Paine rejected the idea of primogeniture for similar reasons to Wollstonecraft: firstly that it was unjust for younger children who did not receive the same opportunities of education and inheritance and secondly that families do not develop a natural relationship. Paine rejected aristocracy and monarchy as forms of government because they presupposed that “wisdom is inherited”¹²⁵ Aristocrats may not be the most appropriate and capable people to govern a society. In France the National Assembly was made up of elected officials whose

¹²³ Keane, p.285

¹²⁴ Paine, p.191.

¹²⁵ Fennessy, p.175

membership was not limited by birth or position but by ability. Paine presents a much longer discussion on France than either Price or Wollstonecraft. Paine seems to have seen a progression of revolution from America to France, and felt that the French were developing similar legislation and government to the Americans. Yet Paine set out to defend the rights of man from a different stand point to Price or Wollstonecraft. With his American experiences of the development of democratic government and the separation of church and state, Paine's version of society is less class-based and more tolerant of religious difference. Paine devoted most of the first part of *The Rights of Man* to a defence of the National Assembly and illustrated the conditions the French citizens experienced under the monarchical government. Paine also went to some length to illustrate the dangers present in a connection between the church and the state. Nowhere does Paine deny the necessity of religion, he does not appear to have been an atheist. What seems to have concerned Paine is what resulted from a connection between church and state.

“All religions are in their nature mild and benign, and united with principles of morality. They could not have made proselytes at first, by professing anything that was vicious, cruel, persecuting or immoral. Like every thing else, they had their beginning; and they proceeded by persuasion, exhortation, and example. How then is it that they lose their native mildness, and become morose and intolerant?”¹²⁶

From this position of advocating that religion and morality were by themselves well-intentioned, Paine went on to outline the destructive nature of church and state combined which he referred to as a “mule-animal”¹²⁷ capable only of destruction not

¹²⁶ Paine, p.138

¹²⁷ Paine, p.139

helping to maintain peaceful and equal relations in society. To stress his position Paine refers to the Inquisition in Spain and the conditions in England that led to the Quakers and Dissenters establishing themselves in new communities in America.¹²⁸

Paine like Wollstonecraft was interested in preventing unnecessary war and conflict, men were not the enemy of men, and governments were. Wollstonecraft in both *Vindications* examines the idea of war, mainly in relation to the iniquitous social structure, and relations of dependence between the monarchy and the aristocracy.¹²⁹ Paine believed under a republican government, there would be no need for war. If the conditions leading to international conflict were removed, relations between nations could be peaceful and prosperous.

“A European Congress similar to plans put forward by Henri IV of France in the early seventeenth century could be convened for the purpose of preventing war. Man was ‘not the enemy of man, but through the medium of false government’. The ‘age of revolutions’ would at last render this clear to all.”¹³⁰

According to Keane, Paine believed that “citizens living in democratic republics would have no reason to go to war.”¹³¹ People living in a democratic republic free from an unnatural hierarchy making decisions for themselves about their money and lives, would be far more hesitant to initiate a war.

Paine shared Price and Wollstonecraft’s positive understanding and vision of human nature and the potential it held for social progress. Like Price and Wollstonecraft, and in direct contrast to Burke, Paine saw great potential for European society in the early

¹²⁸ Paine, p.139

¹²⁹ Sylvana Tomaselli, ed., *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Man and a Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See pp.10,16, 235-6.

¹³⁰ Claeys, p.75

¹³¹ Keane, p.304

events of the French Revolution. Paine followed up the *Rights of Man* Part one with a second part in 1792 which criticised the Hanoverian crown, parliament, national debt, the poor law, and the established church. This publication received swift censure by the government of William Pitt.¹³²

In presenting this limited comparison between Price, Burke, Wollstonecraft, and Paine this chapter delineates political and moral discourse in late 18th century English society. The Glorious Revolution seemed to many to have introduced this reformist potential and then fallen short of its promise. Events in France reawakened, for a short period, potential for the wider development of the rights of the individual. Wollstonecraft's vision of an equal and progressive society involved not only rights for men it also included rights for women. For society to progress the relationship between men and women needed to be of a more equal nature than that Wollstonecraft saw around her and experienced as a professional woman writer. Sapiro illustrates Wollstonecraft's understanding of the role of society in shaping the individual and the paradox of attempting to create a new society while living in a society which impeded progress with false hierarchies and inequalities.

“If people's character, perceptions, and ideas are shaped by the social relationships and societies in which they lived, how can they construct truly new social relationships or societies? Especially, how can they create them without dragging with them the ills of the past?”¹³³

While I do not think that Wollstonecraft ever fully answered this question to her satisfaction. Ways in which Wollstonecraft did address the issues of social and gender equality while living in a society which so flagrantly disregarded her concerns, and

¹³² Mori, p.33

¹³³ Sapiro, p.256

Wollstonecraft's ideas on gender equality and how social progress would result; will be explored in the third chapter. Chapter two investigates eighteenth century English education and how the current structure of education negatively influenced society. Wollstonecraft believed education was the key to social reform; she wanted people to act with an understanding of virtue, be able to govern their own actions, and be a part of a democratic society. Wollstonecraft's religious belief led her to see education and the ongoing progress of social and political equality as a fulfilment of the obligation people owed to the deity. Unlike Burke, Wollstonecraft viewed religion as an integral part of political and social relations not just as a way to continue political stability. Instead Wollstonecraft believed religion would help people develop social and moral understanding of their duties to other people and help them prepare for the next life. Sapiro writes that "Wollstonecraft shared the optimistic Enlightenment goal of the perfection of human society, which requires understanding not just the development of reason among individuals but also the mechanisms of society, particularly relations of dominance and subordination."¹³⁴

Wollstonecraft's understanding of the effect of social inequality and relationships of dominance and subordination were an integral part of her social vision, and this understanding colours her published works. Initially Wollstonecraft criticised the unequal relations between different classes in society. Wollstonecraft extended this argument to cover the unequal relations between men and women in both the family and society.

¹³⁴ Sapiro, p. 76

CHAPTER 2: EDUCATION

“A broad spectrum of reformist writers and activists – from conservatives wishing to shore up the status quo to “Jacobins” wishing to over turn it – saw education as a , if not the key locus for promoting social stability or engineering social revolution.”¹³⁵

This chapter examines the different forms in which education existed in eighteenth century England. It explores how different thinkers interpreted the role of education in society, and how during the course of the Enlightenment different educational theories developed in response to changing attitudes to childhood, social relations, and individual rights. Rosemary O’Day has argued that education was always conceived of as a social tool and that education was no more or less utilitarian in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, than it was in the eighteenth century, what changed was the definition of what was useful.¹³⁶ In this chapter, special attention will be given to the nature of Dissenting educational establishments and their connections with liberal reform. The educational theories of John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau will be explored in light of how both philosophers’ ideas influenced educational theory and practice in the development of child- centred education and literature in the course of the eighteenth century. This chapter will then focus on the educational philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft, in particular her emphasis on co-educational day schools for children and the follow- on long term positive consequences for society.

Before the Reformation the main providers of education were religious institutions. Craft and Merchant associations or guilds maintained priests to officiate for them and founded schools. Hospitals and alms houses also frequently administered

¹³⁵ Richardson, p.24

¹³⁶ Rosemary O’Day, *Education and Society 1500-1800 – The social foundations of education in early modern Britain. Themes in British Social History*. Series editor Dr J. Stevenson. Longman Group Ltd. (Essex, 1982) p.xii

schools. These schools mainly provided for the education of boys. Girls generally stayed at home and were educated by their mothers, though some attended schools. Private tutors were commonly employed at this time by the aristocracy for both boys and girls. Oxford and Cambridge Universities were established during the Middle Ages. The influences for the universities came from Europe where universities were well established, and also from the religious orders of the Franciscans and the Dominicans who respected learning. On the whole these institutions provided education for the aristocracy or children intended to enter religious orders. When the Reformation resulted in the closing of the monasteries education took on a more secular nature. Craft and trade guilds in towns established schools run by town corporations for training young boys. K Snell presents a very informative history of the apprenticeship system in Britain,¹³⁷ in which it is noted that the apprenticeship system acted as a regulatory framework in the lives of apprentices. The Statute of Artificers passed in 1563 controlled artisan production for around two centuries; the statute regulated wages and migration of labourers, restricted entry in to trades, and stipulated the length of apprenticeships and the ages of the apprentices. Snell identifies the legal connection between settlement law and entitlement to poor relief within the parish. Settlement ensured precedence over outside workers coming in from other parishes. The length of apprenticeships and the conditions entailed within an apprenticeship were a way of control over the lives of young people. Snell points out that in 1556 the London guilds set out twenty four as the minimum age to complete an apprenticeship, “primarily to avoid over hastie marriages and over sone

¹³⁷ Snell, K.D.M. The apprenticeship system in British history: the fragmentation of a cultural institution. *History of Education*, 1996, vol 25, no.4, pp.303-321

[soon] setting up of households of and by the youth and young folks of the said citie”¹³⁸

Apprenticeships involved training in a range of skills or knowledge, not just the skills necessary to practice a trade but also religious doctrine, personal morality, literacy, numeracy and account-keeping, and household management knowledge. This was the case for both male and female apprentices.¹³⁹

Some schools were founded by endowments from wealthy individuals. King Henry VIII used money confiscated from the monasteries to open Kings Schools. Under Edward VI grammar schools were re established, and by 1600 grammar schools serviced most communities. According to David Cressy, during the late middle ages England experienced a slow spread of endowed grammar schools and assorted teaching establishments. Freelance teachers who ran schools as long as they could attract students do not appear regularly in the historical record but Cressy believes these freelance teachers and priests - acting on their own initiative - bore a considerable responsibility for education.¹⁴⁰ There were conflicting opinions in society regarding the benefits of educating children from the lower classes. Education could lead them to rise above their station and threaten the social order. On the other hand poverty and ignorance could also lead to disorder. This debate continued throughout the eighteenth century. Cressy also discusses how the Reformation made education a politically sensitive and social topic. “School masters were supposed to inculcate virtue and religious orthodoxy but it was feared they might become agents of discord and dissent.” In an attempt to this a system of

¹³⁸ R.G. Bellamy in Snell, p.304.

¹³⁹ Snell, p.305

¹⁴⁰ David Cressy, Education in Tudor and Stuart England. *Documents of Modern History*. General Editors, A.G. Dickens and Alan Davies. Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd. (London, 1975)

teacher licensing was developed.¹⁴¹ With the Dissolution of the monasteries, formerly monastic wealth transferred to lay individuals was used to endow schools; King Henry VIII also used his position of royal supremacy to divert ecclesiastical revenue to support secular schooling.¹⁴²

During the Interregnum many Dissenting religious groups established schools. At this time different theories emerged on the benefits and problems associated with education and the potential it offered for social reform. In 1660 when the Monarchy was restored the Anglican clergy and the aristocracy felt that wider education across society had resulted in the events of the 1640s and 50s. They therefore supported the Act of Uniformity passed in 1662 which barred dissenters from holding positions within the State. The Toleration Act of 1689 relaxed penalties against Dissenters in turn leading to the establishment of schools run by Dissenters. These schools on the whole offered a much wider curriculum than the traditional church schools. Unable to take degrees at either Cambridge or Oxford many Dissenters attended university either in Scotland or Holland. Fees at Dissenting academies were lower than at the universities so lay parents who could not afford to send their children to university could send them to Dissenting Academies.¹⁴³

With the Renaissance and the Reformation came the development of humanism; it was not an immediate change but over time the changing focus away from the next world to the living world, influenced the nature of education: “The humanist’s progress consisted in the adoption of the dogma, ‘The noblest study of mankind is man’”¹⁴⁴ Along

¹⁴¹ Cressy, p.2

¹⁴² Cressy, p.6

¹⁴³ O’Day, pp.212-215

¹⁴⁴ S.J Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain* (London: University Tutorial Press Ltd, 1948). p.74

with the changing focus towards what was possible in the first life, the development of the printing press, led to changing teaching methods. “Books became more plentiful, and the oral instruction of mediaeval days was superseded by written methods with greater reliance on the text book.”¹⁴⁵ Cressy stresses that the minority of enlightened aristocrats who followed the humanist ideals of the Renaissance and established schools were concerned “as much for the restoration of virtue in civic and religious life as with the purity of the Latin language and the study of classical literature.”¹⁴⁶ Concern for the morality of society and the need for citizens to be useful to their community were as relevant in the sixteenth century as they were in the eighteenth century. As with politics, education in England was affected by the Interregnum. John Milton wrote a *Tractate of Education* (1644) in which he stated that “The reforming of education.... Be one of the greatest and noblest designs that can be thought on and for the want whereof this nation perishes”.¹⁴⁷ John Comenius a Czech theorist had a wide influence in England from his ideas came calls for Free State education for all. According to Christopher Martin a pamphlet of 1659 visualized an “English elementary school in every parish, with a grammar school in each town.” The pamphlet added that “No child should be neglected for hereby hath it come to pass that many are now holding the plough, which might have been fit to steer the state.”¹⁴⁸ Cressy discusses the importance of Samuel Hartlib as well as John Milton, John Dury and John Comenius in the hoped-for radical reappraisal of education. This included universal schooling for both sexes, taught only in the English language, with an emphasis on a practical and pious curriculum in order to usher in a new

¹⁴⁵ Curtis, p.77

¹⁴⁶ Cressy, p.4

¹⁴⁷ John Milton, *Tractate of Education*. Edited with an introduction and notes by Ed E. Morris. Macmillan and Co, Ltd. London, 1911. p.1

¹⁴⁸ Martin, p.4

social order.¹⁴⁹ These theories did not come to serious fruition during the period of the Interregnum but some of these ideals were to come to notice again in the Dissenting Academies of the eighteenth century.

