SIR,

It is not necessary, with courtly insincerity, to apologise to you for thus intruding on your precious time, nor to profess that I think it an honour to discuss an important subject with a man whose literary abilities have raised him to notice in the state. I have not yet learned to twist my periods, nor, in the equivocal idiom of politeness, to disguise my sentiments, and imply what I should be afraid to utter: if, therefore, in the course of this epistle, I chance to express contempt, and even indignation, with some emphasis, I beseech you to believe that it is not a flight of fancy; for truth, in morals, has ever appeared to me the essence of the sublime; and, in taste, simplicity the only criterion of the beautiful.¹ But I war not with an individual when I contend for the rights of men and the liberty of reason. You see I do not condescend to cull my words to avoid the invidious phrase, nor shall I be prevented from giving a manly definition of it, by the flimsy ridicule which a lively fancy has interwoven with the present acceptation of the term. Reverencing the rights of humanity I shall dare to assert them; not intimidated by the horse laugh that you have raised, or waiting till time has wiped away the compassionate tears which you have elaborately laboured to excite.

From the many just sentiments interspersed through the letter before me, and from the whole tendency of it, I should believe you to be a good, though a vain man, if some circumstances in your conduct did not render the inflexibility of your integrity doubtful; and for this vanity a knowledge of human nature enables me to discover such

¹ [Throughout, Wollstonecraft is concerned not only with Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), but with his A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757). We cite the 2nd ed. (1759), ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999).]
extenuating circumstances, in the very texture of your mind, that I am ready to call it amiable, and separate the public from the private character.

I know that a lively imagination renders a man particularly calculated to shine in conversation and in those desultory productions where method is disregarded; and the instantaneous applause which his eloquence extorts is at once a reward and a spur. Once a wit and always a wit, is an aphorism that has received the sanction of experience; yet I am apt to conclude that the man who with scrupulous anxiety endeavours to support that shining character, can never nourish by reflection any profound, or, if you please, metaphysical passion. Ambition becomes only the tool of vanity, and his reason, the weather-cock of unrestrained feelings, is only employed to varnish over the faults which it ought to have corrected.

Sacred, however, would the infirmities and errors of a good man be, in my eyes, if they were only displayed in a private circle; if the venial fault only rendered the wit anxious, like a celebrated beauty, to raise admiration on every occasion, and excite emotion, instead of the calm reciprocation of mutual esteem and unimpassioned respect. Such vanity enlivens social intercourse, and forces the little great man to be always on his guard to secure his throne; and an ingenious man, who is ever on the watch for conquest, will, in his eagerness to exhibit his whole store of knowledge, furnish an attentive observer with some useful information, calcined by fancy and formed by taste.

And though some dry reasoner might whisper that the arguments were superficial, and should even add, that the feelings which are thus ostentatiously displayed are often the cold declamation of the head, and not the effusions of the heart — what will these shrewd remarks avail, when the witty arguments and ornamental feelings are on a level with the comprehension of the fashionable world, and a book is found very amusing? Even the Ladies, Sir, may repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your sentimental exclamations. Sensibility is the name of the day, and compassion the virtue which is to cover a multitude of vices, whilst justice is left to mourn in sullen silence, and balance truth in vain.

In life, an honest man with a confined understanding is frequently the slave of his habits and the dupe of his feelings, whilst the man with a clearer head and colder heart makes the passions of others bend to his interest; but truly sublime is the character that acts from principle, and governs the inferior springs of activity without slackening their vigour; whose feelings give vital heat to his resolves, but never hurry him into feverish eccentricities.

However, as you have informed us that respect chills love, it is natural to conclude, that all your pretty flights arise from your pampered sensibility; and that, vain of this fancied pre-eminence of organs, you foster every emotion till the fumes, mounting to your brain, dispel the sober suggestions of reason. It is not in this view surprising, that when you should argue you become impassioned, and that reflection inflames your imagination, instead of enlightening your understanding.

Quitting now the flowers of rhetoric, let us, Sir, reason together, and, believe me, I should not have meddled with these troubled waters, in order to point out your inconsistencies, if your wit had not burned up some rusty, baneful opinions, and swelled the shallow current of ridicule till it resembled the flow of reason, and presumed to be the test of truth.

