

Mary Wollstonecraft's Nurturing Liberalism: Between an Ethic of Justice and Care

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Contemporary feminist scholars have devoted much attention to analyzing the relationship between justice and care theories but little to the ideas of early feminist authors. I bring the political philosophy of the Mary Wollstonecraft to bear on contemporary justice/care debates in order to highlight her unique contribution. Although usually interpreted as a classical liberal or republican thinker, Wollstonecraft is better understood as a feminist care theorist. She aimed at a revolutionary transformation of liberal society by emphasizing the importance of care-giving duties. Unlike some recent feminist scholars, however, she still recognized an important role for justice. She argued that before personal care-giving activities could transform the political, political justice had first to be extended to personal caring relationships. Wollstonecraft's political philosophy thus provides a feminist model for synthesizing justice and care theories and represents an innovative reformulation of classical liberal and republican ideas that incorporates the care perspective.

In recent years, feminist scholars have proposed political theories based upon an ethic of care as an alternative to liberal theories of justice.¹ Although these scholars have paid little attention to the ideas of historical feminist authors, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) provides important insights into the relationship between liberal justice and feminist care. In this article, I explore Wollstonecraft's views on the relationship between justice and care and outline her proposal for creating a nurturing form of liberalism based upon a synthesis of these concepts.

While contemporary scholars continue to debate the precise nature of justice and care theories, and some even question whether the two concepts are analytically distinct, most recognize certain distinguishing features between them (Gatens 1998; Held 1995a).² Justice theories are organized around formal and abstract rights and rules, whereas care theories emphasize the importance of nurturing activities, personal attentiveness, and the maintenance of human relationships. An important difference between the two is the high moral value that care theories place upon nurturing activities and the realms in which they traditionally occur, especially family life, friendships, and sexual and other close personal relationships (Friedman 1995, 147–8). Concomitant to this view is the belief that private and public spheres cannot be separated: The care provided in personal relationships and family life is essential for public activity and deserves public recognition and support (Katzenstein and Laitin 1987, 262–3).

Even if Okin (1989a, 1989b) is correct in arguing that justice theories can accommodate certain concerns of care theories, the latter may at least be distinguished

from the former by their emphasis on care-giving activities.³ More distinctive is their commitment to taking others' needs as the starting point for normative action (Ruddick 1990, 237; Tronto 1993, 105). In this respect, care theories are more flexible and contextual than theories of justice. Whereas justice theories mediate human relationships by applying abstract moral principles to particular cases, care theories start from the particular needs of individuals and attempt to address these needs in context (Friedman 1993, 70–1). They also tend to focus on the inherent and often unchosen responsibilities and duties that stem from human interdependence and relationships, while justice theories tend to stress individual autonomy and voluntary contractual obligations (Gatens 1998, xiv–xv).

The first generation of care theorists were primarily interested in differentiating the concepts of justice and care, but many recent discussions center around “how justice and care can appropriately be combined from a feminist point of view” (Held 1995a, 2; see also Card 1995; Clement 1996; Dillon 1992; Friedman 1993, 1995; Held 1995b; Hirschmann and Di Stefano 1996; Jaggard 1995; James 1992; Koehn 1998; Okin 1989b; Robinson 1999; Tronto 1993). Interest in this issue has been piqued by awareness of potential shortcomings in the original care ideal (Jaggard 1995). The focus of the care ethic on the particular raises questions about its applicability to public affairs and large social structures (Mendus 1993). At the same time, care ethics has been criticized for ignoring the ways in which institutionally structured power inequities may compromise caring relationships (Friedman 1993). A number of theorists also point out that caring relationships can slide into paternalism or parochialism if not governed by some objective criterion of genuine care (Barry 1995, 252–6; Jaggard 1995; Koehn 1998; Narayan 1995; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1993).

Wollstonecraft affords important insights into these

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¹ The foundational works include Chodorow 1978, Gilligan 1982, Noddings 1984, and Ruddick 1980, 1989. Among recent works that apply care ethics to politics are Clement 1996, Friedman 1993, Held 1993, Hirschmann 1992, Hirschmann and Di Stefano 1996, Sevenhuijsen 1998, and Tronto 1993.

² The Held and Gatens books are anthologies of articles and book chapters that represent a diversity of approaches to justice and care.

³ For a very different view on the ability of justice theories to accommodate the concerns of care theorists, see Kittay 1997 and Sevenhuijsen 1998, 72–9.

debates, yet her writings have been ignored by contemporary care theorists. The neglect of Wollstonecraft's writings is perhaps understandable given her reputation as a conventional liberal feminist—one who simply added women to the classical liberal tradition and stirred. Indeed, several scholars suggest that Wollstonecraft's philosophy embodies all the inadequacies of liberal theories of justice when applied to women (Eisenstein 1981, 90; Gatens 1991; Jacobus 1979, 10; Pateman, 1989; Poovey 1984). The only thing that Wollstonecraft is said to have to offer “on the question of sexual equality is that women are entitled to be treated ‘like men’ or ‘as if they were men’” (Gatens 1991, 126–7). It is held that she incorporated women into the liberal public sphere without taking account of their concerns and perspective.

The problem with the liberal interpretation of Wollstonecraft's thought is that it disregards the important role she accords to caring relationships. Although she draws heavily upon the classical liberal tradition, she nonetheless identifies caring relationships as the foundation and end of society. She argues that the development of autonomous individuals begins in the family, with the particular attention of mothers and fathers to the needs of their children. In fact, family duties are central to her political philosophy. In her vision of society, the highest moral importance is given to the particular caring-giving duties of husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, and citizens.

Within this framework of care Wollstonecraft does recognize an important role for justice. She asserts that equality and rights must be extended to women in political, social, and family affairs in order to foster the development of healthy caring relationships within the family and society at large. Her critique of society is intended to demonstrate that unjust family and social relations not only impede the development of care but actually promote uncaring and pathological relationships. Wollstonecraft is thus rightfully known for her strong advocacy of equality and rights, but it has been overlooked that she demanded equality and rights for women primarily to promote a more caring and dutiful citizen body. Her political philosophy is perhaps best described as a nurturing liberalism in which liberal justice provides the necessary backdrop for the development of virtuous care.