In 1698 the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) was founded. According to Martin the S.P.C.K encouraged local bodies to found and collect funds for parochial elementary schools or charity schools. Craig Rose suggested Charity schools flourished because they were regarded as a counter to dissent. It was hoped also that charity schools, through the education of both boys and girls, could lead to the spiritual regeneration of families and cement loyalty to the Church of England. Charity schools were usually founded and administered by the Church of England. Rose quotes James Talbott's *Christian School Master* of 1707: "the first duty of a charity school teacher was to imprint in the Minds and Memory of the children committed to his Instruction, the Fundamental Doctrines of our Holy Religion, as they are laid down in the Excellent Catechism of our Church."¹⁵⁰ To ensure on- going loyalty to the church – trustees of charity schools found good apprentice masters for their ex- pupils, ensuring the apprentice masters were practising Anglicans, not Dissenters. By 1711 there were 112 Charity schools in London which catered to 2579 boys and 1490 girls. The S.P.C.K was also involved in the establishment of large hospitals and boarding schools for orphans to help relieve communities from problems resulting from poverty. Charity schools and work houses were designed to educate the poor in order to ensure they could earn a living.¹⁵¹ Baker claims that during the eighteenth century there was an increasing influence of philanthropic activity, leading to the establishment of charitable institutions

¹⁴⁹ Cressy, p.10

¹⁵⁰ Rose, p.19

¹⁵¹ O'Day, pp241-251

such as hospitals, schools, and prisons. Over time this contributed to a wider interest in reform and practical humanitarian action and treatment of people.¹⁵² Baker explores charity schools and other forms of philanthropic activity mainly with reference to Lady Hastings. Lady Hastings is considered a pioneer in the provision of education of the poor. She was the daughter of the seventh Earl of Huntington, and following the death of her unmarried brother inherited both land and money. Hastings held strong religious convictions, and applied these socially towards the provision of education and housing for the poor.¹⁵³ The provision of charity schools and other support networks for the less fortunate were carried out on an isolated basis by individuals or families in their wider communities, there did not seem to be any legislation or direction from government.

In her conclusion, Baker identified the ideas of Lady Hastings as progressive for the eighteenth century, at the same time as stating that she “reflected prevailing contemporary views that education (rather than vocational training) was largely inappropriate for the girls, who would be heading anyway into service and/or marriage.”¹⁵⁴ Baker suggests that as an educated woman, Lady Hastings was somewhat unusual for her time. Her opinions on the education of girls reflected not her personal opinion but the wider, socially- accepted idea of the time.

As stated earlier, division existed over educating the poor: it was the concern of the upper and middle classes to maintain the social order. Hannah More believed that a simple elementary education would allow people to earn a living and be useful to their

¹⁵² Mae Baker, "The Lady Hastings' Charity Schools: Accounting for Eighteenth - Century Rural Philanthropy," *History of Education* 26, no. 3 (1997). p.255 Baker in her article stresses the isolated nature of philanthropy or projects such as that of Lady Hastings.

¹⁵³ Baker, p.256

¹⁵⁴ Baker, p.265

community and be thankful to their social betters.¹⁵⁵ Craig Rose suggests that charity schools were envisaged as a way to bring spiritual regeneration to whole families, and cement loyalty to the Church of England.¹⁵⁶ Private enterprise schools made up a certain percentage of educational facilities. There, a teacher, usually a woman, charged a fee to teach children. These schools known as Dame schools were common until the 1850s. W Armytage, in his history of English education emphasises the importance of the S.P.C.K and its role in charity schools. Not only did the S.P.C.K assist in education of both boys and girls, it tried also to help students find apprenticeships. Learning was seen as an avenue to future opportunities and a way of controlling poverty.¹⁵⁷

After 1760 increasing enclosure of common land and the developing industrial revolution began to change English society. Growth of large towns around industries led to increasing numbers of children in towns. Child labour was important for industry and children worked long hours. As children were seen by factory owners as a cheap source of labour ideas concerning compulsory education were not well received. On Sunday, however, which was a day off, children were uncontrolled and were a disruptive force in society. In response to this situation the Sunday School Movement developed. According to Martin, parents and employers approved of this because the schools were cheap and outside work hours. “The long school day alternated instruction in reading and the Catechism with church services, aiming to inspire in pupils good and industrious behaviour in their future character of labourers and servants.”¹⁵⁸ Monitorial schools were

¹⁵⁵ For a in depth exploration of a class and gender based interpretation of the ideas of Hannah More see Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, *Their Father's Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth and Patriarchal Complicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). In particular pp.3-7 and pp56-70.

¹⁵⁶ Rose, pp18-19

¹⁵⁷ W. H. G. Armytage, *Four Hundred Years of English Education*, 2nd edition ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Pp.41-49

¹⁵⁸ Martin, p.9

also tried in the eighteenth century, and became popular in the nineteenth century. There, a master instructed older pupils who then passed on these lessons to the younger students. Education for children was left up to the choice of parents; it was not a legal requirement that children attend school. Neither was there any accepted method or institution for the training of teachers, any individual could establish a private school. It was not until August 1870 when the Education Act was passed that schooling was provided and encouraged for all children. Even then the ideas met with some resistance.¹⁵⁹ One of the most influential writers on education, whose ideas were to play a role in the changing nature of eighteenth and nineteenth century education was John Locke. Locke's theories relating to education and society were adopted in the short term by Dissenters, who could relate to Locke's wider conception of moral and social development.

II

In an *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) Locke established that at birth the mind was a blank slate and that there were no innate ideas, Locke went on to contend that the five senses were the primary sources of knowledge, sense perception and the mind's reflection of these perceptions through observation and experience provided the individual with knowledge.¹⁶⁰ This idea that the infant's mind was a blank slate and sensory perception was the key to early education was the starting point for *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which was published in 1693. This work was designed for an aristocratic audience, and written for a tutor educating a child or children in an aristocratic household.

¹⁵⁹ Armatyge, pp.41-49

¹⁶⁰ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Abridged and edited by John W Yolton. J. M. Dent (London, 1993)

If at birth the mind of the child was a blank state then it was education and socialisation that effected personal development. Although Locke was not the first writer to put forward the idea of social environmentalism, his work was used by writers advocating the ideas later in the eighteenth century. If people were shaped by their environment, and the people they associated with, it followed that changing the outlook or ideas of the early environment and influences would lead to social reform. Locke argued against the proposition of innate ideas. Locke argued that education should be practical and rational and that children should be taught to control the pursuit of pleasure through reason. Locke was concerned not only with education narrowly conceived but with moral and social development. As adults people needed to live and work in society, children needed to learn moral and social obligation. Locke believed that desire and passion needed to be controlled in order for people to live harmoniously in society.¹⁶¹ Locke envisaged that every person to the best of their given ability was bound to labour for the public good.¹⁶² According to J & J Yolton: Locke as well as later writers in the eighteenth century was interested in the moral man, “and the ways in which the morality of man was linked with and supported society.”¹⁶³ J & J Yolton identify the link between *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and *Two Treatises of Government* in Locke’s philosophy of the individual, “the former provides a training and educational programme for the development of a moral person, the latter places that person in the political arena.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ John W. & Jean S. Yolton, ed., *Some Thoughts Concerning Education, The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Yolton in the introduction explores Locke’s social philosophy and compares it with that of other contemporary authors and also with Rousseau. Pp.1-44

¹⁶² Kathleen M. Squadrito, *John Locke*, ed. Bertram Davis, *Twayne’s English Authors Series* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979). P.127

¹⁶³ Yolton, p.28

¹⁶⁴ Yolton, p.1

Children's literature developed as a genre during the eighteenth century. Following Locke's theory that books for children should have pictures, it was argued that learning to read should be a fun activity. Brown identifies the contribution of John Newbery the founding father of children's book publishing. Newbery created books with the idea of learning to read through play. Books came accompanied with toys such as tops, cards, thimbles, and balls.¹⁶⁵ Reading was an associative activity, an imaginative process in which children connected letters on a page with already familiar ideas or objects. Children had less experience and observation than adults and illustrations would help children make connections between an image and the words on a page, this would assist with children developing cognitive processes, by giving them a frame of reference.

166

Along with the educational and social philosophy of Locke another major influence on educational theory and practice in the eighteenth century was Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile or On Education* (1762). *Emile* was a theoretical work; it illustrated what Rousseau believed the appropriate education for both boys and girls was, in order that society could be reformed. Rousseau believed contemporary society was corrupt, despite this people could only be virtuous in a society.¹⁶⁷ In order to reform society, it was necessary to educate people to be part of a new society. Like Locke, Rousseau advocated direct knowledge, that is, learning through experience. Both Locke and Rousseau believed that children developed in stages and that any education needed to be designed around these different stages. *Emile* is divided in to Five books presenting what

¹⁶⁵Gillian Brown, "The Metamorphic Book: Children's Print Culture in the Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006). P.352

¹⁶⁶ Brown, pp.353-4

¹⁶⁷ Conroy Jr, p.105

Rousseau regarded as the appropriate subjects and ideas to be taught to Emile from infancy through until his marriage to Sophie. Rousseau as well as Locke was concerned with religion and the role of religion in society. Both Locke and Rousseau present religion as a rational practice and a part of their educational philosophy. Both men believed that religion underpinned the state, without the influence of religious ideas of tolerance and love of mankind society would collapse into anarchy. In Book 4 of *Emile*, Rousseau outlines ¹⁶⁸his version of a useful religious ethic involving charity, submission to civil authority, and the denouncing of intolerance. Rousseau however emphasises the concept of a direct relationship between God and each individual.¹⁶⁹

Rousseau believed every individual had an obligation to be useful; with this in mind Rousseau had Emile learn a trade. Not only was a trade a practical profession – and useful to other members of society, it also promised Emile economic independence. Rousseau understood the practical and psychological effects on society of relationships of dependence. People could not develop in to rational and useful members of society unless there was equality. “But in society, where he necessarily lives at the expense of others, he owes them the price of his keep in work. This is without exception. To work is therefore an indispensable duty for social man. Rich or poor, powerful or weak, every idle citizen is a rascal.”¹⁷⁰ Rousseau discussed the idea of a trade as a form of independence, it did not lead to a fortune, but allowed one to do without it.¹⁷¹ After presenting how he envisaged Emile would be educated, Rousseau introduced Sophie, Emile’s ideal partner. Rousseau contrasted Emile and Sophie; he claimed that their sexuality made men and

¹⁶⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, Inc Publishers, first published 1762, this edition 1978).

¹⁶⁹ Conroy Jr, p.95

¹⁷⁰ Rousseau, *Emile*, p.195.

¹⁷¹ Rousseau, *Emile*, p.197.

women different. “In the union of the sexes each contributes equally to the common aim, but not in the same way. From this diversity arises the first assignable difference in the moral relations of the two sexes. One ought to be active and strong, the other passive and weak. One must necessarily will and be able; it suffices that the other put up little resistance.”¹⁷² Both needed to learn what was appropriate for their position in society. *Emile* was a theoretical work; Rousseau created an ideal of what education for both boys and girls should be in an attempt to develop the ideal state. As stated earlier, Rousseau thought that contemporary society was corrupt but that people could only be virtuous in a society. Locke and Rousseau both write about the education of an individual rather than the idea of educating children in a classroom environment, despite this both envisaged the products of their educational theory to become contributing and functional members of society. According to Conroy Jr, Emile was educated to live in a society and to participate in the governing of that society. “If the Prince or the State calls you to serve the fatherland, drop everything and go satisfy the honourable function of Citizen in whatever position you are assigned.”¹⁷³ Locke and Rousseau’s educational ideas were incorporated in to the teaching methods of Dissenting academies in the course eighteenth century. Dissenting academies were established to provide a useful education at a reasonable cost for people who did not follow the Anglican religion of the Church of England.

¹⁷² Rousseau, *Emile*, p.358.