I shall not attempt to follow you through "horse-way and footpath," but, attacking the foundation of your opinions, I shall leave the superstructure to find a centre of gravity on which it may lean till some strong blast puffs it into air; or your teeming fancy, which the ripening judgment of sixty years has not tamed, produces another Chinese erection, to stare, at every turn, the plain country people in the face, who bluntly call such an airy edifice — a folly.

The birthright of man, to give you, Sir, a short definition of this disputed right, is such a degree of liberty, civil and religious, as is compatible with the liberty of every other individual with whom he is united in a social compact, and the continued existence of that compact.

Liberty, in this simple, unsophisticated sense, I acknowledge, is a fair idea that has never yet received a form in the various govern-

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1 [Burke, Philosophical Enquiry 101:316.]
2 [Isaiah 1:18.]
3 [Shakespeare, King Lear 4:1.56.]
4 [Burke was sixty-one.] 
5 [A pagoda.]
6 [See the Declaration of the Rights of Men and of Citizens, Appendix A.2; and Price, Discourse 20-21, Appendix A.3.]
ments that have been established on our beauteous globe; the demon of property has ever been at hand to encroach on the sacred rights of men, and to fence round with awful pomp laws that war with justice. But that it results from the eternal foundation of right – from immutable truth – who will presume to deny, that pretends to rationality – if reason has led them to build their morality and religion on an everlasting foundation – the attributes of God?

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

I perceive, from the whole tenor of your Reflections, that you have a mortal antipathy to reason; but, if there is anything like argument, or first principles, in your wild declamation, behold the result: – 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. These are gothic notions of beauty – the ivy is beautiful, but, when it insidiously destroys the trunk from which it receives support, who would not grub it up?

Further, that we ought cautiously to remain for ever in frozen inactivity, because a thaw, whilst it nourishes the soil, spreads a temporary inundation; and the fear of risking any personal present convenience should prevent a struggle for the most estimable advantages. This is sound reasoning, I grant, in the mouth of the rich and shortsighted.

1 As religion is included in my idea of morality, I should not have mentioned the term without specifying all the simple ideas which that comprehensive word generalizes; but as the charge of atheism has been very freely bandied about in the letter I am considering, I wish to guard against misrepresentation.

Ye, Sir, the strong gained riches, the few have sacrificed the many to their vices; and, to be able to pamper their appetites, and supinely exist without exercising mind or body, they have ceased to be men. – Lost to the relish of true pleasure, such beings would, indeed, deserve compassion, if injustice was not softened by the tyrant’s plea – necessity; if prescription was not raised as an immortal boundary against innovation. Their minds, in fact, instead of being cultivated, have been so warped by education, that it may require some ages to bring them back to nature, and enable them to see their true interest, with that degree of conviction which is necessary to influence their conduct.

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 been 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.

Governed by these principles, the poor wretch, whose inelegant distress extorted from a mixed feeling of disgust and animal sympathy present relief, would have been considered as a man, whose misery demanded a part of his birthright, supposing him to be industrious, but should his vices have reduced him to poverty, he could only have addressed his fellow-men as weak beings, subject to like passions, who ought to forgive, because they expect to be forgiven, for suffering the impulse of the moment to silence the suggestions of conscience, or reason, which you will; for, in my view of things, they are synonymous terms.

Will Mr. Burke be at the trouble to inform us, how far we are to go back to discover the rights of men, since the light of reason is such

1 [Milton, Paradise Lost 4.393-94]
a fallacious guide that none but fools trust to its cold investigation?

In the infancy of society, confining our view to our own country, customs were established by the lawless power of an ambitious individual; or a weak prince was obliged to comply with every demand of the licentious barbarous insurgents, who disputed his authority with irrefragable arguments at the point of their swords; or the more splendid requests of the Parliament, who only allowed him conditional supplies.

Are these the venerable pillars of our constitution? And is Magna Charta to rest for its chief support on a former grant, which reverts to another, till chaos becomes the base of the mighty structure — or we cannot tell what? — for coherence, without some pervading principle of order, is a solecism. ¹

Speaking of Edward the IIId. Hume observes, that "he was a prince of great capacity, not governed by favourites, not led astray by any unruly passion, sensible that nothing could be more essential to his interests than to keep on good terms with his people; yet, on the whole, it appears that the government, at best, was only a barbarous monarchy, not regulated by any fixed maxims, or bounded by any certain or undisputed rights, which in practice were regularly observed. The King conducted himself by one set of principles; the Barons by another; the Commons by a third; the Clergy by a fourth. All these systems of government were opposite and incompatible: each of them prevailed in its turn, as incidents were favourable to it: a great prince rendered the monarchical power predominant: the weakness of a king gave reins to the aristocracy: a superstitious age saw the clergy triumphant: the people, for whom chiefly government was instituted, and who chiefly deserve consideration, were the weakest of the whole." ²