Wollstonecraft offers important insights into contemporary care/justice debates. Recent proposals for combining care and justice often minimize the moral and theoretical significance of care or limit its applicability to personal and private affairs (Held 1995b; Jaggar 1995). Wollstonecraft synthesizes justice and care without slighting either value. She embeds justice within the larger framework of care but demonstrates its importance for caring relationships. By her account justice is instrumental to care—an essential feature of caring relationships. She identifies caring duties, in turn, as the crux of a virtuous social order and the key to addressing many social problems. Wollstonecraft argues that many social problems are the result of unhealthy caring relationships that can only be cor-

rected by extending justice to personal relationships and elevating the status of care-giving duties.

My main purpose is to explore the neglected element of care within Wollstonecraft's moral and political thought and to bring her ideas to bear on contemporary debates about care and justice. It may seem anachronistic to apply contemporary concepts to the ideas of an eighteenth-century thinker, but two points justify my interpretation. First, even if the concept of care is a recent discursive invention, the elements that define it (including a concern for nurturing relations, an emphasis on the particular needs of others, a desire to promote attentiveness, and responsibility among individuals) have long existed. Because Wollstonecraft was concerned with those elements, it is plausible to consider her an early care theorist even though she expressed her concerns in a different social and historical context.⁴

Second, and more important, Wollstonecraft stands at a critical historical juncture in the formation of the modern care ethic. In the late eighteenth century, philosophers began to shift notions of moral sentimentality and affection, which are quite similar to elements of the modern care ethic, from the public realm and humanity to the domestic sphere and women (Okin 1981; Tronto 1993). According to Tronto (pp. 25–59), this shift was driven primarily by large-scale economic and social transformations that made political theories based upon contextual morality and affective personal relations seem less relevant for public affairs. Wollstonecraft's writings may be read as an early protest against the domestication and segregation of caring activities as well as a warning about the pathologies of care that would result from it.

A secondary (albeit largely implicit) purpose of this article is to contribute to recent efforts to increase appreciation for Wollstonecraft's works in the canon of modern political philosophy (Falco 1996; Gunther-Canada 1997; Sapiro 1992, 280–300; Weiss 1996). Wollstonecraft remains a peripheral figure among political scientists. Too often her writings are assumed to advocate nothing more than the extension of liberal rights to women and are considered of historical but not theoretical interest. I suggest that Wollstonecraft articulated an innovative liberal theory that places nurturing and caring activities at the center of public affairs. She viewed liberal rights and freedoms as a means to promote the virtuous fulfillment of nurturing duties. That fulfillment, in turn, could protect against the selfishness and irresponsibility often associated with liberal society. Wollstonecraft aimed at the revolutionary transformation of society, not so much through restructuring macroeconomic and political institutions as through improving the quality of personal and domestic care. But before personal care can transform the political, she argues, political justice first must be extended to personal caring relations.

⁴ Sapiro (1992, 258–9) dubs Wollstonecraft a feminist on the grounds that she shared with nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminist theorists “a minimal and flexible set” of common ideas and concerns. See also Kelly 1992, 1–2.

BURKEAN CARE AND A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MEN

It is useful to begin the discussion of Wollstonecraft's philosophy with a brief discussion of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Wollstonecraft dedicated her first major political work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), to the task of rebutting it. Scholars have proposed a variety of hypotheses to explain the vehemence of her response to Burke, but none has suggested that her reaction may have been provoked in part by the similarity of their ideas. Both wrote during a period when the contextual and affective moral and political philosophies of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, among others, were being replaced by universalistic and abstract moral and political philosophies, or at least were being pushed into the domestic sphere (Tronto 1993, 25–59). Both Burke and Wollstonecraft viewed this development with concern but addressed it in very different ways.

In *Reflections*, Burke criticizes the uncaring nature of universalistic philosophies and defends the traditional and patriarchal social structure as necessary for the preservation of caring relationships and the fulfillment of duties. Wollstonecraft apparently read *Reflections* as a twisted or pathological description of her own concern with nurturance and care-giving duties. She counters Burke's argument by claiming that universal rights are a necessary prerequisite for healthy caring relationships, and she dedicates much of her *Rights of Men* to highlighting the shortcomings of care ethics when treated in isolation from equality and rights.

Burke formulates some of his central criticisms of the French Revolution in terms reminiscent of care ethics. One clear example is his criticism of Enlightenment liberalism's commitment to abstract rights. The true rights of individuals, he declares, depend upon their particular wants and needs (Burke [1790] 1987, 51–3). In professing his love for liberty, for example, Burke notes that he would not therefore congratulate a mentally ill individual for escaping (or being cast out) from a psychiatric hospital (p. 7). The abstract perfection of natural rights is their practical defect. They ignore the special needs of different individuals. Burke asserts that the devotion to abstract rights can devolve into the most callous and uncaring sorts of policies and actions if not adapted to the particular and contextual needs of human beings:

Though a pleasant writer said, *liceat perire poetis* [Let the poets perish], when one of them, in cold blood, is said to have leaped into the flames of a volcanic revolution, *ardentem frigidus Aetnam insiluit* [Coldly he jumped into burning Aetna], I consider such a frolic rather as an unjustifiable poetic license than as one of the franchises of Parnassus; and whether he was a poet, or divine, or politician that chose to exercise this kind of right, I think that more wise, because more charitable, thoughts would urge me rather to save the man than to preserve his brazen slippers as the monuments of his folly (p. 55).

Burke claims it is the responsibility of each of us—and of governments more generally—to attend to the real and variable needs of individuals. The commitment to

abstract rights is too simplistic and impersonal to treat all human beings in a truly humane manner.

Burke's concern with caring relationships is also evident in his criticism of the selfish individualism of Enlightenment society. Burke worried that liberal societies would strip away “all the pleasing illusions which made power gentle and obedience liberal” and reduce all human relations to matters of power and self-interest (p. 67). “On the scheme of this barbarous philosophy, which is the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings . . . laws are to be supported only by their own terrors and by the concern which each individual may find in them from his own private speculations or can spare to them from his own private interests” (p. 68). For Burke, the only way to preserve affectionate and attentive personal relationships is to maintain traditional feudal arrangements in which power differentials are mitigated by manners and customs and each individual occupies a status and role that defines his or her duties toward others. Kings behave toward subjects as loving fathers; the nobility feels obliged to care for the lower classes; men show special concern for women. The whole of society is arranged “so as to create in us love, veneration, admiration, or attachment” (p. 68).