¹⁷³ Rousseau in Conroy Jr, p.83

III

H McLachlan in *English Education Under the Test Acts* traces the history of the Dissenting Academies.¹⁷⁴ In his introduction he explains how the renewal of the Act of Uniformity, originally passed in 1559 and renewed at the Restoration along with the Oath to renounce the Covenant was followed by the resignation of at least 2000 rectors and vicars. Both Oxford and Cambridge universities required staff and students to attend the Church of England. Many of the ministers ejected from their positions took up teaching not just to earn a living, but also to ensure that their sons and those of other dissenters did not miss out on an education. Initially these schools were organised and run without formal legal recognition. According to O'Day the Dissenting academies developed because of nonconformity and exclusion, leading to the closure of the Universities to Dissenters, another contributing factor was the interest in provision of a realistic and practical education.¹⁷⁵ In 1689 after the Glorious Revolution the Act of Toleration afforded the Dissenters a measure of toleration and made it easier for them to establish schools. In 1779 Protestant non – conformists were legally allowed to be teachers. Dissenting academies were progressive in their curriculum, and the fees at these schools were lower than the universities so that Anglican parents who could not afford to send their sons to Oxford or Cambridge could still provide them with a quality education. Students studying divinity at these academies were sent out to preach during their studies, and English not Latin was, in the main, the language used for teaching. These two ideas helped create useful and confident members of society, through their contact with people

¹⁷⁴ H McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts: Being the History of the Non-Conformist Academies 1662-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931).

¹⁷⁵ O'Day, Rosemary O'Day, *Education and Society 1500 - 1800: The Social Foundations of Education in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Dr J Stevenson, *Themes in British Social History* (Essex: Longman, 1982). P.212

in the community and learning in the vernacular these students could go on to be caring, hard working members of society. O'Day concludes her discussion on Dissenting Academies with the point that they provided a university education for those excluded from the English universities, the teaching at the academies was rational and practical with a tendency towards experimental and empirical study of science.¹⁷⁶

Scottish philosophers and ideas had an increasing influence on the academies. Students from the academies could not attend Oxford or Cambridge so some went to university in Scotland or in Holland "where Protestantism was strongly entrenched."¹⁷⁷ Dissenting academies had a much wider and more progressive curriculum, this was influenced in a large measure by the on going contact between the academies and Scottish universities and cultural ideas.¹⁷⁸

According to Heinz Rhyn, Joseph Priestley who taught for six years at Warrington Academy- one of the most well known dissenting academies- presented education in a conceptual manner. In an *Essay On a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (1765, 1778) Priestley wrote

"The curriculum, the subjects, were too scholastic for him, too much orientated to theology and to metaphysical philosophy and without direct bearing on civil and active life. In his educational conception, he restrained the instruction in Greek, Latin, and Aristotelian logic, integrated the results and methods of empirical and experimental

¹⁷⁶ O'Day, p.215

¹⁷⁷ McLachlan, p.33

¹⁷⁸ "Scottish culture was realistic, modern and progressive, and Scottish modes of thought, methods of instruction and text books made their way during the last half of the eighteenth century in to the English academies, whose teaching was improved and their curricula wider widened by the contact of their pupils and tutors with the universities of Scotland." McLachlan, p.33

sciences and simultaneously, he disapproved of an education of the mind that is unable to criticise.”¹⁷⁹

In a similar manner to Locke and Rousseau, Priestley envisaged a useful education that prepared students to be contributing members of society. Priestley had a more liberal and positive attitude to the possibility of social reform, and human nature than Rousseau. Priestley was concerned with all of society not just the aristocracy unlike Locke. Priestley believed it was necessary to instill all levels of society with a political consciousness.¹⁸⁰ Matthew Mercer believes that all the dissenting academies had ministerial education in mind as their primary aim but with the exclusion from the universities of dissenting students, Dissenting academies provided a higher and broader education for students.¹⁸¹ According to Derek Orange, Rational Dissenters’ interest in education was related to a number of factors including the idea that a good general education would provide entry into all levels of society. A wide curriculum based on science and modern subjects would provide students with a broad intellectual understanding, giving them an important sense of truth which would in turn lead to a liberating force in the lives of men.¹⁸² An emphasis on individual enquiry was necessary for both lay and religious students – Dissenters did not believe in the same distinction between sacred and secular. It was a religious duty to understand and improve the physical environment in which an individual lived.¹⁸³ Warrington Academy was the first

¹⁷⁹ Priestley in Heinz Rhy, The Formation of Liberal Education in England and Scotland. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. Volume 18 pp5-14

¹⁸⁰ “Priestly uses social and political arguments to justify a liberal education which includes broad scientific knowledge and should be accessible for everybody, particularly with human rights and civil government, which acknowledges no absolute type of rule.”

¹⁸¹ Matthew Mercer, Dissenting academies and the education of the laity, 1750-1850. *History of Education*, 2001, Vol 30. No.1 pp35-58.

¹⁸² Mercer, p.37

¹⁸³ Derek Orange quoted in Mercer, p.37

Dissenting Academy to cater deliberately for lay students including those intended for careers in civil and commercial professions not just more learned professions, Mercer notes the important role that Joseph Priestley had in this decision, and in the broad nature of the curriculum.¹⁸⁴ Mercer gives an indepth discussion of the training for careers in trade and industry, and the role of science in Dissenting education, “to enable them to fulfil their destined role as gentlemen and leaders in Dissenting society.”¹⁸⁵ There was always a sense of utility in education for Dissenters. To become a contributing and responsible member of society with a sense of duty to oneself, other members of society, and the deity was at the heart of Dissenting education. Dissenting Academies were identified with radical politics and this became an impediment to recruiting students in the later eighteenth century. Ruth Watts in a study of dissenting education also highlights the importance of utility, and to end restrictions on education.

“The whole thrust of radical education was to open up learning; to end its restriction to the privileged and powerful or, at least, allow new ambitious groups – the growing industrial bourgeoisie to which most of these reformers were connected – to have access to it.”¹⁸⁶

As well as wanting to extend education to include those excluded from traditional education on account of their religion or their class, Dissenters believed in the importance of education for girls,

“...within the various the various circles in which radical educationists moved, girls at home were often given a substantially better education than other girls (or many

¹⁸⁴ Mercer, p.39

¹⁸⁵ Mercer, p.43

¹⁸⁶ Ruth Watts, Some radical educational networks of the late eighteenth century and their influence. *History Of Education, 1998, Vol 27, No.1, pp.1-14.*

boys for that matter) received. Subsequently as adults, some of them became educationists in their own right and their writings or teachings furthered the radical cause.”¹⁸⁷

Warrington Academy which was one of the most well known and successful academies had a course of study of either 3 or 5 years depending on whether the student was intending to go in to business or some other position within the state or to follow a religious career. Courses included universal grammar and rhetoric, mathematics and natural philosophy, book keeping, art and drawing, geography, history, and government. After an education with a wider curriculum than that offered at the English universities students had been introduced to theories of society and equality and taught to question not just to accept what they were told. Furthermore students educated at the dissenting academies were expected to have a career in mind and to understand their obligation to be a useful and contributing member of society. Edmund Burke made particular reference to the Dissenting Academies in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, denouncing Hackney College as the “new arsenal in which subversive doctrines and arguments were forged.”¹⁸⁸

IV

Although Wollstonecraft remained an Anglican she was greatly influenced by Dissenting ideas. Through her work for Joseph Johnson and the *Analytical Review*, and her time administering a girls school at Newington Green, “her thought on education and

¹⁸⁷ Watts, p.3 Watts makes particular reference to the contribution of Anna Aikin later Barbauld and Hannah More.

¹⁸⁸ Edmund Burke, *The Works of The Right Honourable Edmund Burke. A New Edition Vol. VI.* Luke Hansard & Sons. London, 1826.

childhood shows a good deal of coherence with leading non – conformist ideas.”¹⁸⁹

Sapiro in *A Vindication of Political Virtue* makes clear the interconnectedness of Wollstonecraft’s religious and social thought.

“She was more concerned with deeply held principles and habits of mind than with institutionalised organisation of belief and this concern was profound and central to her understanding of human life.”¹⁹⁰ This wider view of religion and the potential given to every person through their relationship with God informs all of Wollstonecraft’s published works and plays an important part in her vision not just for progress in society but how to prepare for the after life. Wollstonecraft envisaged a relationship with God based not on power or arbitrary authority but one involving unerring reason. “By creating human beings with the potential for thought and reason, God willed that people would feel a motivation to use that facility and, through it, acquire virtue.”¹⁹¹

Through her work for the *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft was exposed to the educational theories of Thomas Day and Maria and Richard Edgeworth. One of the works that Wollstonecraft reviewed for the *Analytical Review*, was *Sandford and Merton* written by Thomas Day, and published by Johnson between 1783-6. Day attempted to turn Rousseau’s pedagogical theory into a book for children. Following Day’s successful work Wollstonecraft attempted a similar work in 1788 with *Original Stories*. Therein she argued that children ideally should be taught through the example of parents and teachers, as daily experience and practical example instil ideas more comprehensively in the minds of children than do reading or theory. Richardson attributes this programme of practical and experiential education to Wollstonecraft’s time as governess to the Kingsborough

¹⁸⁹ Richardson, p.25

¹⁹⁰ Sapiro, p.45

¹⁹¹ Sapiro, p.51

daughters and her exposure to the ideas of Rousseau.¹⁹² Despite this, like Rousseau before her, Wollstonecraft recognised that given the present state of society it was necessary to teach by precept not example. After children were taught to understand their role in the future state of society, they could teach their own children through example. Contemporary parents – who, for Wollstonecraft were typified by Lord and Lady Kingsborough - could not instil their own children with a moral and social understanding that they themselves lacked, in part because of the education and family environment they had experienced. Wollstonecraft started her writing career with a somewhat conservative, acceptable publication for a woman, on the education of daughters, published just prior to Wollstonecraft taking a position as governess to the younger daughters of Lord and Lady Kingsborough. *Original Stories* her second published work is, in part, the result of her time with the Kingsborough's and was also influenced by her reading of *Emile*. Wollstonecraft attempted to reform her charges through “a program based on personal example, rational conversation, and affectionate bonding.”¹⁹³ In the preface to *Original Stories*, Wollstonecraft gave her opinion on the problem of education through example “... Given the present state of society, parents with their own passions to combat and fastidious pleasures to pursue can hardly be expected to correctly form the ductile passions of their children.”¹⁹⁴ In the *Second Vindication*, Wollstonecraft in a chapter entitled ‘Duty to Parents’ outlined her vision of the appropriate relationship between parents and children. This chapter concludes with the warning:

¹⁹² Richardson, p28

¹⁹³ Richardson, p.28

¹⁹⁴ Richardson, p.29

“But, till society is very differently constituted, parents, I fear, will still insist on being obeyed, because they will be obeyed, and constantly endeavour to settle that power on a Divine right which will not bear the investigation of reason”¹⁹⁵

Wollstonecraft’s educational theories both support and challenge the ideas of John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. In line with the thinking of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft criticised the swaddling of babies because it could lead to long term damage and did not encourage the early development of movement.¹⁹⁶ Wollstonecraft also recognised the importance of play and recreational exercise; children ought not to be constrained in doors for long periods of time. They did not have the same concentration ability as adults. “The schoolroom ought to be surrounded by a large piece of ground, in which the children might be usefully exercised, for at this age they should not be confined to any sedentary employment for more than an hour at a time.”¹⁹⁷

In a similar manner to a number of other writers including her future husband William Godwin, Wollstonecraft believed that the government should not be part of directing or administering schools. Direct government control could lead to an official Anglican state that could “shape ideological uniformity and religious orthodoxy”¹⁹⁸, which would perpetuate the current ideology and social ideals.

Wollstonecraft’s direct life experiences as the oldest daughter in a lower middle class family, and as a woman excluded because of her gender from an active civil life, concentrated most of her published works on the criticism and analysis of education and

¹⁹⁵ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p.278

¹⁹⁶ In *Emile*, Rousseau criticized the practice of swaddling for two reasons, because it placed the needs of the parents above the child, and swaddling could lead to deformities in the development of children’s limbs. p.11

¹⁹⁷ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. p.293

¹⁹⁸ Richardson, p.35

lack of legal and social identity for women. Chapter 12 of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* outlines Wollstonecraft's plan for a state organised system of co – educational day schools where children from different classes in society would be educated together. Wollstonecraft begins by establishing that parents could not isolate themselves with their children, and if they did they could not be the childhood friend their child required. Children raised only in the company of adults become premature adults without the prerequisite social and moral understanding. Children need to be educated with other children.

“In order to open their faculties they should be excited to think for themselves; and this can only be done by mixing a number of children together, and making them jointly pursue the same objects.”¹⁹⁹

Children develop different relationships with adults and their peers, children will develop at a similar pace to each other, and a parent is likely to unwittingly lead their children to develop beyond their age and ability. Left to develop at their own pace children will also develop appropriate relationships with their family and friends. “A child very soon contracts a benumbing indolence of mind, which he has seldom sufficient vigour afterwards to shake off, when he only asks a question instead of seeking for information, and then relies implicitly on the answer he receives. With his equals in age this could never be the case, and the subjects of inquiry, though they might be influenced, would not be entirely under the direction of men, who frequently damp, if not destroy, abilities by bringing them forward too hastily: and too hastily they will be infallibly brought forward, if the child be confined to the society of a man, however sagacious that man may be.”²⁰⁰

Wollstonecraft identified the different ideas of respect one felt for a parent, and the different social affection between friends. Wollstonecraft then went on to outline why she felt that neither a boarding school nor being taught at home provided the appropriate learning and social environment for the moral development of the child.