And just before that most auspicious aera, the fourteenth century, during the reign of Richard II. whose total incapacity to manage the reins of power, and keep in subjection his haughty Barons, rendered him a mere cypher; the House of Commons, to whom he was obliged frequently to apply, not only for subsidies but assistance to quell the insurrections that the contempt in which he was held naturally produced, gradually rose into power: for whenever they granted supplies to the King, they demanded in return, though it bore the name of petition, a confirmation, or the renewal of former charters, which had been infringed, and even utterly disregarded by the King and his seditious Barons, who principally held their independence of the crown by force of arms, and the encouragement which they gave to robbers and villains, who infested the country, and lived by rapine and violence.

To what dreadful extremities were the poorer sort reduced, their property, the fruit of their industry, being entirely at the disposal of their lords, who were so many petty tyrants!

In return for the supplies and assistance which the king received from the commons, they demanded privileges, which Edward, in his distress for money to prosecute the numerous wars in which he was engaged during the greater part of his reign, was constrained to grant them; so that by degrees they rose to power, and became a check on both king and nobles. Thus was the foundation of our liberty established, chiefly through the pressing necessities of the King, who was more intent on being supplied for the moment, in order to carry on his wars and ambitious projects, than aware of the blow he gave to kingly power, by thus making a body of men feel their importance, who afterwards might strenuously oppose tyranny and oppression, and effectually guard the subject's property from seizure and confiscation. Richard's weakness completed what Edward's ambition began.

At this period, it is true, Wycliffe opened a vista for reason by attacking some of the most pernicious tenets of the church of Rome; still the prospect was sufficiently misty to authorize the question — Where was the dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century?

A Roman Catholic, it is true, enlightened by the reformation, might, with singular propriety, celebrate the epoch that preceded it, to turn our thoughts from former atrocious enormities; but a Protestant must acknowledge that this faint dawn of liberty only made the sub-

¹ [Burke, Reflections; Writings: 8: 81-82. Magna Charta, signed (reluctantly) by King John in 1215, had come to be interpreted as limiting the absolute power of the Crown and protecting its subjects from oppression.]

1 [John Wycliffe (c. 1329-84), English reformer, challenged the authority of the Church in his lectures (Oxford, 1379-80) and in De Ecclesia (1381).]
siding darkness more visible; and that the boasted virtues of that century all bear the stamp of stupid pride and headstrong barbarism. Civility was then called condescension, and ostentatious almsgiving humanity; and men were content to borrow their virtues, or, to speak with more propriety, their consequence, from posterity, rather than undertake the arduous task of acquiring it for themselves.

The imperfection of all modern governments must, without waiting to repeat the trite remark, that all human institutions are unavoidably imperfect, in a great measure have arisen from this simple circumstance, that the constitution, if such an heterogeneous mass deserve that name, was settled in the dark days of ignorance, when the minds of men were shackled by the grossest prejudices and most immoral superstition. And do you, Sir, a sagacious philosopher, recommend night as the fittest time to analyze a ray of light?

Are we to seek for the rights of men in the ages when a few marks were the only penalty imposed for the life of a man, and death for death when the property of the rich was touched? when I blush to discover the depravity of our nature — when a deer was killed! Are these the laws that it is natural to love, and sacrilegious to invade? — Were the rights of men understood when the law authorized or tolerated murder? — or is power and right the same in your creed?

But in fact all your declamation leads so directly to this conclusion, that I beseech you to ask your own heart, when you call yourself a friend of liberty, whether it would not be more consistent to style yourself the champion of property, the adorer of the golden image which power has set up? — And, when you are examining your heart, if it would not be too much like mathematical drudgery, to which a fine imagination very reluctantly stoops, enquire further, how it is consistent with the vulgar notions of honesty, and the foundation of morality — truth; for a man to boast of his virtue and independence, when he cannot forget that he is at the moment enjoying the wages of falsehood; and that, in a skulking, unmanly way, he has secured himself a pension of fifteen hundred pounds per annum on the Irish establishment? Do honest men, Sir, for I am not rising to the refined principle of honour, ever receive the reward of their public services, or secret assistance, in the name of another?