Liberal theories of justice replace these affections with a base commitment to equality and freedom. They tear away all traditional and communal norms in favor of a calculating and isolated individualism. Burke foretells the coming of a society driven by “present convenience” and the “lust of selfish will” (pp. 77, 83). The French revolutionaries' rude treatment of King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette is emblematic of the new social ethos devoid of humaneness (pp. 62–5). Burke's concern about the increasing equality and assertiveness of women, too, reflects his belief that universal morality will eventually degrade all relationships into mere contractual agreements (Gunther-Canada 1996, 65–6). “But the age of chivalry is dead,” Burke decries. “That of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever. Never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom” (p. 66).

Wollstonecraft devoted *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* to a critique of Burke's *Reflections*. Probably more than any other work, it established her reputation as a traditional liberal theorist. She vehemently defends the Enlightenment ideals of freedom, equality, rights, and rationality against Burke's conservative defense of personal affection and moral sentimentality. Yet, it is misleading to characterize this work in terms of the simple contrast between affection and rationality, care and justice. Wollstonecraft expresses sympathy for many of Burke's ideas and even observes that in different circumstances Burke might have been a “revolutionary” like herself (Wollstonecraft [1790] 1995, 5, 45–6). Above all, she expresses sympathy with his concern for affective and caring relationships, but she finds his account of these virtues to be distorted by his

attachment to unequal social relations. *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* is not only a vindication of justice and equality but also, more accurately, a first vindication of her own vision of a just and caring society. She wants to demonstrate that the French revolutionaries' commitment to equality, rationality, and rights is not necessarily antithetical to the development of a caring and dutiful society but, indeed, the foundation of it.

Wollstonecraft ([1790] 1995) begins by ridiculing Burke's "pampered sensibility." His emotions and passions overwhelm his reason and subject him to pretty flights of imagination (pp. 6–7). Wollstonecraft portrays her own argument as an attempt to reinsert reason into the discussion about the French Revolution. "Quitting now the flowers of rhetoric, let us, Sir, reason together" (p. 7). Several scholars have commented upon the gender reversal implicit in Wollstonecraft's rhetoric (Gunther-Canada 1996; Johnson 1995, 23–46; Kelly 1992, 84–106). Wollstonecraft adopts the masculine language of reason to rebuke Burke's effeminate sentimentality and emotionalism.⁵ This rhetorical strategy might appear antifeminine (indeed, Wollstonecraft has few good things to say about most of her female contemporaries), but her goal is to lead both women and men away from an artificial and conventional definition of the moral sentiments toward true human affection.

According to Wollstonecraft, feelings that are "ostentatiously displayed are often the cold declamation of the head, and not the effusions of the heart" (*Rights of Men*, p. 6). "When the heart speaks, we are seldom shocked by hyperbole, or dry raptures. I speak in this decided tone" (p. 29). She insists that her straightforward, unemotional prose indicates her true feelings; in contrast, Burke's fanciful and romantic prose is a sign of "false, or rather artificial, feelings" (p. 29). She even accuses Burke of "hard-hearted sophistry" (p. 59). He tries to manipulate his readers through fanciful images and appeals to the emotions. He sacrifices all true affection to stylized affectation.

Wollstonecraft's clearest statement on style appears in the opening pages of her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), although a similar statement is found at the very beginning of *Rights of Men*: "I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for, wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming from the head, never reach the heart" (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995, 77; VM, 5). We should not, of course, accept at face value Wollstonecraft's claim to speak without affectation. Her rhetoric is based upon the Rousseauian conceit that there is a true and natural language of the heart beneath the distorting layers of convention. The important point is that her rhetoric is not based, as sometimes supposed,

upon the sharp distinction between reason and affection. She regards rational reflection as the truest road to uncovering the genuine feelings of the human heart.

Behind the poetic images and flowery rhetoric of Burke's *Reflections*, Wollstonecraft argues, there is a cold and uncaring philosophy. Burke exalts a constitution "settled in the dark days of ignorance" (*Rights of Men*, p. 11), when members of the peasantry were put to death for hunting on the nobility's lands or for defending their crops from the nobility's game. "How many families," she asks, "have been plunged, in the sporting countries, into misery and vice for some paltry transgression of these coercive laws, by the natural consequence of that anger which a man feels when he sees the reward of his industry laid waste by unfeeling luxury?—when his children's bread is given to dogs" (p. 16)! She notes that Burke's empathy seems to extend only to the rich and wellborn. His lack of concern for the needs of the poor exposes the indifference at the core of his philosophy:

Misery, to reach your heart, I perceive, must have its cap and bells; your tears are reserved, very naturally considering your character, for the declamation of the theatre, or for the downfall of queens, whose rank alters the nature of folly, and throws a graceful veil over vices that degrade humanity; whilst the distress of many industrious mothers, whose helpmates have been torn from them, and the hungry cry of helpless babes, were vulgar sorrows that could not move your commiseration, though they might extort an alms. "The tears that are shed for fictitious sorrows are admirably adapted," says Rousseau, "to make us proud of all the virtues which we do not possess" (p. 14).

Wollstonecraft adds that not only the poor suffer under Burke's system. Feudalism stymies the development of healthy caring relationships. Burke assumes that "respect chills love" (*Rights of Men*, p. 6). Wollstonecraft counters that "affection in the marriage state can only be founded on respect" (p. 22). She explains that equal respect is necessary to appreciate the particular and unique characteristics of others and to love them as real individuals. Traditional social arrangements thwart genuine interpersonal relationships by encouraging people to take on false airs, to view others through artificial romantic ideals, and to marry according to status and wealth. "The respect paid to rank and fortune damps every generous purpose of the soul, and stifles the natural affections on which human contentment ought to be built" (p. 24).

In their efforts to emulate the manners of the nobility, the middle class similarly sacrifices personal intimacy to wealth and affectation. "The grand concern of three parts out of four is to contrive to live above their equals, and to appear to be richer than they are. How much domestic comfort and private satisfaction is sacrificed to this irrational ambition! It is a destructive mildew that blights the fairest virtues; benevolence, friendship, generosity, and all those endearing charities which bind human hearts together" (*Rights of Men*, p. 23). Feudal arrangements further undermine nurturing family relations by inclining parents to care more for the perpetuation of family name and estates than the well-being of their children. "The younger children

⁵ Because the first edition of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* was published anonymously, Wollstonecraft probably did not initially conceive of this gender reversal as part of her public rhetorical strategy.

have been sacrificed to the eldest son; sent into 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 and virtuous" (pp. 21–2)? In short, traditional social arrangements distort close personal relationships by subordinating them to romance, rank, and wealth.