¹⁹⁹ Wollstonecraft, p.279

²⁰⁰ Wollstonecraft, p.279.

Wollstonecraft developed an argument in favour of day schools. In boarding schools children think only of holidays, and when they go home, they only play. When they are educated at home, they do not have set lessons and tasks in the same manner as at school. They also develop a misguided sense of their position as children by believing they are superior to servants despite the servants being adults. “..yet they there acquire too high an opinion of their own importance, from birth allowed to tyrannise over servants..”²⁰¹ Mothers sometimes tried to create little adults, teaching their children accomplishments through emulation rather than understanding. “..from the anxiety expressed by mothers, on the score of manners, who eager to teach the accomplishments of a gentleman, stifle, in their birth, the virtues of a man. Thus brought into company when they ought to be seriously employed, and treated like men when they are still boys, they become vain and effeminate.”²⁰² In her criticism of boarding schools Wollstonecraft identified in particular the eager anticipation for vacations, and the negative or undesirable habits developed through groups of boys or girls living in close proximity to each other. Wollstonecraft felt that boys in boarding schools became gluttons and slovens, developing the behaviour and habits of a libertine, instead of learning the virtues of family life.²⁰³

Having outlined her reasons for dissatisfaction with the current educational practices, Wollstonecraft then develops her theory on what an ideal school education for children would entail. Wollstonecraft made clear that schools needed to be national establishments, where the state, not parents paid the teacher. Thus the teacher would not be at the mercy of parents, and therefore would not feel it necessary to teach what parents

²⁰¹ Wollstonecraft, pp.280-281.

²⁰² Wollstonecraft, p.281

²⁰³ Wollstonecraft, p.280.

felt appropriate. “..for whilst schoolmasters are dependent on the caprice of parents, little exertion can be expected from them, more than is necessary to please ignorant people.”²⁰⁴ If boys and girls were educated together they would learn to see each other as equals and develop a sincere, chaste relationship, rather than the contemporary pattern of sexual distinction and gallantry.²⁰⁵ Along with the understanding of equality would come the development of girls who would make better mothers to their children and a more equal and understanding wife to their husband. A wife who could read and write, help with a business, and hold an interesting conversation, would make a more suitable wife. A partner who could share in their husband’s business or understand the job that they did, or contribute to the family income by working herself, would lead to happier, more understanding, and equal marriages.²⁰⁶ “a man can only be prepared to discharge the duties of public life, by the habitual practice of those inferior ones which form the man”²⁰⁷ If both men and women were educated, they would learn to relate to each other as equals, they could share parenting both able to teach children similar skills, and families would then develop respectful and equal relationships. “Nay marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses; for the mean doublings of cunning will ever render them contemptible, whilst oppression renders them timid.”²⁰⁸ Wollstonecraft was not only concerned with shaping the mind and personality of children but also considered physical health as a goal of education.

²⁰⁴ Wollstonecraft, p.286

²⁰⁵ Wollstonecraft, p.292

²⁰⁶ Wollstonecraft, p.294

²⁰⁷ Wollstonecraft, p.294.

²⁰⁸ Wollstonecraft, p.290.

V

Like Rousseau, Wollstonecraft recognised that physical exercise was important for the development of a healthy body and mind, in the same way that the understanding of reading, writing, and arithmetic were important for future prospects. Under Wollstonecraft's school system children would start school at five and stay in the same school until the age of nine. Schools would be free and open to all classes. Wollstonecraft suggested the curriculum could include botany, mechanics, and astronomy; reading, writing, arithmetic, natural history, and simple natural philosophy. At the age of nine, children intended for domestic service or mechanical trades would go on to a different school where they would be taught skills appropriate to their career, but for part of the time boys and girls would still be taught together. Children of superior ability or whose parents could afford to pay, would go onto study the dead and living languages, science, and continue the study of history and politics, and also literature.²⁰⁹

In the final stages of the chapter Wollstonecraft explained that her ideas were only suggestions for ways in which society could be improved through education. In order that both men and women understand their familial and social obligations it was necessary that they received an education that provided them with this understanding. Like Rousseau, Wollstonecraft envisaged a reformed society, where men and women were educated to understand their position within that society and people of equal ability were given an opportunity to develop themselves to be contributing members of society. Wollstonecraft disagreed with Rousseau on the most appropriate education for girls, and the role they would play in a reformed society.

²⁰⁹ Wollstonecraft, pp.292-4

In this chapter I have attempted to outline the major currents in social and educational theory present in eighteenth century England, the lack of government direction and involvement in schools and teacher training, and the different attitudes to the education and position of the lower classes. In the next chapter which explores Wollstonecraft's gender theory, I will further develop Wollstonecraft's ideas relating to education and social progress. Wollstonecraft became a feminist and wrote about the position of women in society in response to the attitudes to, and lack of options for, women in eighteenth century society. However Wollstonecraft was not just a feminist, she envisaged a new reformed society where people from all classes had the opportunity to be educated and to make a contribution to society to the best of their abilities. Education was not just about intellectual understanding but also social understanding, and developing appropriate relationships to other people, and between men and women. Both men and women needed to be educated to be contributing members of their society, and to be an understanding, and helpful parent to their children. Social reform began with children, children were the future. In her later published works Wollstonecraft applied her ideas on education and society developing them to their logical conclusion.

Wollstonecraft envisaged a society of equals where people were encouraged to reach their potential and had the same opportunities for advancement, if their abilities allowed. It is this philosophy which influenced Wollstonecraft to publish *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) in response to Edmund Burke. Simon Schama in *Revolutions*, episode nine of *A History of Britain* refers to Mary Wollstonecraft as a one woman revolution. Wollstonecraft was by no means the only woman writer of her day, and there were many who were more successful or well known than she. What I feel made

Wollstonecraft different was that she was not afraid to stand up to or criticize well respected and successful male writers and politicians with whom she had a difference of opinion. Wollstonecraft felt she had as much justification to publish her ideas as any other writer; femininity should not have excluded her from citizenship of her country, or a place in the community of writers and philosophers in which she participated for most of her adult life. Wollstonecraft's vision of an equal society where both men and women had equal access to education, professional opportunities, and full citizenship rights remained with her even when the reality around her seemed very different.

Wollstonecraft, along with many other people in her wider professional and social circle, regarded the early stages of the French Revolution as offering the opportunity for France to build a new social and political environment based on equal rights. Not a society bound by a hierarchical class structure but a society similar to that the American colonists had established in which every individual theoretically had equal opportunity and potential.

As I discussed earlier, in chapter 12 of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, On National Education, Wollstonecraft outlines her idea of national co educational day schools. Wollstonecraft believed that an equal education and socialisation would lead to a more equal and understanding marriage. Not only would an educated woman make a husband a more understanding and companionate wife; she would also make a better mother to her children. This situation as well as improving relations between men and women would ensure that if a woman was left as a widow, abandoned by her husband, or the family required extra income, she would have the skills to find employment. Through their time together in a classroom and playground boys and girls would learn to see each

other as equals. Instead of seeing each other as different, they would learn to understand each other and become friends. How Wollstonecraft envisaged this society of equals will be explored in the next chapter, which examines the concepts of gender and gender relations, and how they impacted on society.

CHAPTER 3: A COUNTER – IMAGE: MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT’S

GENDER VISION

“The world the Enlightenment inherited and criticised was a man’s world patriarchal both in actuality and by imprimatur.”²¹⁰

This assessment by Porter seems to accurately describe Wollstonecraft’s life experiences and goes some way to explaining her published works. Wollstonecraft was aware of the patriarchal structure of the society in which she lived, and the ways in which that society kept women in a position of dependence. Democratic and republican theorists from Aristotle to Rousseau all envisaged a domestic and family - based position for women in society. Girls and boys were different and would grow up to have different roles in society, therefore they required a different kind of education. This had been most recently presented by Rousseau in *Emile*, where Emile and Sophie were educated according to what Rousseau felt they would need in order to best fulfil their different roles in the family and society. Wollstonecraft approved in part of Rousseau’s education for Emile, but was unhappy with the education Rousseau advocated for Sophie. In England in the late eighteenth century women were represented legally and politically by their male relatives and did not have an identity of their own. This lack of independent identity and responsibility contributed to what Wollstonecraft described as the perpetual babyhood of women. Wollstonecraft illustrated the effect this had on society - and in particular women - in all her published works, most vividly in *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman*. As I discussed earlier Wollstonecraft’s life experience and position within the Dissenting circle of Joseph Johnson highlighted for her the dependent and isolated position of women in her society; and she responded to this with a critique of the

²¹⁰ Porter, p.320

pernicious effect this structure had on the potential for social progress. According to Gunther – Canada, “The corpus of Wollstonecraft’s work demonstrates the development of feminist political theory as an oppositional discourse.”²¹¹

A few pages later Gunther- Canada suggests that Wollstonecraft challenged traditional political theory by politicising the female reader.²¹² In part I agree that Wollstonecraft invited women to partake in the political and social rights of men. But this only tells half the story. In this chapter it is my intention to attempt to illustrate that it is simplistic to view Wollstonecraft solely as an advocate for the rights of women.

Wollstonecraft’s vision of the ideal society differed from many of her contemporaries in that she imagined a society in which men and women had equal opportunities for access to education, employment, and legal and political representation. Wollstonecraft was not living in that society; the exclusion from society Wollstonecraft experienced through her gender and class gave her a unique position from which to critique that society, and a different position from which to envisage a society free from the divisions of class and gender. In her published works Wollstonecraft responded to the works of male writers including Jean Jacques Rousseau and Edmund Burke who she seems to have felt were protecting their position in society by de politicising women and issues associated with a woman’s lived experiences.

Early in her career as a writer Wollstonecraft identified that gender was a social construction; her published works are a response to this social construction and to the writers - both male and female - who perpetuated the status quo in their writing. Wollstonecraft set out to illustrate that gender was a social construction, that is that

²¹¹ Gunther- Canada, p.4

²¹² Gunther- Canada, p.12

sexual difference did not in fact have the natural origin established by Rousseau in *Emile*.²¹³ Following Locke's idea that the infant's mind was a tabula rasa, Wollstonecraft proposed that if boys and girls were given an equal education they would share a rational understanding of the world. In time this would assist in men and women developing equal relationships that lead to a companionate marriage, in which both partners contributed to raising children and maintaining a household. In both *Vindications* and *A Historical and Moral View*, Wollstonecraft identified the link between education and citizenship. Wollstonecraft politicised education: if the lessons of the public sphere were the basis of civic education and assisted in educating boys to grow up to be working, contributing members of society, denied this opportunity women were in fact holding back not assisting in - progress towards an equal society. As Gunther – Canada puts it

“The revolutionary power of Wollstonecraft's feminist analysis was that it theorised the relationship between gender, education, and citizenship.”²¹⁴ This idea is also supported by J.G. Barker – Benfield and Cindy Griffin.²¹⁵

Two elements of Wollstonecraft's vision of society seem to have been overlooked by some later writers: firstly, the central role that religion played in Wollstonecraft's understanding of society and human nature; and secondly, that in order to create what Wollstonecraft believed was the ideal society required equal opportunities for both men

²¹³ A good comparison between Rousseau and Wollstonecraft's ideas on gender and education is given in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft* edited by Maria Falco presents the political and social theories of Wollstonecraft clearly and accurately. In particular Sapiro and Weiss Jean Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft: Restoring the Conversation. Sapiro and Weiss set out Rousseau and Wollstonecraft's social, political, and family theory. Illustrating how Wollstonecraft responded to Rousseau's vision of the equal society

²¹⁴ Gunther – Canada, p.113

²¹⁵ 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, no. 4 (1996). G J Barker- Benfield, "Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealth Woman," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50, no. 1 (1989).

and women. Wollstonecraft believed that both men and women shared the same rational nature from God and if given the same opportunities, were capable of similar achievements. It was not gender that defined an individual but their education and socialisation. Wollstonecraft's religion was not the same as many of her Dissenting friends and colleagues but a personal faith in the possibility of equality, harmony, and salvation. Wollstonecraft's religion was central to her social and political vision. It was a rational religion involving a personal relationship between an individual and the deity, where people were benevolent and felt a duty towards themselves and other people. Wollstonecraft's religious faith comes through in her published works here I quote two examples from *Mary: A Fiction* that illustrate the indepth connection for her between religion and personal and social responsibility. Firstly Mary's view of Henry:

“He was a pious man; his rational religious sentiments received warmth from his sensibility.” And secondly a quote from when Mary was visiting convents and considering religious forms in society:

“They who imagine they can be religious without governing their tempers, or exercising benevolence in its most extensive sense, must certainly allow, that their religious duties are only practised from selfish principles; how can they be called good”²¹⁶

Both these excerpts, illustrate how Wollstonecraft linked personal responsibility and a wider responsibility to society. Religion was not empty forms or ceremonies but a living relationship involving responsibility, duty, and benevolence. Wollstonecraft's connection between virtue and religion is illustrated by a quote from a letter she sent to her younger sister Eliza in 1787.

²¹⁶ Wollstonecraft, Pp27 and 29.