But to return from a digression which you will more perfectly understand than any of my readers — on what principle you, Sir, can justify the reformation, which tore up by the roots an old establishment, I cannot guess — but, I beg your pardon, perhaps you do not wish to justify it — and have some mental reservation to excuse you, to yourself, for not openly avowing your reverence: Or, to go further back; — had you been a Jew — you would have joined in the cry, crucify him! — crucify him! The promulgator of a new doctrine, and the violator of old laws and customs, that not melting, like ours, into darkness and ignorance, rested on Divine authority, must have been a dangerous innovator, in your eyes, particularly if you had not been informed that the Carpenter's Son was of the stock and lineage of David. But there is no end to the arguments which might be deduced to combat such palpable absurdities, by shewing the manifest inconsistencies which are necessarily involved in a direful train of false opinions.

It is necessary emphatically to repeat, that there are rights which men inherit at their birth, as rational creatures, who were raised above the brute creation by their improbable faculties; and that, in receiving these, not from their forefathers but, from God, prescription can never undermine natural rights.

A father may dissipate his property without his child having any right to complain; — but should he attempt to sell him for a slave, or fetter him with laws contrary to reason; nature, in enabling him to discern good from evil, teaches him to break the ignoble chain, and not to believe that bread becomes flesh, and wine blood, because his parents swallowed the Eucharist with this blind persuasion.

There is no end to this implicit submission to authority — some where it must stop, or we return to barbarism; and the capacity of improvement, which gives us a natural sceptre on earth, is a cheat, an ignis-fatuus, that leads us from inviting meadows into bogs and

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1 [In fact, Burke would not be granted a pension until 1794.]
2 [Wollstonecraft explains the suspicion that Burke was a crypto-Catholic, educated by Jesuits: Protestants accused Jesuits of practising deception by giving apparently straightforward statements a "mental reservation" inaccessible to their hearers.]

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dunghills. And if it be allowed that many of the precautions, with which any alteration was made, in our government, were prudent, it rather proves its weakness than substantiates an opinion of the soundness of the stamina, or the excellence of the constitution.

But on what principle Mr. Burke could defend American independence, I cannot conceive; for the whole tenor of his plausible arguments settles slavery on an everlasting foundation. Allowing his servile reverence for antiquity, and prudent attention to self-interest, to have the force which he insists on, the slave trade ought never to be abolished; and, because our ignorant forefathers, not understanding the native dignity of man, sanctioned a traffic that outrages every suggestion of reason and religion, we are to submit to the inhuman custom, and term an atrocious insult to humanity the love of our country, and a proper submission to the laws by which our property is secured. — Security of property! Behold, in a few words, the definition of English liberty. And to this selfish principle every nobler one is sacrificed. — The Briton takes place of the man, and the image of God is lost in the citizen! But it is not that enthusiastic flame which in Greece and Rome consumed every sordid passion: no, self is the focus; and the dispiriting rays rise not above our foggy atmosphere. But softly — it is only the property of the rich that is secure; the man who lives by the sweat of his brow has no asylum from oppression; the strong man may enter — when was the castle of the poor sacred? and the base informer steal him from the family that depend on his industry for subsistence.

Fully sensible as you must be of the baneful consequences that inevitably follow this notorious infringement on the dearest rights of men, and that it is an infernal blot on the very face of our immaculate constitution, I cannot avoid expressing my surprise that when you recommended our form of government as a model, you did not caution the French against the arbitrary custom of pressing men for the sea service. 1 You should have hinted to them, that property in England is much more secure than liberty, and not have concealed that the liberty of an honest mechanic — his all — is often sacrificed to secure the property of the rich. For it is a farce to pretend that a man fights for his country, his hearth, or his altars, when he has neither liberty nor property. — His property is in his nervous arms — and they are compelled to pull a strange rope at the surly command of a tyrannic boy, who probably obtained his rank on account of his family connections, or the prostituted vote of his father, whose interest in a borough, or voice as a senator, was acceptable to the minister.

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? But it was the poor man with only his native dignity who was thus oppressed — and only metaphysical sophists and cold mathematicians can discern this insubstantial form; it is a work of abstraction — and a gentleman of lively imagination must borrow some drapery from fancy before he can love or pity a man. — Misery, to reach your heart, I perceive, must have its cap and bell; 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 helpers 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 sorrow are admirably adapted," says Rousseau, "to make us proud of all the virtues which we do not possess."