Wollstonecraft defends the rights of men as the solution to this problem. Like Burke, she wants to avoid the development of a cold and calculating society. But in contrast to Burke, she claims the extension of rights and equality is necessary to this end. She suggests that a liberal political order based upon abstract and universal rights does not necessarily entail the demise of personal affection; on the contrary, it provides the basis for the development of more caring and dutiful relationships.

The civilization which has taken place in Europe has been very partial, and, like every custom that an arbitrary point of honour has established, refines the manners at the expense of morals, by making sentiments and opinions current in conversation that have no root in the heart, or weight in the cooler resolves of the mind.—And what has stopped its progress?—hereditary property—hereditary honours. The man has changed into an artificial monster by the station in which he was born, and the consequent homage that benumbed his faculties like the torpedo's touch;—or a being, with a capacity of reasoning, would not have failed to discover, as his faculties unfolded, that true happiness arose from the friendship and intimacy which can only be enjoyed by equals; and that charity is not a condescending distribution of alms, but an intercourse of good offices and mutual benefits, founded on respect for justice and humanity (*Rights of Men*, pp. 8–9).

In this passage, Wollstonecraft touches upon a number of themes that are central to both her *Vindications*. Following Rousseau, she claims that European civilization is corrupt because it is based upon unequal social relationships. This inequality has created a civilization of monstrous and unfeeling characters. The only way to develop true friendship and mutual care is to extend equality and justice to all. While she commends Burke's concern for relationships and care she suggests that he has not explored deeply enough what is necessary to promote these ends. He falls back upon the feudal hierarchy as the foundation of caring relationships and thus helps perpetuate the very thing he claims to detest: an impersonal and uncaring society.

Burke and Wollstonecraft approach the problem of promoting caring relationships in quite different ways. Burke looks back wistfully to the feudal social order in which caring duties are prescribed by the particular roles and status of individuals. Wollstonecraft looks ahead to the development of a more caring society based upon egalitarian social arrangements. Although Burke's concern for affection and care is more similar to the ideas of contemporary conservative theorists than to those of contemporary feminists, Wollstonecraft's critique nonetheless yields valuable lessons for contemporary feminist discussions about justice and care. Rather than jettison justice for care or draw a

sharp distinction between them, she argues that the two concepts are integrally related. Without justice, the concern for care can justify paternalistic and oppressive social relationships, especially for women, children, and the poor. Indeed, she claims it is difficult if not impossible to actualize healthy caring relationships within an unjust social structure, since social inequality creates pathologies of care in the form of misplaced and artificial affections. It is this last point that Wollstonecraft elaborates at length in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN

After defending the principles of the French Revolution against Burke's conservative criticisms in her first *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft turns in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to a criticism of the French revolutionaries for being too conservative. She charges them with betraying their ideals by reproducing elements of the feudal social order within their new constitution. Specifically, they exclude women from political rights and thus maintain the old patriarchal social system. "Who made man the exclusive judge, if woman partake with him the gift of reason" (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995, 69)? Before the French Revolution, kings and nobles justified their rule by arguing that the people lacked the reason necessary to govern themselves. "Do you not act a similar part, when you *force* all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families groping in the dark" (p. 69)? Although the revolutionaries were free from belief in the divine right of kings, they held fast to the "divine right of husbands" (p. 112). Denouncing both divine rights, Wollstonecraft demands the extension of civil and political rights to women.

This demand for women's rights solidified Wollstonecraft's reputation as a liberal feminist, but the liberal interpretation of her thought fails to capture the full complexity of her ideas. As noted above, in the *Rights of Men* Wollstonecraft criticizes not affection per se, but the heartless and unnatural affection that develops from unequal social relationships. In the *Rights of Woman*, she likewise defends the extension of rights to women primarily on the grounds that it will facilitate the development of more nurturing and caring relationships. In fact, she approaches the whole issue of governance from a care perspective, reformulating classical liberal theory to emphasize the importance of the family and nurturing relationships for the well-being of society at large.

Wollstonecraft's concern with care distinguishes her thought from classical liberal theory in several ways. Rather than simply appeal to the abstract dignity of all individuals, Wollstonecraft supports women's equality largely by emphasizing the ways in which it will facilitate the delivery of care. She also focuses on the importance of healthy family relationships for the public good and rejects the classical liberal distinction between public and private spheres. She claims justice must be brought to bear on the private sphere of family

and social life in order to foster the development of care, and government must accord greater resources and respect to traditional nurturing activities, such as parenting and education. As Sapiro (1992, 183; 1996, 37) has written, Wollstonecraft "saw no clear distinction between public and private" but instead "saw 'public' and 'private' as integral parts of the same wholes, not just as different social spaces but, in some ways, as occupying the same space." Also distinct from classical liberal thought is Wollstonecraft's suggestion that the proper goal of government is the creation of a more virtuous citizen body devoted to fulfilling particular duties to one another and humanity at large.

Wollstonecraft is most often interpreted as a liberal theorist, but some scholars place her thought within the classical republican tradition and interpret her as a virtue theorist (Baker-Benfield 1989; Johnson 1995; Landes 1988; Sapiro 1992). There can be no doubt about the republican influences on her thinking. She argues that hierarchy and luxury invariably corrupt the morality of people, and she advocates an activist or participatory ideal of citizenship (Sapiro 1992, xix–xx, 77–116, 232–7). But her republicanism also is strongly influenced by her concern for caring relationships. She argues that public virtue depends upon particularized care relationships, and these depend upon social and political equality. She thus extends classical republican arguments about the corrupting effects of hierarchy and inequality into the private sphere and makes egalitarian family relations a central focus of her theory of a virtuous republic. At the same time, she associates virtue for both men and women not with military or political glory but with the fulfillment of family and social nurturing duties. In fact, she positively reviles the traditional republican valorization of the military and war (*Rights of Woman*, pp. 92–3, 235–6; see Sapiro 1992, 102–3). Hers is a republic of care in which duty to children, spouses, friends, citizens, and humanity replaces the traditional republican ideal of the swaggering *vir virtutis*.