“Virtue is the doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness.”²¹⁷

Wollstonecraft envisaged a new society; she was despite this still living in the society of which she was so critical, and was in some respects influenced by that society. England as a nation experienced economic and social change and growth during the eighteenth century, these changes; especially the development of a consumer economy caused apprehension among different social groups and became a subject for discussion and debate in publications such as the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*. Over the course of the eighteenth century business came to be seen as a masculine enterprise, women were discursively and physically displaced from the workforce. Over the course of the century the workplace shifted from the home to larger sites of industry. With industrialisation, employment opportunities changed and increasing specialisation resulted in fewer opportunities for women. As is the case for research in the history of women in general, less records were kept about the employment and training of female apprentices and records by women who inherited businesses on the death of a husband are also few.²¹⁸

Despite the fact that Wollstonecraft does not directly refer to the consumer economy or

²¹⁷ Wollstonecraft, p.156. This letter to Eliza discussed the philosophy of William Paley. Wollstonecraft recommended Paley’s work to Eliza. Showing Wollstonecraft’s understanding of and interaction with the contemporary ideas and influences she was introduced to through her reading and employment. Mori describes Paley as a conservative utilitarian. He rejected natural rights, and believed rights were generated by social needs. Recognising the idea that people were designed to live in societies, not to live a solitary existence. Paley like Price, Bentham, Wollstonecraft, and other social theorists, questioned the structure of the poor laws, the game laws, and the exclusion of Dissenters and Catholics from a contributing role in political and social institutions. Jennifer Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000). pp.43-45.

²¹⁸ For an in depth exploration of the development of the consumer society and the place of women in this society see Elizabeth Kowaleski- Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, And Business in the Eighteenth Century*.

increasing industrialisation, these aspects of eighteenth century society concerned her. As she remarked in *A Historical and Moral View*

“The destructive influence of commerce, it is true, carried on by men eager by overgrown riches to partake of the respect paid to nobility, is felt in a variety of ways. The most pernicious, perhaps, is its producing an aristocracy of wealth, which degrades mankind, by making them only exchange savageness for tame servility, instead of acquiring the urbanity of improved reason.”²¹⁹

Power relations were an ever present aspect of both family and social structure in the eighteenth century. Wollstonecraft developed a critique of the effects this had on the relationship between family members and the relationship between female servants and their employers, and relations between male and female servants. Her most virulent observations on this topic are made in *A Short Residence*. Having described the severe treatment of male servants in Sweden and their low wages, she goes on to observe that “Still the men stand up for the dignity of man, by oppressing the women. The most menial, and even laborious offices, are therefore left to these poor drudges.”²²⁰ Another observation showing the iniquitous class and gender relationships present in society comes from letter XIX from Denmark

“I have everywhere been struck by one characteristic difference in the conduct of the two sexes; women in general, are seduced by their superiors, and men jilted by their inferiors; rank and manners awe the one, and cunning and wantonness subjugate the other; ambition creeping into the woman’s passion, and tyranny giving force to the man’s...”²²¹

Wollstonecraft had experienced first hand both the vulnerable positions of a daughter represented by and reliant on her father and older brother, and then the positions of domestic companion and governess. Wollstonecraft continued her critique of the

²¹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Historical and Moral View*, p.233

²²⁰ Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*, p.253

²²¹ Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*, p.325.

unequal nature of society begun in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* and explored how this unequal society affected both gender relations and the position of women in society. Wollstonecraft intended readership for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was the middle class.

“I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state. Perhaps the seeds of false refinement, immorality, and vanity, have ever been shed by the great. Weak, artificial beings, raised above the common wants and affections of their race, in a premature unnatural manner, undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society.”²²²

Unlike the aristocracy who maintained class and family affiliations through marriage and patronage, and the working class - including servants whose position was dictated by their need to survive - the middle class were less financially and socially dependent, and were in a position to examine social issues and ideas from a wider perspective, not influenced by the ideas of superiors or the need to perpetuate a family name or a social position. Despite the idea that the middle class did not owe their position or livelihood directly to another individual, Wollstonecraft was concerned at attempts by the middle class to emulate the lifestyle of the aristocracy. Two particular issues for Wollstonecraft coincide in an exploration of the developing consumer economy and the continuing rise in the position of the middle class, at the same time as opportunities for outside employment for women decreased. In a chapter in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, entitled *The Unfortunate Situation of Females, Fashionably Educated And Left Without A Fortune*, Wollstonecraft points out that “Few are the modes of earning a subsistence, and those very humiliating”²²³ Further on in the same chapter Wollstonecraft again comments on the narrow opportunities open to women “The few

²²² Wollstonecraft, p.81

²²³ Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, p.64

trades which are left, are now gradually falling into the hands of men, and certainly they are not very respectable.”²²⁴ Wollstonecraft was commenting on the impractical nature of education for girls, and the increasingly narrow range of independent employment opportunities for women. Women were held in positions of dependence on men by their limited social and legal identity.

Wollstonecraft was adamant in both *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that gender identity was socially constructed, and the differences that existed between men and women were more to do with education and socialisation than any genetic difference in intellectual ability, this is highlighted in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. Firstly in a chapter on matrimony, the point that women are considered a weaker vessel, men have the advantage in that they receive an education. Boys

“If they have a tolerable understanding, it has a chance to be cultivated. They are forced to see human nature as it is, and are not left to dwell on the pictures of their own imaginations. Nothing, I am sure, calls forth the faculties so much as the being obliged to struggle with the world; and this is not a woman’s province in a married state.”²²⁵

As well in an earlier chapter on Love, Wollstonecraft makes the point that “There are quite as many male coquets as female, and they are far more pernicious pests to society, as their sphere of action is larger, and they are less exposed to the censure of the world.”²²⁶ Here Wollstonecraft is critiquing the education and social position of the aristocracy, an individual who has not had to work to earn a living, can not properly develop reason and virtue. This predicament was harmful enough for women, in their limited domestic sphere. When it extended to men who participated in political and social

²²⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, p.73

²²⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts On The Education Of Daughters*, pp.99-100.

²²⁶ Wollstonecraft, “*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*”, p.81

institutions, and came under less public scrutiny than women, the long term effects were more not less harmful. Gender construction and identity was of interest to writers and intellectuals throughout the eighteenth century, with differing opinions on the nature and personality of men and women. Compared with men; women had an insatiable appetite that could not be controlled without harsh discipline. Women required consistent male authority throughout their lives, to ensure their continued obedience and loyalty to their family and place in society. Bernard Mandeville and Jonathan Swift linked female identity with the consumptive impulse. Mandeville although critical of the means that women employed to be part of the consumer economy, recognised that this consumption would continue the “health of a larger body politic.”²²⁷ Mandeville believed women were easily impressionable, but also manipulated men through the use of appearance and behaviour. Mandeville recognised this as immoral, but believed it was necessary for the continued survival of the economy.²²⁸ Johnathan Swift inspite of recognition of the unsuitable and limited nature of the education given to most girls still identified the female appetite and impulse for luxury as an essential and unchangeable part of their nature.²²⁹ Unlike Mandeville or Swift, Wollstonecraft identified human nature and social behaviour as a cultural construction; in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft, critical of the education and socialisation of women, wrote that women were

²²⁷ Elizabeth Kowaleski - Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). P.7

²²⁸ Ibid. pp.7-8 and pp.87-88

²²⁹ Kowaleski – Wallace,p.9

“rendered weak and luxurious by the relaxing pleasures which wealth procures; but added to this they are made slaves to their persons, and must be alluring that man may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright.”²³⁰

Here Wollstonecraft criticised what she identified as the cultural construction of women in a commercial age. Luxury and appetite are not natural, but are in fact a product of social construction and education. Like Mandeville and Swift, Wollstonecraft is critical of the consumptive appetite of both men and women, Wollstonecraft in comparison to Mandeville and Swift does not just accept luxury and consumption as a part of human society.²³¹ Wollstonecraft developed a wide ranging critical discussion in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, of the factors that contribute to creating creatures of luxury and consumption.

In both *Vindications*, Wollstonecraft criticised the education and cultural construction of men and women of the aristocracy and middle class. Wollstonecraft’s experienced first hand how the aristocracy lived, and the effects this lifestyle had on the development of their character, and the relations of power and dependence between men and women, and employers and servants. These experiences confirmed for Wollstonecraft that the false distinctions of social structure and gender negatively influenced both social and family relations. Lady Kingsborough was fifteen at the time of her marriage to Lord Kingsborough, they were cousins, and the marriage made them the largest estate owners in Ireland. Lady Kingsborough was a distant and harsh mother,

²³⁰ Kowaleski- Wallace, p.44

²³¹ Kowaleski- Wallace presents a wide ranging and in depth picture of the development of a consumer economy in Great Britain in the eighteenth century, and the resulting issues related to decline of small businesses, growth of demand for imported luxury goods, and the perceived role of women in that development. John Brewer and J.H. Plumb Neil McKendrick, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Hutchinson, 1983). Brewer, Plumb, and McKendrick discuss the increasing commercialization of English society and the literary and social responses to the changes.

fonder of her lap dogs, than her children. Wollstonecraft was governess to three daughters, Margaret, Caroline, and Mary Kingsborough. Wollstonecraft attempted to give the girls a broader education than that they had experienced so far. Lady Kingsborough was interested in ceremony and outward displays of rank and wealth, which in Wollstonecraft's mind perpetuated the current false and damaging family and social structure. In the eyes of Wollstonecraft, Lord Kingsborough was no better than his wife: he too was a product of a false education and social structure, their marriage like many aristocratic marriages was for financial purposes. Lord Kingsborough drank and it was rumoured he had fathered an illegitimate child with the last governess, Miss Crosby. These experiences confirmed Wollstonecraft's criticisms of the aristocracy and were to influence her when writing both *Vindications*.²³²

Shawn Lisa Maurer in *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth Century English Periodical*²³³ makes a very valid point that gender has been interpreted to mean feminine ignoring the idea that masculinity is just as socially constructed as femininity. Wollstonecraft's work has suffered from this interpretation to some extent; there has been a wide focus on Wollstonecraft's ideas on the progress of women. This is only half the picture. Wollstonecraft attempted to illustrate in both *Vindications* and in *Historical and Moral View* that all gender was culturally constructed. Wollstonecraft did not publish a work in which she set out her new society in detail, however her vision of equal social and gender relations are present in her criticisms of education, social structure, and national character, in all her published works. Maurer in

²³² Lyndall Gordon presents a thorough explanation of Wollstonecraft's time as governess with the Kingsborough's, including the nature of the marriage, the character of both Lord and Lady Kingsborough, the relationship between Lady Kingsborough and her children. Also the place Wollstonecraft occupied in the household and the feelings of inferiority that she experienced. pp.80-121

²³³ Maurer, p.7

discusses the rise of the literary periodical at the start of the eighteenth century and the important role it played in generating and disseminating complex values of moral, economic, political, and aesthetic significance. In particular the development of “sentimental masculinity”,²³⁴ and the resulting rise of the bourgeois family ideal, of a man as provider and supporter, and women as domestic and dependent daughters, wives, and mothers.

“By their creation of an environment favourable to mercantile relations as well as through specific representations of exemplary tradesmen, periodicals publicized models of masculine excellence dependent upon such bourgeois qualities as honesty, self-control, and the ability to support and educate one’s family. By constituting these attitudes toward virtue in terms of gender as well as class, periodical literature played a decisive role in formulating an ideology of separate spheres.”²³⁵

Wollstonecraft never makes clear reference to particular periodical literature, she was no doubt aware, however of the influence it had had and continued to have on eighteenth century society. Wollstonecraft would have approved of the presentation of the values of honesty, self control, and the ability to support and educate one’s family. What she would not have been in agreement with was the gender division that periodical literature presented. Women as well as men should be capable of supporting and educating a family, not least because “earning wages has always earned familial authority; conversely, economic dependence brings with it passivity and emotional compliance.”²³⁶

²³⁵ Maurer, p.18

²³⁶ Maurer, p.24

Wollstonecraft was witness to this dichotomy in her family situation and in her early employment; she felt that this dependence and inequality created unstable relationships within family and society. In order to change this relationship of dependence between men and women, and between social classes, it was necessary to change the structure of educational opportunities for all members of society. Economic and social independence would help create a new, more equal and stable society. While the status of women did not actually change over the course of the eighteenth century what did change was the way that society justified the social and gender divisions. Despite the growing glorification of the role of motherhood and the recognition of the complementary domestic function of women, they were still in a relationship of dependence to men. Maurer developed this idea fully in her first chapter *Constructing Masculinity*, in which she argues that the idea of a complementary marriage actually strengthened patriarchy as a social force. Chandos Brown explores the strengthening of patriarchy in the early American republic emphasising both the structural transformation of the state and the rise of the concept of republican motherhood. While Republican recognition of the role a woman played as a first teacher of a child, gave women a kind of status, it did not provide them with opportunities to improve themselves. Brown points out that as the society and the economy transformed, gender roles acquired sharper definition, yet women were not liberated by republicanism as Wollstonecraft envisaged they could be in her political and social ideals. Instead republicanism

“constrained them by an increasing emphasis on the production and nurturing of male citizens, infant and adult. The idea of the republican mother and wife evolved as an

encompassing taxonomy where in theory, if not always in fact, women enacted narrowly designated roles within a circumscribed space.”²³⁷

While some women, through fortunate circumstance, experience a level of freedom or opportunity, this was not the lived experience of a majority of women or men. Throughout her work, Wollstonecraft insisted that men and women from all levels of society should have educational and employment opportunities to improve themselves, and contribute meaningfully to the state.