The baneful effects of the despotic practice of pressing we shall, in all probability, soon feel; for a number of men, who have been taken from their daily employments, will shortly be let loose on society, now that there is no longer any apprehension of a war.

The vulgar, and by this epithet I mean not only to describe a class of people, who, working to support the body, have not had time to

1 [Burke, Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775); Works 2: 99-186.]
2 [See Appendix A.1.]
3 [Impression, a form of forcible conscription into the navy, lasted until 1815.]
cultivate their minds; but likewise those who, born in the lap of affluence, have never had their invention sharpened by necessity are, nine out of ten, the creatures of habit and impulse.

If I were not afraid to derange your nervous system by the bare mention of a metaphysical enquiry, I should observe, Sir, that self-preservation is, literally speaking, the first law of nature; and that the care necessary to support and guard the body is the first step to unfold the mind, and inspire a manly spirit of independence. The mewing babe in swaddling-clothes, who is treated like a superior being, may perchance become a gentleman; but nature must have given him uncommon faculties if, when pleasure hangs on every bough, he has sufficient fortitude either to exercise his mind or body in order to acquire personal merit. The passions are necessary auxiliaries of reason: a present impulse pushes us forward, and when we discover that the game did not deserve the chase, we find that we have gone over much ground, and not only gained many new ideas, but a habit of thinking. The exercise of our faculties is the great end, though not the goal we had in view when we started with such eagerness.

It would be straying still further into metaphysics to add, that this is one of the strongest arguments for the natural immortality of the soul. — Every thing looks like a means, nothing like an end, or point of rest, when we can say, now let us sit down and enjoy the present moment; our faculties and wishes are proportioned to the present scene; we may return without repining to our sister clod. And, if no conscious dignity whisper that we are capable of relishing more refined pleasures, the thirst of truth appears to be allayed; and thought, the faint type of an immaterial energy, no longer bounding it knows not where, is confined to the tenement that affords it sufficient variety. — The rich man may then thank his God that he is not like other men – but when is retribution to be made to the miserable, who cry day and night for help, and there is no one at hand to help them? And not only misery but immorality proceeds from this stretch of arbitrary authority. The vulgar have not the power of emptying their mind of the only ideas they imbibed whilst their hands were employed; they cannot quickly turn from one kind of life to another. Pressing them entirely unhinges their minds; they acquire new habits, and cannot return to their old occupations with their former readiness; consequently they fall into idleness, drunkenness, and the whole train of vices which you stigmatise as gross.

A government that acts in this manner cannot be called a good parent, nor inspire natural (habitual is the proper word) affection, in the breasts of children who are thus disregarded.

The game laws are almost as oppressive to the peasantry as press-warrants to the mechanic. In this land of liberty what is to secure the property of the poor farmer when his noble landlord chooses to plant a decoy field near his little property? Game devour the fruit of his labour; but fines and imprisonment await him if he dare to kill any – or lift up his hand to interrupt the pleasure of his lord. — How many families have been plunged, in the sporting countries, into misery and vice from 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!

You have shewn, Sir, by your silence on these subjects, that your respect for rank has swallowed up the common feelings of humanity; you seem to consider the poor as only the live stock of an estate, the feather of hereditary nobility. When you had so little respect for the silent majesty of misery, I am not surprised at your manner of treating an individual whose brow a mitre will never grace, and whose popularity may have wounded your vanity — for vanity is ever sore. Even in France, Sir, before the revolution, literary celebrity procured a man the treatment of a gentleman; but you are going back for your credentials of politeness to more distant times. — Gothic affability is the mode you think proper to adopt, the condescension of a patron, not the civility of a liberal man. Politeness is, indeed, the only substitute for humanity; or what distinguishes the civilised man from the unlettered savage? and he who is not governed by reason should square his behaviour by an arbitrary standard, but by what rule your attack on

1 [Luke 18:11.]
Dr. Price was regulated we have yet to learn.