Wollstonecraft lays out the intellectual framework of her argument in the opening chapters of *Rights of Woman*. Criticizing Rousseau's account of the original isolation of human beings, she claims that God created human beings to progress toward moral perfection within and through society (pp. 79–82). She defines moral perfection as the development of reason, knowledge, and virtue (p. 79). Reason and knowledge provide human beings with the capacity to understand and control their social world and, more specifically, to comprehend their duties toward others. Virtue consists of the self-conscious fulfillment of these duties (Sapiro 1992, 74–5). The primary duties of women are their care-giving responsibilities as mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives. The primary duties of men are their care-giving responsibilities as fathers, sons, brothers and husbands. Beyond these primary duties exist broader social responsibilities to neighbors, other citizens, and all human kind.

For Wollstonecraft, the moral progress of society, which forms the entire backdrop of the argument in *Rights of Woman*, consists of progress toward a world in

which men and women recognize the supreme importance of their care-giving duties within the family and society at large. Yet, she claims, everything depends upon women's equality. Without that, neither gender can satisfactorily fulfill its most basic care-giving duties, and society will remain stalled in a morally underdeveloped state. The following important passage from the prefatory letter to *Rights of Woman* aptly summarizes the underlying premises of Wollstonecraft's argument:

Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. . . . If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman, at present, shuts her out from such investigations (p. 68).

Wollstonecraft makes clear from the outset of *Rights of Woman* that her central concern is the development of a more caring and nurturing society. She defends women's equality primarily on the grounds that it is prerequisite for the moral progress of humanity toward a more virtuous and dutiful state.

INEQUALITY AND THE PATHOLOGIES OF CARE

Wollstonecraft dedicates much of the argument in *Rights of Woman* to demonstrating how social and political inequality distorts women's natural affections and prevents them from effectively fulfilling their care-giving duties. On the most basic level, the unequal education given to most women leaves their minds suspended in a state of perpetual childhood. As a result, they are totally unfit for mature companionship and motherhood.

The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavour by satire or instruction to improve them. It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives by acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves,—the only way women can rise in the world,—by marriage. And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act:—they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures.—Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio!—Can they be expected to govern a family with judgement, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world (p. 77)?

Wollstonecraft returns to this theme throughout *Rights of Woman*. Until women comprehend the importance of their care-giving activities for society and receive public recognition for them, they will not be fully attached to them or discharge them virtuously (p. 69). Trained to think primarily about their own beauty

and marriage, many girls grow up to be “cold-hearted, narrow-minded,” and self-centered women who neglect their duties (p. 142). Alternatively, those who remain attached to their duties tend to fulfill them in overly particular and arbitrary ways. “Mankind seem to agree that children should be left under the management of women during their childhood. Now, from all the observation that I have been able to make, women of sensibility are the most unfit for this task, because they will infallibly, carried away by their feelings, spoil a child’s temper” (p. 145). Wollstonecraft is careful to note that her observations do not apply indiscriminately to all women (p. 136). Working women, in particular, tend to display more virtue than “gentlewomen” because they are less immersed within polite society and are more likely to engage in the sorts of practical employment that develop their “good sense” (pp. 154–5).⁶ Wollstonecraft mainly worries about middle- and upper-class women, whose sentimental education renders them unfit for adult duties.

Wollstonecraft argues that gender inequality also disrupts close heterosexual relationships by encouraging women to tyrannize over men (*Rights of Woman*, p. 78). She explains that all human beings innately desire recognition and respect from others (pp. 132, 231). Yet, social inequalities prevent women from attaining respect through legitimate social avenues. They are provided only the most superficial sort of education and are shut out from political activity and most occupations. Consequently, they resort to the only means available to them to achieve some power and respect. They use their feminine wiles to manipulate men to their will. “[Women’s] exertion of cunning is only an instinct of nature to enable them to obtain indirectly a little of that power of which they are unjustly denied a share; for, if women are not permitted to enjoy legitimate rights, they will render both men and themselves vicious, to obtain illicit privileges” (p. 70). Women attempt to gain power vicariously by putting on “infantine airs” in order to excite men’s desires (p. 78). Men respond with lavish and artificial displays of romantic affection. As a result, marriages are formed upon the weakest of foundations.

After the first flush of love passes, men usually became bored with their wives. “Their husbands acknowledge that they are good managers, and chaste wives; but leave home to seek more agreeable, may I be allowed to use a significant French word, *piquant* society” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 143). Women respond by redirecting their feminine arts toward new conquests or retiring into dreary bitterness.

The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband’s heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone. Will she then have sufficient native energy to look into herself for comfort, and cultivate her dormant faculties? Or, is it not more rational to expect that she will try to

please other men; and, in the emotions raised by the expectations of new conquests, endeavor to forget the mortification her love or pride has received? When the husband ceases to be a lover—and the time will inevitably come, her desire of pleasing will then grow languid, or become a spring of bitterness; and love, perhaps the most evanescent of all passions, gives place to jealousy or vanity (p. 97).

Wollstonecraft hardly even considers the possibility that women might also turn to one another for support and refuge from their unhappy relations with men. Her silence on this subject seems to reflect her pessimism about it. She indicates that it is very difficult for women who grow up submitting to and tyrannizing over men ever to trust one another as true friends. Most view other women as rivals and reproduce the oppressions of patriarchal society in their female relationships (*Rights of Woman*, pp. 142, 286). In her last novel, *The Wrongs of Women, or Maria*, however, Wollstonecraft (1989) does provide the story of two women, Maria and Jemima, who are able to develop bonds of friendship through their common oppression (Johnson 1995, 47–69).⁷

The effects of inequality are even more pronounced in women’s relations with their children. Wollstonecraft outlines a variety of ways in which inequality contributes to dysfunctional maternal-child relations. Being subject to the unjust rule of men within society, women often reproduce this injustice within their home. “It will not be difficult to prove that such delegates will act like men subjected by fear, and make their children and servants endure their tyrannical oppression. As they submit without reason, they will, having no fixed rules to square their conduct by, be kind, or cruel, just as the whim of the moment directs; and we ought not to wonder if sometimes, galled by their heavy yoke, they take a malignant pleasure in resting it on weaker shoulders” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 120).

Inequality also leads women to neglect their children. Because women associate their power and respect with their ability to control men, many of them show more concern for the arts of beauty and coquetry than the duties of motherhood (pp. 231–2). Alternatively, some women carry out a quiet revenge against their husband by “wanting their children to love them best, and take their part, in secret, against the father, who is held up as a scarecrow” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 243). Furthermore, social inequality often poisons even the most well-intentioned maternal affection with “perverse self-love” (p. 242). Women look to their children to be what they cannot be. They invest their children with their dreams and make them their source of power and pride. They forget that children, too, are human beings entitled to respect and independence.