With the rise of commerce during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century there developed a commercial middle class, this commercial middle class who made money through productive or active employment was distinguished from the land owning aristocracy and gentry who were not gainfully employed but instead lived on inherited wealth. This concept of the middle class man in moral and economic terms as self controlled, frugal, yet wealthy enough to support a family, and have easy access to capital differentiated him not just from the aristocracy but also from women who did not contribute in their own right to the economy. In this way the middle class man is envisaged as the ideal citizen.²³⁸ This idea of the ideal citizen, their place in and contribution to society and their potential role in changing the structure of society was recognised throughout the eighteenth century. Most writers envisaged this citizen as male: Men educated and socialised for a role in the social and political administration of their society. In contrast wives stayed at home and concerned themselves with the

²³⁷ Chandos Michael Brown, "Mary Wollstonecraft, or the Female Illuminati: The Campaign against Women and "Modern Philosophy" in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15, no. 3 (1995). p.394

²³⁸ Sapiro in *A Vindication of Political Virtue* outlines Wollstonecraft's understanding and criticism of natural and unnatural distinctions, making reference to both *Vindications*, *Historical and Moral View* and *A Short Residence*. In particular Sapiro explains Wollstonecraft's view of the middle class and the values that Wollstonecraft similarly to others in her social milieu attributed to the middle class.

administration of the family and household. What changed over the eighteenth century was not the position of women in society, but the way in which their domestic role was envisaged and justified by men. A new active form of masculinity involving the integration of the public and private spheres developed. This ideal masculine figure was an active bread winner and at the same time “a faithful husband and protective father”²³⁹

Concerning himself with providing for his family and overseeing their well being and moral development. In chapter five *Father, Husband, Rake: Contradictions of Masculinity in the ‘Tatler’*, Maurer develops a picture of the way in which Steele and Addison construct and illustrate what the desirable qualities were for both men and women. In the *Tatler*, Steele attempted to portray the idea of the domestic masculine figure in contrast to the “aristocratic pretension, vanity, and libertinism”²⁴⁰ common in upper classes.

The problem with this became that the role of the male as the head of the household perpetuated the idea that women existed for the pleasure of men, and through marriage protected family wealth and reputation. Virtue as a concept and ideal interested many writers throughout the eighteenth century, in chapter seven *Trading in Virtue: Attacks on Luxury, Leisure, and Fashion, in the ‘Tatler’, ‘Spectator’, and ‘Guardian’*, Maurer explores the ways in which Addison and Steele participated in the construction of gender difference by establishing women “as the proper objects of visual as well as ethical scrutiny and men as their obligatory scrutinizers.”²⁴¹

How as masculinity and femininity developed in direct opposition to each other, different ideals of virtue were expected from men and women. Even though the active

²³⁹ Maurer, p.77

²⁴⁰ Maurer, p.97

²⁴¹ Maurer, p.136

man of business became the ideal picture of masculinity involved in economic production and direct contribution to society, in contrast the ideal middle class woman was a domestic wife through which the man was able to display his wealth. Despite the fact that the aristocratic man who displayed his wealth through his appearance was ridiculed, it was accepted that women of the middle class were ladies of leisure and a way for a husband to illustrate his wealth. Over the period of the eighteenth century increasing industrialisation and the rise of factories led to the home becoming a site of consumption rather than a place of production, which historically it had been. As this development occurred “women of the middle ranks came increasingly to embody attributes of gentility no longer appropriate for their male counterparts.”²⁴²

Middle class women became objects of display and had more leisure time available to them, and in consequence the pursuit of fashion once confined to the aristocracy encompassed middle class women as well. This development of different concepts of masculinity and femininity, and differing definitions of virtue for men and women became an aspect of eighteenth century society of which Wollstonecraft was most critical. For Wollstonecraft virtue was a specific ideal and model of behaviour not dependent on different genders but a personal understanding of duty and obligation to oneself, society, and finally to God. Virtue did not have a specific gender; the same ideals should be expected from both men and women. In the second *Vindication* Wollstonecraft makes her point clear:

“Men have various employments and pursuits which engage their attention, and give a character to the opening mind; but women, confined to one, and having their thoughts constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves, seldom extend their views beyond the triumph of the hour.”²⁴³

²⁴² Maurer, p.139

²⁴³ Wollstonecraft, p.132

Throughout both the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* the structure of the middle class family was presented in direct contrast to that of the aristocracy. The ideal image of the sentimental father who understands and takes an interest in his children, supporting, and advising them is developed in contrast to the traditional patriarchal figure of the king. A King has complete authority, who decrees rather than discusses, controlling resources and competing for those resources with his heir or heirs. In contrast, the sentimental father does not see his children as competitors for his wealth but as part of a family economic unit, and invests in and provides for his children not for selfish reasons but with an understanding of the social and familial role his children will play in the future. This only applied to sons as boys were educated and socialised to become active producers within society; this position was sustained through “the subordination and objectification of desirably dependent women.”²⁴⁴

Maurer discusses the *Female Spectator*, and explains how the representation of a sentimental husband did not actually alter the gender dynamic and it simply “revealed a new form of gender dominance.”²⁴⁵

Wollstonecraft recognised the dichotomy that this family and gender structure created in society and set out to present a viable alternative to the idea of the active gainfully employed male citizen, and the image of the dependent, obedient, less well educated wife who dutifully took care of her family at the expense of herself, and through her relationship of dependence was vulnerable in the chance that she became a widow

²⁴⁴ Maurer, p.203

²⁴⁵ Maurer, p.204

and was responsible for raising a family. The rest of this chapter will discuss fully the way that Wollstonecraft hoped that gender relations may develop in the future.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is writing in response to a number of earlier male writers and their thoughts on education and the role of women in society. Foremost among these writers is Rousseau. Wollstonecraft was impressed by many of the ideas that Rousseau presented in *Emile*; a work one scholar has designated Rousseau's "most important philosophical work, his most complex and complete statement about man in society."²⁴⁶

In *Emile*, Rousseau presents his educational and social theory on how to shape an ideal citizen. Rousseau imagined a new, reformed society in which both men and women fulfilled specific roles. Rousseau questioned the existing human institutions that shaped the individual as they were educated and socialised to become part of society as an adult. Rousseau believed that "civil man is born, lives, and dies in slavery"²⁴⁷ Rousseau was concerned with educating an individual from infancy to adulthood and illustrated the ideas and influences from society he believed negatively impacted on their development and adult life. In Book I, Rousseau set out the social environment that he was critiquing, and then went on to illustrate what he envisaged the ideal man, and society would look like. Rousseau's answer to the problem of socialisation was to have Emile educated by a tutor isolated from society, and introduced to ideas and concepts as the tutor believed appropriate. In Book IV, Rousseau gives an explanation of how he would introduce religion, friendship, and social responsibility to Emile. Rousseau, like Wollstonecraft after him, believed that friendship was the first sentiment Emile should develop, first

²⁴⁶ Conroy Jr, p.82

²⁴⁷ Conroy Jr, p.83.

Emile needed to be able to relate to his peers. Friendship also created an understanding of sentiment and responsibility to other people.²⁴⁸ Rousseau set out what he felt it was necessary Emile learn in order to be an active and contributing member of society. Rousseau developed an active education involving direct experience as the most appropriate way to educate a child, as Emile grew older Rousseau advocated including an understanding of money and the economy. Rousseau believed that for Emile to live as an individual, free of obligation to social superiors it was necessary to learn a trade. A trade would give Emile a skill which gave him independence from his superiors.²⁴⁹ In common with other writers at the time, Rousseau included religion as an important aspect of education, and developed a concept of natural religion or deism as the most appropriate faith for Emile. This included how to judge ideas for oneself and live according to set principles. As a Protestant, Rousseau presented the idea that there was no intermediary between the individual and God. Individual conscience was important, as was the need to follow the teachings of the gospels, submission to civil authority, and acts of charity, and concern for fellow members of society. Religion taught ideas of charity and caring for other people, and the importance of self control and responsibility in order to develop an appropriate relationship with the deity, and with the other members of an equal society.²⁵⁰

In Book 5 of *Emile*, Rousseau introduced Sophie, Emile's ideal partner. Emile had been educated to be an active member of society, provided with a trade, and an

²⁴⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, Inc Publishers, first published 1762, this edition 1978). Book IV pp.220-250 Wollstonecraft establishes in the second *Vindication* that "Friendship is a serious affection; the most sublime of all affections, because it is founded on principle, and cemented by time. The very reverse may be said of love." p.151

²⁴⁹ Rousseau, pp.195-200. Rousseau discussed what he considered as suitable trades, and the positive social outcome for Emile from having a trade.

²⁵⁰ Rousseau developed an exploration of the connection between religion, society, and politics. Like Wollstonecraft was to do after him, Rousseau identified the link between politics and morality. pp235-6

understanding of politics and society, Sophie on the other hand is educated at home by her mother, in the domestic arts and relationships. Sophie did not require the same understanding of the world that was necessary for Emile. As the final part of Emile's education, accompanied by his tutor, he goes on the grand tour, the socially accepted final part of an aristocratic son's education. Sophie is given no such experience.

Rousseau argued that men and women had very different natures due to their different sexuality. Girls needed to be protected from society, in order to maintain a good public reputation, boys did not. Rousseau presented female weakness as the way in which women dominated men.²⁵¹ Sophie's education included only what Rousseau felt it was fitting a girl should know. Rousseau, in a similar manner to Swift and Mandeville, felt girls were by nature attracted to finery. Rousseau it seems believed women were of

“mediocre intelligence at best. Weak in the exact sciences they are experts in the human heart....”²⁵²

This stereotype was common in the eighteenth century, a belief that female emotions were stronger than those of men, dominating their character, thoughts, and actions.²⁵³ Rousseau designed an education for Sophie by her mother in all the domestic arts; she is not to be an active citizen similar to Emile, she is to organise and administer a household. Rousseau envisages the development of republican motherhood, the idea of a woman who nurtured children and supported her husband, but did not actively contribute to the state. Unlike Emile, Sophie is not taught about society or given a way to earn an

²⁵¹ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*. pp359-360.

²⁵² Conroy Jr, p.98.

²⁵³ Paul Hyland with Olga Gomez & Francesca Greensides, ed., *The Enlightenment: A Source Book and Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003). Chapter 9 entitled Gender and society examines the place of gender in Enlightenment discourse and the specific issues raised by the philosophes, it is also noted that there was no firm agreed upon view of gender during the Enlightenment, and that this situation still exists today.

independent living. It is assumed by Rousseau that a female will be taken care of and supported by a man. Sophie therefore does not need to understand or participate in her society, Emile will represent her interests. “Sophie obeys Emile, who in turn is guided by her: her authority is over his heart, his over her body.”²⁵⁴ Wollstonecraft was impressed by some of Rousseau’s educational ideas; she was however disappointed by the image of Sophie as the domestic ideal, prey to her emotions and feminine wiles. It is this domestic ideal that Wollstonecraft was so critical of in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. If *Emile*, as Conroy Jr wrote, is Rousseau’s most complete picture of man in society, then Wollstonecraft’s second *Vindication* is an attempt to place women in that social picture.