I agree with you, Sir, that the pulpit is not the place for political discussions, though it might be more excusable to enter on such a subject, when the day was set apart merely to commemorate a political revolution, and no stated duty was encroached upon. I will, however, wave this point, and allow that Dr. Price's zeal may have carried him further than sound reason can justify. I do also most cordially coincide with you, that till we can see the remote consequences of things, present calamities must appear in the ugly form of evil, and excite our commiseration. The good that time slowly educes from them may be hid from mortal eye, or dimly seen; whilst sympathy compels man to feel for man, and almost restrains the hand that would amputate a limb to save the whole body. But, after making this concession, allow me to expostulate with you, and calmly hold up the glass which will shew you your partial feelings.

In reprobating Dr. Price's opinions you might have spared the man; and if you had half but half as much reverence for the grey hairs of virtue as for 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. I am not accustomed to look up with vulgar awe, even when mental superiority exalts a man above his fellows; but still the sight of a man whose habits are fixed by piety and reason, and whose virtues are consolidated into goodness, commands my homage—and I should touch his errors with a tender hand when I made a parade of my sensibility. Granting, for a moment, that Dr. Price's political opinions are Utopian reveries, and that the world is not yet sufficiently civilized to adopt such a sublime system of morality; they could, however, only be the reveries of a benevolent mind. Tottering on the verge of the grave, that worthy man in his whole life never dreamt of struggling for power or riches; and, if a glimpse of the glad dawn of liberty rekindled the fire of youth in his veins, you, who could not stand the fascinating glance of a great Lady's eyes, when neither virtue nor sense beamed in them, might have pardoned his unseemly transport;—if such it must be deemed.

I could almost fancy that I now see this respectable old man, in his pulpit, with hands clasped, and eyes devoutly fixed, praying with all the simple energy of unaffected piety; or, when more erect, inculcating the dignity of virtue, and enforcing the doctrines his life adorns; benevolence animated each feature, and persuasion attuned his accents; the preacher grew eloquent, who only laboured to be clear; and the respect that he extorted, seemed only the respect due to personified virtue and matured wisdom. Is this the man you brand with so many opprobrious epithets? he whose private life will stand the test of the strictest enquiry—away with such unmanly sarcasms, and puertic conceits. But, before I close this part of my animadversions, I must convict you of wilful misrepresentation and wanton abuse.

Dr. Price, when he reasons on the necessity of men attending some place of public worship, concisely obviates an objection that has been made in the form of an apology, by advising those who do not approve of our Liturgy, and cannot find any mode of worship out of the church, in which they can conscientiously join, to establish one for themselves. This plain advice you have tortured into a very different meaning, and represented the preacher as actuated by a dissenting phrasy, recommending dissensions, "not to diffuse truth, but to spread contradictions!" A simple question will silence this impertinent declamation. What is truth? A few fundamental truths meet the first enquiry of reason, and appear as clear to an unwarped mind, as that air and bread are necessary to enable the body to fulfil its vital functions; but the opinions which men discuss with so much heat must be simplified and brought back to first principles; or who can discriminate the vagaries of the imagination, or scrupulosity of weakness, from the verdict of reason? Let all these points be demonstrated, and not determined by arbitrary authority and dark traditions, lest a

1 [Burke, Reflections; Writings 8: 126. See Appendix A.4.1.]
2 [Augustus Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton (1735-1811), \textit{Hans. Et. Submitted to the Senate, Attention of the Clergy, Nobility and Gentry, Newly Assembled, by a Layman, a Friend to the True Principles of the Constitution in the Church, State, and to Civil and Religious Liberty} (1786); see Price, Discourse 170. Appendix A.3.]
3 [Price, Discourse on the Love of our Country (1784) 18 Appendix A.3.]
4 Page 15. [Burke, Reflections; Writings 8: 65; Price, Discourse 18; see Appendix A.3.]

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dangerous supineness should take place; for probably, in ceasing to enquire, our reason would remain dormant, and delivered up, without a curb, to every impulse of passion, we might soon lose sight of the clear light which the exercise of our understanding no longer kept alive. To argue from experience, it should seem as if the human mind, averse to thought, could only be opened by necessity; for, when it can take opinions on trust, it gladly lets the spirit lie quiet in its gross tenement. Perhaps the most improving exercise of the mind, confining the argument to the enlargement of the understanding, is the restless enquiries that hover on the boundary, or stretch over the dark abyss of uncertainty. These lively conjectures are the breezes that preserve the still lake from stagnating. We should be aware of confining all moral excellence to one channel, however capacious; or, if we are so narrow-minded, we should not forget how much we owe to chance that our inheritance was not Mahometism; and that the iron hand of destiny, in the shape of deeply rooted authority, has not suspended the sword of destruction over our heads. But to return to the misrepresentation.