Woman, however, a slave in every situation to prejudice, seldom exerts enlightened maternal affection; for she

⁶ Tronto (1993, 61–97) argues in this vein that care is linked not only with gender but also with class and race; lower-class individuals and people of color adopt this perspective more often than individuals with power and privilege.

⁷ Jemima is initially presented as a woman who, due to oppression and abuse throughout her life, is misanthropic and actually colludes with the corrupt society by working as a guard in an asylum. Over the course of the novel, Maria and Jemima develop a friendship based largely upon their common experiences and oppression as women.

either neglects her children, or spoils them by improper indulgence. Besides, the affection of some women for their children is, as I have before termed it, frequently very brutish: for it eradicates every spark of humanity. Justice, truth, every thing is sacrificed by these Rebekah's [sic], and for the sake of their *own* children they violate the most sacred duties, forgetting the common relationship that binds the whole family on earth together (p. 243, emphasis in original).

Wollstonecraft recognizes far more clearly than many contemporary feminists the close links between social structures and the healthy delivery of care. Lacking a rational education and just social structure, women are likely express their affection in self-serving ways. They smother their children with affection but forget to recognize their humanity. Their love is just a more subtle form of their desire to tyrannize over others.

WOLLSTONECRAFT'S SYNTHESIS OF CARE AND JUSTICE

Wollstonecraft is well known for her defense of women's equality, but it is rarely noticed that the central reason she calls for equal rights is her desire to overcome the pathologies of care. She considers justice to be an integral aspect of a caring society and essential for encouraging women to fulfill their nurturing duties.

Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers—in a word, better citizens. We should then love them with true affection, because we should learn to respect ourselves; and the peace of mind of a worthy man would not be interrupted by the idle vanity of his wife, nor the babes sent to nestle in a strange bosom, having never found a home in their mother's (*Rights of Woman*, p. 241).

Wollstonecraft invokes friendship as her model of a natural and pure affection (*Rights of Woman*, pp. 98–101). Friendship is devoid of all coercion and romantic sentimentality and involves the respect of human beings for the unique and particular characteristics of one another, or what Wollstonecraft calls “mutual sympathy” (pp. 203, 241). She contrasts the “calm tenderness of friendship, the confidence of respect” with the “blind admiration, and the sensual emotions of fondness” (p. 99). Unless women are given the opportunity to develop their full capacities, however, they can never be the equal of their husband and never become their genuine friend. “The affection of husbands and wives cannot be pure when they have so few sentiments in common, and when so little confidence is established at home, as must be the case when their pursuits are so different. That intimacy from which tenderness should flow, will not, cannot subsist between the vicious” (p. 292).

Without social equality, women and men can never attain the highest form of personal intimacy—friendship. The lack of friendship between parents, in turn, undermines healthy child care: “Children will never be properly educated till friendship subsists between par-

ents. Virtue flies from a house divided against itself—and a whole legion of devils take up their residence there” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 292). Wollstonecraft traces the ills of society from the political order to the family and back again. Without political and social equality, men and women will never achieve friendship within the family or provide the proper care for their children. As a result, children will grow up ill-equipped for the duties of citizenship, and political society will remain nothing more than an assemblage of selfish and isolated individuals.

Wollstonecraft outlines two sets of concrete proposals for equalizing the condition of women within society. First, she demands the extension of political and civil rights to women, including the rights to life, liberty, and property as well as the right to vote (*Rights of Woman*, pp. 230–41). Unique to her defense of these rights is her attention to their effects on family life. She claims political rights will expand women's understanding of their place within the web of social relations. They will come to see themselves as active citizens with responsibilities to others outside their immediate social sphere. This enlarged social understanding will make them more devoted and adept care givers because they will realize the importance of their nurturing activities for the public good. Lacking this enlarged social understanding, they will remain fixated on their petty concerns and will be incapable of fulfilling even their private family duties. “It is plain from the history of all nations, that women cannot be confined to merely domestic pursuits, for they will not fulfill family duties, unless their minds take a wider range, and whilst they are kept in ignorance they become in the same proportion the slaves of pleasure as they are the slaves of men” (p. 270).

Wollstonecraft argues in a similar vein about civil rights for women. They should be given a legal existence independent of their father, husband, and brothers and granted the right to divorce (Sapiro 1992, 149–52, 237). They also should have the right to own and inherit property as autonomous citizens (*Rights of Woman*, pp. 230–41). Furthermore, the government should work to open careers to women. At present, Wollstonecraft complains, too many women waste their life in idleness who might otherwise have been doctors, nurses, midwives, politicians, merchants, teachers, store owners, farmers, and more (pp. 238–9). Free access to careers will not only allow women to contribute their talents to the public good but also help them achieve economic independence from men. As a result, “women would not then marry for a support . . . and neglect the implied duties” (p. 239). Open careers, like engagement in the political realm, also will broaden women's understanding. They will approach their nurturing relationships with a wider understanding of social affairs rather than through their own private idiosyncrasies and desires.

Wollstonecraft claims that professional careers for women will strengthen family ties. People will marry from affection rather than convention, necessity, or passing romance. They will relate to one another as equals with common interests and aims rather than as

master and servant. “In short, in whatever light I view the subject, reason and experience convince me that the only method of leading women to fulfill their peculiar duties, is to free them from all restraint by allowing them to participate in the inherent rights of mankind” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 272). Political and civil rights are, by Wollstonecraft’s account, the foundation of a caring society.

Wollstonecraft’s other major reform proposal is her plan for national education for girls. She claims the extension of equal rights and opportunities to women is inadequate for addressing the deep gender inequality within society, much of which stems from the manner in which women are socialized.⁸ They are taught to feign weakness and innocence rather than to develop their reason. According to Wollstonecraft, women who are socialized in this manner would gain little from political and civil rights. She therefore argues that the government should assume direction of children’s education in order to combat these social prejudices and especially the parochial views of parents. “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” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 257).

Wollstonecraft specifically calls for the establishment of public day schools to serve as a counterweight to the inequities within the family. Their purpose should be twofold: Educate the mind and heart, that is, cultivate both reason and care. She outlines several pedagogical reforms to meet this end. First, public schools should abolish all false distinctions of sex by educating girls and boys together in the same subjects and activities. In this way, they will be inculcated with a sense of mutual respect from a young age (*Rights of Woman*, p. 260). “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” (p. 264). Second, pedagogical methods based upon obedience and hierarchy should be replaced by a system of active learning carried out through examples and conversation and designed to create students who exercise their reason independently of their teachers (p. 251; Sapiro 1992, 240–1).⁹ Third, attention should be given to an education of the heart. “I am, indeed, persuaded that the heart, as well as the understanding, is opened by cultivation; and by, which may not appear so clear, strengthening the organs; I am not now talking of momentary flashes of sensibility, but of affections” (p. 142). The best means to accomplish this goal is to broaden children’s understanding of the intimate links between their nurturing duties and the public good.