In both *Vindications*, Wollstonecraft used common literary ideas and techniques in new ways. One of these techniques was her use of gendered language. In the first *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft used ““manly” and “masculine” to qualify her own ideas, and “effeminate” and “infantile” to depreciate Burke’s arguments.”²⁵⁵ This illustrated that Wollstonecraft understands the traditional gender categories, and her attempts to find a way to undermine or defy them in her work as she fought to gain social and political equality for women. Chris Jones identifies the way in which Wollstonecraft criticised the current virtues of her society:

“The specious social and sexual virtues upheld by this society are, again in Rousseauistic fashion, regarded as substitutes for the virtues themselves: regulations instead of principles, reputation in place of integrity, commercial treaties instead of friendship, legal prostitution instead of marriage.”²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Peter V. Conroy Jr, *Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. David O’Connell, *Twayne’s World Author’s Series* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998). P.101

²⁵⁵ Gunther- Canada, p.77

²⁵⁶ Jones, Chris, pp.51-52

From the early stages of her writing career Wollstonecraft identified how what she saw as false virtues were corrupting society. In the second *Vindication*, She more strongly criticised the false precepts that denied women the same reason and ability as men, that the power of reason, “has not only been denied to women, but writers have insisted that it is inconsistent, with a few exceptions with their sexual character.”²⁵⁷ In response to writers such as Rousseau, Wollstonecraft argued that virtue had no sex, and that the ability to reason was universal to both men and women, it was dependent not on gender but on education. Gunther- Canada explains that Wollstonecraft’s anonymity in the first edition of *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, her refusal to identify herself as a woman “is a telling commentary on the centrality of gender to political discourse and the marginality of women in political practice.”²⁵⁸ By not identifying herself as a woman and using gendered language to refer to both Burke’s and her own ideas, Wollstonecraft illustrated her awareness of gender categories in political and social construction, it also illustrated her place outside politics as a woman. This place outside politics and society offered Wollstonecraft a unique position from which to critique these categories and social constructions. Unlike Burke, Wollstonecraft did not owe her political position or source of income to another individual. Wollstonecraft did not have to write in defence of a particular policy or idea, but was free to express herself in a manner she felt appropriate. Despite this Burke’s political position provided his work with instant recognition and reputation, whereas a work published anonymously could not carry the same weight. Wollstonecraft recognised that Burke created false distinctions between men and women, and between different classes of society in *Reflections*, these false

²⁵⁷ Gunther- Canada, p.77

²⁵⁸ Gunther- Canada, p.80

distinctions were part of the traditional gendered society that Wollstonecraft was commenting on. Wollstonecraft criticised the false distinctions that gave sexual character to the mind as these created female ignorance and male tyranny. This impeded the moral development of women, therefore impeding the progress of society. In the first *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft responded to Burke's gender distinctions with: "I do not like to make a distinction without a difference."²⁵⁹

With this comment Wollstonecraft denied innately different sexual characters. Wollstonecraft argued in both *Vindications* that any differences between men and women except that relating to physical strength were created by education and socialisation.²⁶⁰ If boys and girls were given similar opportunities they would in fact develop in a similar manner. Wollstonecraft in the second *Vindication* advocated the idea of co educational day schools for junior children involving both intellectual and physical pursuits as part of any curriculum. Wollstonecraft believed that out of this equal education would develop equal relations between boys and girls.

"In this plan of education the constitution of boys would not be ruined by early debaucheries, which now make men so selfish, or girls rendered weak and vain, by indolence, and frivolous pursuits. But, I presuppose, that such a degree of equality should be established between the sexes as would shut out gallantry and coquetry, yet allow friendship and love to temper the heart for the discharge of higher duties."²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Gunther-Canada, p.86.

²⁶⁰ Wollstonecraft "employed rhetorical devices that confounded the mark of gender and she developed theoretical arguments that denied sexual difference." In an attempt to counter the work of writers, defending the popular understanding of gender difference.

²⁶¹ Wollstonecraft, Sylvana Tomaselli, ed., *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Man and a Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). p.264.

This degree of equality would lead to a society in which men and women viewed each other as equals, educated together boys and girls would develop natural friendships, encouraging equal relations and a wider understanding of virtue and morality.

Wollstonecraft through her experience of having to support herself independent of her family, with no recourse to inheritance or access to wider education made her aware of the dependent and precarious position women held in her society. Women had no social or political identity outside that of their male relatives. Gunther- Canada makes the point that “For women the political consequences of primogeniture and patriarchy has been a form of powerlessness in which women were treated as property themselves.”²⁶²

Wollstonecraft experienced this powerlessness through having to support herself and her younger siblings on her limited income, and having to have the assistance of Joseph Johnson when hiring tradesmen to carry out maintenance on her flat.

Wollstonecraft, as much as she disapproved of Lady Kingsborough recognised that she was powerless, she had not been able to make her own choices for her life. It was her fate as an aristocratic woman to strengthen the position of a family or to combine valuable estates, with no thought given to the wishes of the daughter. Her place was to marry someone of her parents’ choosing for the long term prosperity of her family and her husband’s family. A daughter was not given the opportunity to be independent or to make decisions for herself, but was expected to follow the wishes of her parents. It was this experience of powerlessness and continued poverty that influenced Wollstonecraft’s ideas in writing both *Vindications*. Her lack of political and social identity created a unique position from which Wollstonecraft was able to confound sexual difference, and present a vivid picture of the particular issues facing women in her society.

²⁶² Gunther- Canada, p.92.

Throughout the second *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft critiques the contemporary literature and educational models designed for girls. These included the work of Rousseau, Dr Fordyce, and Dr Gregory, all of whom advocate female weakness and submissiveness. Fletcher emphasised the contribution of Dr Gregory to the construction of femininity, showing how concepts were seen to be adaptable to certain arguments. “It all shows how nature proves a wonderfully fluid and adaptable concept in the hands of eighteenth – century ideologists intent upon fixing men and women in a framework of polarity.”²⁶³ Arguing that there were innate differences between men and women, and therefore they required different education and treatment in society. Girls should rely on the ideas and opinions of men rather than having an education in order to prepare them to look after themselves. Wollstonecraft wanted women to be the heroes of their own stories, not to rely on romantic stories or false ideals. She envisaged a world in which women shared with men the new revolutionary rights and privileges which had become part of political life in the United States of America, and which the new French Republic was putting in to place. I feel this is why Wollstonecraft dedicated *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to Talleyrand; the French constitution addressed the political and legal rights of men and subsumed women within the family²⁶⁴, “if women are not permitted to enjoy legitimate rights, they will render both men and themselves vicious to obtain illicit privileges.”²⁶⁵ If women were not given a political and social identity of their own, they would manipulate men to obtain a position for themselves. Women as well as men

²⁶³ Fletcher, p.391

²⁶⁴ Gary Kates, ed., *The French Revolution: Recent Debates & New Controversies, Rewriting Histories* (London: Routledge, 1998). In a chapter on Counter – Revolutionary women Olwen Hufton claims that in year III when men were called to swear an oath of loyalty, it was not expected of women: “It held that theirs was the private sphere and it was their husbands’ job to exercise control. They were not citizens, that is those partaking of the political, but citizenesses, owing first allegiance to the responsible citizen in the shape of husband or father. Their relationship to politics placed them at one remove.” p.315

²⁶⁵ Wollstonecraft, p.89

required a practical and useful education in order to fulfil their potential, gifted to them from God.

Gunther- Canada believed Wollstonecraft's political theory "offered women the emancipatory power of Enlightenment reason,"²⁶⁶ a way to break free from the ignorance of their so-called false education and to create their own political and social reality. By doing this Wollstonecraft theorized a relationship between gender, education, and citizenship. In denying educational and political rights to women, how could women be expected to be part of a new state? Writers such as Rousseau, Swift, and Mandeville had criticised the frivolous nature of women, without actually addressing the reasons for this frivolity. How can women be expected to understand a society in which they have no practical experience or active social position? Without that equal education and companionship with men women will in fact hold back the progress of knowledge and virtue in society. Rousseau envisaged a state in which Sophie would be dependent on Emile, yet her education in the feminine arts would give her a certain domestic power over Emile. Wollstonecraft felt that this perpetuated the false distinctions and current inequalities in society and impeded the moral and virtuous development of the female character.²⁶⁷ Chris Jones gives an insightful exploration of Wollstonecraft's understanding of the concept of family affection. As it was for Rousseau and Burke, the family was the central unit in society for Wollstonecraft. A family was a first teacher for children, in which children learned to relate to other people and to understand their responsibilities to themselves and to the people around them. In the dedicatory letter to Tallyrand, which opens the second *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft set out her critique of

²⁶⁶ Gunther- Canada, p.108

²⁶⁷ Sapiro makes particular reference to Wollstonecraft's ideas concerning false distinctions in society, and the way that the structure of the family was directly related to relations within the state in chapters 4 and 5.

family and social relations, and called Tallyrand's attention to the fact that both male and female characters needed reforming. If this happened,

“...the common law of gravity prevailing, the sexes will fall in to their proper places. And, now that more equitable laws are forming your citizens, marriage may become more sacred: Your young men may choose wives from motives of affection, and your maidens allow love to root out vanity.”²⁶⁸

Wollstonecraft unlike Burke and Rousseau believed that refined affection could only exist between equals. Wollstonecraft's understanding of family affection made the family

“the breeding ground of a republican or universal benevolence.”²⁶⁹ Unlike Dr Gregory or Fordyce, or Rousseau and Burke, Wollstonecraft's idea of family joined together the republican ideals of benevolence, independence, and morality,

Wollstonecraft extended these ideals to involve an active role for women in the state.

Wollstonecraft did not divide the family from the community.

“If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should all be educated after the same model, or the intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women ever fulfil the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens, till they become free by being enabled to earn their own subsistence, independent of men; in the same manner, I mean, to prevent misconstruction, as one man is independent of another. Nay, marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses.....Virtue will never prevail in society till the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason; and, till the affections common to both are allowed to gain their due strength by the discharge of mutual duties.”²⁷⁰

Ruth Abbey recognises Wollstonecraft's attempt not only to portray the family as a political institution, but her notion of the family as involving justice as well. The family needed the same ideals and values as the public realm. Abbey argues that Wollstonecraft

²⁶⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Second Vindication*. P.70

²⁶⁹ Chris Jones, *Cambridge Companion*, p.46.

²⁷⁰ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p.260.

viewed marriage as friendship, a relationship of rationality, equality, and freedom. Wollstonecraft's challenge to the separation of the public and private realms, and promotion of the idea of marriage as friendship, is Wollstonecraft's contribution to the liberal tradition. Marriage and parenthood should be shared equally, Wollstonecraft supplemented her rights argument with an appeal to social utility.²⁷¹ Wollstonecraft spent her literary career responding to the ideas of other influential authors, and finding ways to make a social and political identity for women. She wanted to discover how to make women a part of politics and society; to further both the social development of women and men, the moralistic and virtuous understanding of women in relation to society and their future happiness. Wollstonecraft did not only respond to the work of political and philosophical authors such as Edmund Burke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. She also responded to the works of female and male novelists, who she believed had just as strong an influence on society and the shaping of gender. Wollstonecraft was critical of the effect novels could have on the mind of a young ill educated woman. If all a young women read were novels displaying false notions of romanticism and the idea of a 'happily ever after'. Wollstonecraft was concerned that with only an experience of novels through which to understand human relations and societal expectations, women would fail to understand their duties as parents and members of society. Emulating the false models of femininity they saw displayed in novels, because their world did not offer them a broader experience of human emotions and relations. In her work for the *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft criticised women novelists who helped continue the social, political, and personal inequality in gender relations through their portrayal of weak,

²⁷¹ Ruth Abbey, "Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft," *Hypatia* 14, no. 3 (1999). pp.78-95

dependent, domestic heroines who are at the mercy of libertine rakes who will abandon or mistreat them. Wollstonecraft wanted female characters in novels to be heroines in their own right not to be dependent on or at the mercy of a male character.²⁷² This false world presented to women in novels by both men and women writers was for Wollstonecraft a validation of the current position of women in society, women novelists were complicit in their own subservience and dependence.²⁷³ Even strong female characters in novels were at the mercy of men, an example of this to which Wollstonecraft refers on occasion is Clarissa, the eponymous heroine of one of Samuel Richardson's most well known and popular novels. Lord Lovelace expected to be able to overcome Clarissa's hesitation with "verbal flourishes, ingenious plots and amusing disguises."²⁷⁴ When his theatrical performance did not have the desired effect Lovelace raped Clarissa.

This situation, not uncommon in eighteenth century novels, normally resulted in the ruin of a female's reputation and their inability to find a husband or a position of employment. Wollstonecraft was concerned that female characters such as Clarissa had a bad influence on young women with no other experience of the world. Wollstonecraft was painfully aware of the dependent situation facing many women in society, and the pernicious effects this had on the development of their character, and their later ability to function as wives and mothers. This power inequality and the lack of legitimate employment opportunities for women contributed to women turning to prostitution or

²⁷² Mizi Myers in the *Cambridge Companion* presents a chapter on Wollstonecraft's literary reviews making reference to her criticism of female novelists and the nature of novels themselves in both the *Analytical Review* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

²⁷³ Myers quotes from Wollstonecraft's review of *A Simple Story* by Elizabeth Inchbald, "Why do all female writers, even when they display their abilities, always give a sanction to the libertine reveries of men? Why do they poison the minds of their own sex, by strengthening a male prejudice that makes women systematically weak?" p.88

²⁷⁴ Gordon, p.227.

other dependent unstable forms of employment or relationships. Wollstonecraft tried to illustrate this inequality and the negative effects for the moral development of women in her published works.