'Those, to whom Mr. Burke pays great deference, 2 seems to agree with Dr. Price, that the succession of the King of Great Britain depends on the choice of the people, or that they have a power to cut it off; but this power, as you have fully proved, has been cautiously exerted, and might with more propriety be termed a right than a power. Be it so! — yet when you elaborately cited precedents to shew that our forefathers paid great respect to hereditary claims, you might have gone back to your favourite epoch, and shewn their respect for a church that fulminating laws have since loaded with opprobrium. The preponderance of inconsistencies, when weighed with precedents, should lessen the most bigotted veneration for antiquity, and force men of the eighteenth century to acknowledge, that our canonized forefathers were unable, or afraid, to revert to reason, without resting on the crutch of authority; and should not be brought as a proof that their children are never to be allowed to walk alone.

When we doubt the infallible wisdom of our ancestors, it is only advancing on the same ground to doubt the sincerity of the law, and the propriety of that servile appellation — our sovereign lord the king. 2 Who were the dictators of this adulatory language of the law? Were they not courtly parasites and worldly priests? Besides, whoever at divine service, whose feelings were not deadened by habit, or their understandings quiescent, ever repeated without horror the same epithets applied to a man and his Creator? If this is confused jargon — say what are the dictates of sober reason, or the criterion to distinguish nonsense?

You further sarcastically animadvert on the consistency of the democrats, by wresting the obvious meaning of a common phrase, the dregs of the people; 3 or your contempt for poverty may have led you into an error. Be that as it may, an unprejudiced man would have directly perceived the single sense of the word, and an old Member of Parliament could scarcely have missed it. He who had so often felt the pulse of the electors needed not have gone beyond his own experience to discover that the dregs alluded to were the vicious, and not the lower class of the community.

Again, Sir, I must doubt your sincerity or your discernment. — You have been behind the curtain; and, though it might be difficult to

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1 "The doctrine of hereditary right does by no means imply an indefeasible right to the throne. No man will, I think, assert this, that has considered our laws, constitution, and history, without prejudice, and with any degree of attention. It is unquestionably the boast of the supreme legislative authority of this kingdom, the King and both Houses of Parliament, to defeat this hereditary right; and, by particular entails, limitations, and provisions, to exclude the immediate heir, and vest the inheritance in any one else. This is strictly consonant to our laws and constitution; as may be gathered from the expression so frequently used in our statute books, of 'the King's Majesty, his heirs, and successors.' In which we may observe that, as the word 'heirs' necessarily implies an inheritance, or hereditary right, generally subsisting in the royal person; so the word successors, distinctly taken, must imply that this inheritance may sometimes be broken through; or, that there may be a successor, without being the heir of the king."

bring back your sophisticated heart to nature and make you feel like a man, yet the awestruck confusion in which you were plunged must have gone off when the vulgar emotion of wonder, excited by finding yourself a Senator, had subsided. Then you must have seen the clogged wheels of corruption continually oiled by the sweat of the laborious poor, squeezed out of them by unceasing taxation. You must have discovered that the majority in the House of Commons was often purchased by the crown, and that the people were oppressed by the influence of their own money, extorted by the venal voice of a packed representation.

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 excise man’s place can only be secured by electioneering interest. I will go further, and assert that few Bishops, though there have been learned and good Bishops, have gained the mitre without submitting to a servility of dependence that degrades the man. — All these circumstances you must have known; yet you talk of virtue and liberty, as the vulgar talk of the letter of the law; and the polite of propriety. It is true that these ceremonial observances produce decorum; the sepulchres are white-washed,¹ and do not offend the squeamish eyes of high rank; but virtue is out of the question when you only worship a shadow, and worship it to secure your property.

Man has been termed, with strict propriety, a microcosm, a little world in himself. — He is so; — yet must, however, be reckoned an ephemera, or, to adopt your figure of rhetoric, a summer’s fly.² The perpetuation of property in our families is one of the privileges you most warmly contend for; yet it would not be very difficult to prove that the mind must have a very limited range that thus confines its benevolence to such a narrow circle, which, with great propriety, may be included in the sordid calculations of blind self-love.