In discussing the education of women in particular, Wollstonecraft conjectures that they would not be

drawn to petty pursuits “if political and moral subjects were opened to them; and I will venture to affirm, that this is the only way to make them properly attentive to their domestic duties.—An active mind embraces the whole circle of its duties, and finds time enough for all” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 265). Starting from small practical examples within the classroom, children can be taught the importance of care and respect in interpersonal relations. Later these particular affections can be related to larger political and moral concerns. Students then can be shown the important role of their care-giving duties for society at large. The point is to elevate the moral status of care-giving activities by teaching students about the central role of these activities in fostering a healthy and functioning society.

Wollstonecraft’s fusion of justice and care is most evident in her account of healthy care-giving activities. Here she claims that justice is necessary not only in broad social affairs but also in the intimate relations among individuals. It is not only a prerequisite for the delivery of care but also provides an important check on it. The proper approach of the adult care giver to the child is one of respectful nurturing. Parents and teachers should devote their nurturing activities to transforming children into autonomous beings. They are to address their wards in the following manner: “It is your interest to obey me till you can judge for yourself; and the Almighty Father of all has implanted an affection in me to serve as a guard to you whilst your reason is unfolding; but when your mind arrives at maturity, you must only obey me, or rather respect my opinions, so far as they coincide with the light that is breaking in on your own mind” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 247). This passage aptly summarizes Wollstonecraft’s vision of adult care. Parents and teachers are to direct their affections to the development of a child’s reason and autonomy. Even if they cannot treat children as equals and hence as friends, they should think of them as friends in the making.

The following passage from *Original Stories*, as relayed by Mrs. Mason, the tutor, highlights Wollstonecraft’s views.¹⁰

[As] Mary had before convinced me that she could regulate her appetites, I gave her leave to pluck as much fruit as she wished; and she did not abuse my indulgence. On the contrary, she spent [the] most part of the time gathering some for me, and her attention made it sweeter. Coming home I called her my friend, and she deserved the name, for she was no longer a child; a reasonable affection had conquered an appetite; her understanding took the lead, and she had practiced a virtue (Wollstonecraft [1788] 1989, IV, 400–1).

The test of healthy, as opposed to self-indulgent, parental care is whether it promotes the child’s autonomy. Only after achieving autonomy can the child express genuine care for others. The goal of the parent or teacher is to graduate the child from a dependent to a friend.

Wollstonecraft has no illusions about the short-term

⁸ Sapiro (1992, 237–9) emphasizes that Wollstonecraft defines education broadly in terms of socialization.

⁹ In an interesting contemporary parallel, Koehn (1998) suggests that the Socratic method provides an appropriate model for promoting principled and healthy caring relationships.

¹⁰ For the view that Mrs. Mason represents the ideas of Wollstonecraft, see Kelly 1992, 63–4.

effectiveness of her proposed reforms. Since “men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in,” she concludes that “till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 89). The first step toward reform is the extension of equal rights and education to women, but this is only a first step. A “revolution in female manners” must sweep through society in order to effect real change (p. 292). The success of this revolution depends not only on a change in women’s consciousness but also on the transformation of men’s consciousness. “For I will venture to assert, that all the causes of female weakness, as well as depravity, which I have already enlarged on, branch out of one grand cause—want of chastity in men” (p. 227). As long as men respond to coquetry, women will continue to play the flirt. “The two sexes mutually corrupt and improve each other. This I believe to be an indisputable truth, extending it to every virtue. Chastity, modesty, public spirit, and all the noble train of virtues, on which social virtue and happiness are built, should be understood and cultivated by all mankind, or they will be cultivated to little effect” (p. 229).

Although Wollstonecraft’s revolution may start with equal rights and educational reform, it will not reach its end until the deep prejudices against women are rooted out of society. It likewise requires a reevaluation of caring activities within society. These are to be viewed not as ancillary to business and political activities but as primary human and social virtues to be embraced by both men and women. The reward Wollstonecraft holds out for this revolution is the emergence of a more dutiful and virtuous society. “The conclusion which I wish to draw, is obvious; make women rational creatures, and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives, and mothers; that is—if men do not neglect the duties of husbands and fathers” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 275). Wollstonecraft aims at the radical transformation of society not so much by effecting substantial change in political or economic institutions as by instigating a revolution in the status and nature of care.

WOLLSTONECRAFT’S NURTURING LIBERALISM

It should be evident from the foregoing just how misleading it is to characterize Wollstonecraft simply as a classical liberal feminist. She rejects the classical liberal distinction between public and private spheres, emphasizes the importance of care-giving activities, and sets her sights on creating a more dutiful and caring citizen body. On the one hand, she emphasizes the importance of involving women in public affairs for the sake of making them more virtuous care givers. “Females, in fact, denied all political privileges, and not allowed, as married women, excepting in criminal cases, a civil existence, have their attention naturally drawn from the interest of the whole community to that of the minute parts, though the private duty of any member of society must be very imperfectly performed

when not connected with the general good” (*Rights of Woman*, pp. 281–2).

On the other hand, she asserts the importance of private care for the development of public virtue.

Public education, of every denomination, should be directed to form citizens; but if you wish to make good citizens, you must first exercise the affections of a son and a brother. This is the only way to expand the heart; for public affections, as well as public virtues, must ever grow out of the private character, or they are merely meteors that shoot athwart a dark sky, and disappear as they are gazed at and admired. Few, I believe, have had much affection for mankind, who did not first love their parents, their brothers, sisters, and even the domestic brutes, whom they first played with. The exercise of youthful sympathies forms the moral temperature; and it is the recollection of these first affections and pursuits that gives life to those that are afterwards more under the direction of reason (*Rights of Woman*, p. 256).