Maria or the Wrongs of Woman was left unfinished at Wollstonecraft's death in 1797; it was published posthumously by Godwin and Joseph Johnson. *Maria* is possibly the second part to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that Wollstonecraft explained she intended to write in the text of the second *Vindication*, or as Gordon describes it in *A New Genus* "*The Wrongs* is a sequel on legal wrongs in fictional form."²⁷⁵

Maria illustrates the particular social oppressions and legal issues faced by women under the political and social environment through the experiences of two women Maria and Jemima. In choosing to present her ideas in the form of a novel, Wollstonecraft felt that the genre was more acceptable than a political treatise from a woman author, and that a novel would reach a wider reading audience. Wollstonecraft however politicised the novel, she took the novel genre and used it to make a social criticism. According to Sapiro, *Wrongs of Woman* "goes even further in explaining Wollstonecraft's implicit claim that the existing tyranny of husband over wife was at least as cruel as other forms she identified"²⁷⁶ Wollstonecraft's *Maria* is a young woman who marries early as her only avenue to leave the family home and the mistreatment of her stepmother. For Maria, however, marriage is in fact no better than the family home. At her marriage Maria's possessions and dowry become the property of her husband. He

²⁷⁵ Gordon, p.341

²⁷⁶ Sapiro, p.149

squanders this money, and Maria is powerless to do anything to improve her situation. At this point Wollstonecraft has Maria exclaim that “Marriage has bastilled me for life.”²⁷⁷

Wollstonecraft takes the well known symbol of political oppression- the Bastille prison -and compares it with the institution of marriage. Women are imprisoned within marriage, without any legal or social identity of their own. They have no legal recourse or support or protection in the case of mistreatment. At a time when French men had freed themselves from monarchical rule through the revolution, they did not improve equally the position of women. Despite the fact that republican motherhood gave recognition to the important role women had in giving birth to and raising children, like Rousseau before them the French legislators used this as a way to keep women within the home.ref They were not given the opportunity to become active citizens and contribute equally to the new society. Their legal status remained the same as it was in England: derived from their relationship to men and without a legal and social identity of their own. While women could inherit property under the new French constitution; they were still not given enfranchised as citizens. Jones claims that Wollstonecraft’s complaint to Tallyrand in the dedication at the start of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* “underlies the importance of political rights to Wollstonecraft.”²⁷⁸ Maria J. Falco states Wollstonecraft believed “The continued exclusion of women from full civic status ...worked to the detriment of society generally, and to the goals of republicanism and of the French Revolution itself”²⁷⁹

Jemima in *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman*, is an example of the result of woman’s vulnerable position in society. Jemima’s mother was seduced by a fellow

²⁷⁷ Wollstonecraft, p.155

²⁷⁸ Jones, p.49

²⁷⁹ Falco,p.2

servant, dying a few days' after Jemima's birth. Jemima's father takes a second wife and Jemima is ill treated by her step mother. Then following employment as a domestic servant, Jemima is raped by the master of the house. Found to be pregnant she is fired, and forced to turn to stealing and prostitution, then other forms of dependent relationships before finally ending up as a warder at the institution where Maria's husband had Maria confined.

Wollstonecraft did not blame women for their position rather she tried to illustrate the ways in which the dependent position of women resulted in the social and behavioural situation many social theorists and critics commented adversely on. Wollstonecraft insisted that if women were educated and had opportunities to be self sufficient they would not be dependent on men or rely on certain modes of behaviour to gain support. Wollstonecraft envisaged throughout the second *Vindication* that if women could control their own destiny and make independent decisions reliant on their education and understanding this would in turn not only reform the behaviour of men, it would in time lead to a reformed society.

Wollstonecraft was as dependent on certain kinds of literature as she was critical of them. Vivien Jones explores Wollstonecraft's complex relationship with the tradition of advice literature in both *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft's exposure to the moral and spiritual ideas present in the literature of Dissenting writers also influenced her social theory. In particular their criticism of luxury and commercial excess, also the way in which Dissenting writers

presented a “.. human, rather than gendered, regime of spiritual self discipline works in the service of a wider, communitarian, political ideal.”²⁸⁰

Wollstonecraft borrows middle class ideas of independence, avoidance of ostentatious display and excesses of pleasure present in Dissenting literature and applies them to her wider criticism of society. Wollstonecraft had a wider understanding of virtue than that which was present in the advice literature of which she was critical. She argued that men had shaped what she describes as feminine virtues for their own convenience. Wollstonecraft envisaged a genderless virtue, whereby both men and women behave in a similar manner towards each other, and both have a similar understanding of their wider responsibilities; to themselves, to each other, to their families, and to their future position in the next life.

“..I here throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty. For man and woman, truth, if I understand the meaning of the word, must be the same; yet the fanciful female character, so prettily drawn by poets and novelists, demanding the sacrifice of truth and sincerity, virtue becomes a relative idea, having no other foundation than utility, and of that utility men pretend arbitrarily to judge, shaping it to their own convenience.”²⁸¹

Women were dependent on men, and men created women to reflect what they desired. Wollstonecraft believed virtues were the same for both sexes the codes of behaviour and moral expectations should be the same. Throughout the second *Vindication* Wollstonecraft established that men and women should have the same expectations placed on them. Women should be educated to be able to provide for

²⁸⁰ Vivien Jones, Cambridge Companion, p.127.

²⁸¹ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp.141-2

themselves and their children if abandoned or left as a widow, or to be an equal contributing partner in a marriage. For Wollstonecraft the only acceptable concept of marriage was a marriage of equals. Neither sex should be dependent on the other, but they should share equally in the responsibilities of family.

As observed above Wollstonecraft's published works represent different stages her social and political understanding. *Mary* was Wollstonecraft's second published work before she had become part of Joseph Johnson's literary social circle. In this novel she set out to present a heroine different to the dependent and vapid variety present in most novels: Mary is a woman with thinking powers. *Mary* is dismissed by many Wollstonecraft scholars as an early work with little significance. What is clearly significant about this novel is the last words. "She thought she was hastening to that world where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage."²⁸²

Wollstonecraft at this early stage in her career has not developed the confidence to openly criticise the political and social dependence of women as she does in the *Vindications*. Here she envisaged the afterlife as the only place where there could be equality between men and women. This is a criticism of the current social structure in the most acceptable genre for a woman writer. *The Wrongs of Woman or Maria* politicises the social and personal wrongs that women face in society. *Maria* was left unfinished at the time of Wollstonecraft's death but from what had been written it is clearly a politicisation of the social and personal handicaps that faced women in English society. Wollstonecraft not only highlights the dependent position of Maria on her family and her husband, and her lack of legal identity or representation; she also attempts to

²⁸² Wollstonecraft, *Mary*, p.68

show the way that sentimental culture deludes men as well as women. Both *Mary* and *Maria* illustrate Wollstonecraft's

“despair of the present and their hope in the future.”²⁸³

Wollstonecraft unlike many of her contemporaries never seems to lose hope in the idea of progress and the potential for progress in the future. She despairs at the world around her in England, in Revolutionary France, and in Scandinavia. At the same time, however she is able to see and comment upon events or individuals which herald the potential for change and progress in the future. During her residence in France and Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft comes to recognise that progress must come from within a society at a time when it is ready. Other nations cannot become involved and positively influence events; societies must change from within at a pace which is comfortable for that society. “An ardent affection for the human race makes enthusiastic characters eager to produce alteration to laws and governments prematurely. To render them useful and permanent, they must be the growth of each particular soil, and the gradual fruit of ripening understanding of the nation, matured by time, not forced by an unnatural fermentation”²⁸⁴

Despite this eventual realisation Wollstonecraft continues to believe in progress and eventual equality between men and women, and different classes of people in society. Mary A. Favret illustrates the way in which Wollstonecraft uses the idea of travel to present both the possibility and, at the same time, the insecurity of a woman's life. Wollstonecraft presents travel not just as a grand tour to finish an aristocrat's education – but any journey undertaken for means of survival, necessity, employment, as well as pleasure. In this way Wollstonecraft highlights the powerlessness or volatility present in the lives of women and the lower classes. According to Favret, travel could also mean travail: even as the image of a traveller can represent independence and freedom of movement it can also mean necessity or suffering due to outside circumstances such as enclosure and deportation, the transportation of slaves or prisoners,

²⁸³ Johnson, *Cambridge Companion*, p.207

²⁸⁴ Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*, p.127 She also shared this gradualism with Godwin. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. pp.266-81.

a family or individual attempting to escape creditors. It could also describe the experiences of an abandoned woman and her illegitimate child.

“Her emphasis on exercise and determination in her travels (travel writing is useful, she tells us, “if the traveller always has a particular pursuit in his head.”) quietly hints at the travail, the work or suffering that lies beneath the word travel, even as it constructs an image of self – possession or independence.”²⁸⁵

In *A Short Residence*, as in her other published works, Wollstonecraft illustrates the dependent position of women and the lower classes, and the inequality present in the society in which she lives. Favret also illustrates the method by which Wollstonecraft demonstrates the domestic sphere as being limiting or involving pointless routine or inertia. In letter 2 written in Gothenburg, Wollstonecraft criticised the endless civility and hospitality of the Swedes which constrained the actions of people. For Wollstonecraft hospitality represented indolence and mindless pleasure at the expense of useful employments. In escaping the endless dinner party to explore the woods Wollstonecraft attempts to escape or rise above current social practices and be the master of her own destiny. “Here as elsewhere we see Wollstonecraft identifying the domestic sphere with inertia and pointless routine. Her walk outdoors is her chance to determine freely where and how she will move.”²⁸⁶

Wollstonecraft attempts to show herself as dependent only on herself. She is not dependent on a husband, she is free in some ways to make her own decisions, She has been able to rise above the limitations placed on her as a woman by society, and is employed as an independent individual. All of Wollstonecraft’s published works are testament to her attempts to escape the social conventions and limitations placed on

²⁸⁵ Favret, *Cambridge Companion*, p.213.

²⁸⁶ Favret, *Cambridge Companion*, p.216

women by patriarchy and existing institutions. All of her works illustrate a continued faith in progress and a long term vision of a reformed society in which men and women live as equal partners. In this chapter I have illustrated the interconnectedness of Wollstonecraft's social theory, and her complex understanding of gender relationships, as well as the way in which Wollstonecraft envisaged that, changing relationships between men and women, would in the long term lead to a reform of social practices. I have identified the ways in which Wollstonecraft critiqued the gender understanding of Rousseau, and how *Emile*, especially the character of Sophie perpetuated, not changed the position of women in society, or personal relations between men and women.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been an attempt to highlight the significance of Wollstonecraft's religious and social vision. During the time I was researching this thesis Barbara Taylor's book *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*²⁸⁷ was published. Taylor presents a thought provoking and well researched account of Wollstonecraft's philosophy; I share some of Taylor's ideas concerning Wollstonecraft. In particular her recognition of the providential nature of Wollstonecraft's theory of progress, as well as the personal nature of Wollstonecraft's religious thought, and her not uncritical relationship with Rational Dissent. Along with Wollstonecraft's religious thought Taylor briefly explores Wollstonecraft's attitude towards the forms that the male character took, through Wollstonecraft's personal correspondence. In chapter five, Taylor recognises the egalitarian nature of *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, Taylor still appears to understand Wollstonecraft through a feminist lens.

In some ways it is difficult to judge Wollstonecraft's attitude to commerce, the commercial society that is taken for granted in the 21st century was in its infancy in the late 18th century when Wollstonecraft was writing. Wollstonecraft was able to see both positive and negative aspects of the developing commercial society. Wollstonecraft believed in equal opportunities for all levels of people in society, through equal education. Wollstonecraft was critical of the false distinctions of rank and birth, as they existed in the forms of aristocracy, primogeniture, and monarchy, and, the clergy. This aspect of Wollstonecraft's thought is given critical analysis by Virginia Sapiro, Sapiro

²⁸⁷ Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, ed. Marilyn Butler and James Chandler, *Cambridge Studies in Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

recognises that “Wollstonecraft’s sole and universal measure of natural superiority was the capacity for reason – based virtue.”²⁸⁸ For Wollstonecraft this could only result from a practical education involving not only intellectual subjects, but the understanding of a responsibility to act for the future good of mankind and to offer support to other members of society. With this understanding Wollstonecraft presented a wider vision of benevolence, “The grand virtues of the heart particularly the enlarged humanity which extends to the whole human race, depend more on the understanding, I believe than is generally imagined.”²⁸⁹

Taylor in her epilogue, and Lyndall Gordon in her final chapters both illustrate the different interpretations Wollstonecraft was subject to after her death, and the confused legacy that Wollstonecraft left to future generations. What Wollstonecraft may have thought of these interpretations can never be known, in my personal opinion the fact that her work was able to provide hope and vision to both men and women in a later time would give Wollstonecraft satisfaction. Wollstonecraft’s ideas may not have been adopted by society during her life time, now in the 21st century her vision, at least the part of it respecting women, is more widely regarded. Wollstonecraft scholars have tended to over look the religious basis of her philosophy society now may be more secular than the one in which Wollstonecraft lived. Resulting in some ways in a difficulty in contextualising or fitting Wollstonecraft’s ideas in to a theory of politics and society: For Wollstonecraft it was the central tenet of her published works, Wollstonecraft remained religious throughout her life and it was through a duty to God to develop to one’s full

²⁸⁸ Virginia Sapiro, *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). P.78

²⁸⁹ Wollstonecraft in Sapiro, p.177

potential, that Wollstonecraft argued for equality between men and women in all aspects of social and political life.

Mary Wollstonecraft's place in the history and development of feminist thought has been the subject of constant and continuing scholarship. Wollstonecraft's place within the wider canon of political thought has been less explored. Two writers who in some ways do justice to the wider social vision of Wollstonecraft are Virginia Sapiro and Chris Jones, both of whom I have drawn on during this thesis. This thesis has tried to come to terms with the religious and gender politics of Mary Wollstonecraft. My intention in the limited scope of a thesis has been to highlight aspects of Wollstonecraft's thought and suggest ways that Wollstonecraft could be more widely interpreted in light of her radical critique of political theory.

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