Wollstonecraft ultimately aims at a massive and long-term reform of both public and private affairs. She calls upon the government to extend equal rights to women and to work for their equality in the family and careers. She also calls upon government to take a direct role in educating a more egalitarian and caring citizen body. Most generally, she claims the mission of government goes beyond the abstract guarantee of equality and rights to all; its task is more particularly to balance power differentials within society by taking the side of the weak against the strong (Sapiro 1992, 182): “Nature having made men unequal, by giving stronger bodily and mental powers to one than to another, the end of government ought to be, to destroy this inequality by protecting the weak. Instead of which, it has always leaned to the opposite side, wearing itself out by disregarding the first principle of its organization” (Wollstonecraft [1794] 1989, VI, 17). In short, Wollstonecraft reformulates the classical liberal definition of government by placing it within the larger framework of care. One might say she took Burke’s criticisms of Enlightenment liberalism seriously enough to recognize that liberal governments need to give special attention to caring activities if they are to avoid the selfish egoism and individualism associated with liberal justice.

Wollstonecraft’s thought also does not fit neatly into the classical republican tradition. Landes (1988, 123–51), for example, has portrayed Wollstonecraft as an advocate of republican motherhood. Yet, most advocates of republican motherhood embrace a sharp distinction between the public and private spheres (Sapiro 1992, 178–9). They suggest that men have a civic role in the public realm, whereas women’s civic duties are confined to their domestic duties as mothers and housekeepers. Wollstonecraft, by contrast, argues that men should play a more active role within the family as fathers and husbands, since family affection is the foundation of public virtue. She likewise urges an independent civic existence for women as a means for broadening their private affections.

Wollstonecraft thus breaks down the traditional republican distinction between public men and private

women. She argues that the cultivation of virtue depends upon drawing more men into the home and more women into the public sphere. The egalitarian division of society into public and private realms is just as corrupting as the hierarchical public world of subjects and kings. She also abandons the classical republican association of human virtue with political and military glory. The main attribute of a virtuous individual by her account is the self-conscious fulfillment of one's responsibilities and duties to others. She calls upon both men and women to spend at least as much time and energy on domestic care as they devote to their political and business pursuits.

Once the important role of care within Wollstonecraft's philosophy is recognized, some of the contemporary criticisms of her thought are dispelled. Contemporary feminists claim, for example, that Wollstonecraft's argument for women's equality is contradictory (Gatens 1991; Pateman 1989). She defines the duties of women as those of "mothers and wives" but fails to realize that these roles are at the root of women's oppression. Pateman dubs this contradiction "Wollstonecraft's dilemma." That is, Wollstonecraft demands equal rights for women in the "gender-neutral" social world but simultaneously insists that women have special capacities and duties that differentiate them from men. The two demands are incompatible, according to Pateman (1989, 197), because they recognize "two alternatives only: either women become (like) men, and so full citizens; or they continue at women's work, which is of no value for citizenship."

Although Pateman highlights an important problem for most classical liberal theories, her criticism does not apply to Wollstonecraft, who redefines the public sphere as a space where care is to be accorded special prominence. She calls for a "revolution" in social thinking whereby the caring duties of both men and women are to be given equal respect with and made essential to the obligations of citizenship. Both men and women are called upon to share equally in the care-giving and civic functions of citizenship. Pateman is correct to observe that Wollstonecraft never considers the possibility of such radical policy initiatives as public subsidies for parenting activities, but this policy is not contrary to her philosophy, given the role she envisions for government in fostering care. She identifies the reforms she considers most necessary to develop a society more attuned to the value of care, while admitting that her proposals are only "sketches" (*Rights of Woman*, p. 71). She leaves it to others to develop her ideas.

There is thus nothing contradictory about Wollstonecraft demanding equal rights for women and exhorting them to fulfill domestic duties. In her vision of society, domestic duties are every bit as deserving of respect as public occupations, and men are similarly expected to fulfill their domestic duties while engaging in public life. If liberal society is still confronted with the dilemma of incorporating women into the public sphere as full citizens, it is only because it has failed to implement reforms necessary to complete Wollstonecraft's revolutionary project. We still do not fully recognize the value of nurturing activities for public life

or acknowledge the degree to which some of our most pressing social problems may stem from our neglect of care.

CONCLUSION

Wollstonecraft provides contemporary feminists with a model that combines justice and care. Throughout her writings, she identifies care as the foundation and end of social relations. She stresses the importance of nurturing family relations for creating autonomous individuals, and she defines moral progress as movement toward a more virtuous and dutiful society. At the same time, she argues that the development of nurturing relations depends upon a just social structure, for only in such a structure can care find healthy expression. Ultimately, she breaks down the dichotomy between justice and care as well as between the public and private spheres by arguing that justice is an essential feature of care. Justice facilitates the healthy expression of care and also provides a criterion for healthy care giving.

Few contemporary feminists examine the influence of larger social forces on the delivery and expression of care, but Wollstonecraft makes this theme the focus of her political philosophy. She argues that under conditions of social or economic inequality, the delivery and expression of care are often distorted. Men neglect their wives and children, and women tyrannize over men and neglect or overindulge their children. Children then grow up without the capacity for sympathy or care. The implications for social policy are far-reaching.

Wollstonecraft's thought suggests that feminists (and others) concerned with care should focus more attention on identifying and addressing the social inequalities that hinder the expression and delivery of care within society. Without a just social structure, care will be stymied, and duties will go unfulfilled. At the same time, a concerted effort should be made to elevate the status of caring activities within society. Wollstonecraft proposes public support for and direction of the education system, but her ultimate goal is to foster a revolution in thinking that will lead to equal respect for care-giving activities. In this regard, her thought also suggests that feminists (and others) concerned about care should focus more attention on identifying the institutions and conventions that diminish the importance of care-giving functions within our society and should explore the possibilities for instituting public policies that will give more support and respect to nurturing activities.

Wollstonecraft calls for a revolution in care but leaves it to others to identify the particular laws and policies that might be necessary to complete it. As women today struggle with the multiple demands of family, work, and civic activity, Wollstonecraft provides an inspirational vision of the interrelatedness of all these activities. Good mothers are, by her account, career women and politically active. The same is true of good fathers. The central tasks of government are to ensure that women and men have equal access to

careers and politics and to encourage them to fulfill their care-giving duties. Although Wollstonecraft may not provide all the answers for promoting a nurturing liberal order, her writings direct us to consider important questions. In what ways might social injustices inhibit the delivery of care within our society, and how might government better support caring activities? If Wollstonecraft's analysis is correct, the answers to these questions may hold the key to addressing some of the central pathologies—including selfishness, indifference, and irresponsibility—that afflict contemporary liberal societies.

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