A brutal attachment to children appeared most conspicuous in parents who have treated them like slaves, and demanded due homage for all the property they transferred to them, during their lives. It has led them to force their children to break the most sacred ties; to do violence to a natural impulse, and run into legal prostitution to increase wealth or shun poverty; and, still worse, the dread of parental censure has made many weak characters violate truth in the face of Heaven; and, to avoid a father’s angry curse, the most sacred promises have been broken. It appears to be a natural suggestion of reason, that a man should be freed from implicit obedience to parents and private punishments, when he is of an age to be subject to the jurisdiction of the laws of his country; and that the barbarous cruelty of allowing parents to imprison their children, to prevent their contaminating their noble blood by following the dictates of nature when they chose to marry, or for any misdemeanor that does not come under the cognizance of public justice, is one of the most arbitrary violations of liberty.¹

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 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 or virtuous? — No; it is the spurious offspring of overweening, 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.

Another pernicious consequence which unavoidably arises from this artificial affection is, the insuperable bar which it puts in the way of early marriages. It would be difficult to determine whether the minds or bodies of our youth are most injured by this impediment. Our young men become selfish coxcombs, and gallantry with modest women, and intrigues with those of another description, weaken both mind and body, before either has arrived at maturity. The character of a master of a family, a husband, and a father, forms the citizen imperceptibly, by producing a sober madness of thought, and orderly behaviour; but, from the lax morals and depraved affections of the lib-

¹ [Under the sanction of virtue, persons could be imprisoned without trial through the use of letras de cachete. Parents sometimes obtained them to prevent their children from making unlawful marriages; see Wordsworth, The Prelude (1805) 9:555-554.]
² [Burke, Reflections; Writings 8: 102.]

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ertine, what results? — a finical man of taste, who is only anxious to secure his own private gratifications, and to maintain his rank in society.

The same system has an equally pernicious effect on female morals. — Girls are sacrificed to family convenience, or else marry to settle themselves in a superior rank, and coquet, without restraint, with the fine gentleman whom I have already described. And to such lengths has this vanity, this desire of shining, carried them, that it is not now necessary to guard girls against imprudent love matches; for if some widows did not now and then fall in love, Love and Hymen would seldom meet, unless at a village church.

I do not intend to be sarcastically paradoxical when I say, that women of fashion take husbands that they may have it in their power to coquet, the grand business of genteel life, with a number of admirers, and thus flutter the spring of life away, without laying up any store for the winter of age, or being of any use to society. Affection in the marriage state can only be founded on respect — and are these weak beings respectable? Children are neglected for lovers, and we express surprise that adulteries are so common! A woman never forgets to adorn herself to make an impression on the senses of the other sex, and to extort the homage which it is gallant to pay, and yet we wonder that they have such confined understandings!

Have ye not heard that we cannot serve two masters? an inmoderate desire to please contracts the faculties, and immerges, to borrow the idea of a great philosopher, the soul in matter, till it becomes unable to mount on the wing of contemplation. It would be an arduous task to trace all the vice and misery that arise in society from the middle class of people apering the manners of the great. All are aiming to procure respect on account of their property; and most places are considered as snares that enable men to start into notice. 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, and the pursuits which raise the mind to higher contemplations, all that were not cankered in the bud by the false notions that "grew with its growth and strengthened with its strength," are crushed by the iron hand of property!

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 over-power talents and depress virtue.

Besides, an inhuman servility, most unnatural to true dignity of character, is, by this means, fostered in society. Men of some abilities play on the follies of the rich, and mounting to fortune as they degrade themselves, they stand in the way of men of superior talents, who cannot advance in such crooked paths, or wade through the filth which parasites never boggle at. Pursuing their way straight forward, their spirit is either bent or broken by the rich man's contumelies; or the difficulties they have to encounter.

The only security of property that nature authorizes and reason sanctions is, the right a man has to enjoy the acquisitions which his talents and industry have acquired; and to bequeath them to whom he chooses. Happy would it be for the world if there were no other road to wealth or honour; if pride, in the shape of parental affection, did not absorb the man, and prevent friendship from having the same weight as relationship. Luxury and effeminacy would not then introduce so much idiocy into the noble families which form one of the pillars of our state; the ground would not lie fallow, nor would undirected activity of mind spread the contagion of restless idleness, and its concomitant, vice, through the whole mass of society.

Instead of gaming they might nourish a virtuous ambition, and live might take place of the gallantry which you, with knightly fealty, venerate. Women would probably then act like mothers, and the fine lady, become a rational woman, might think it necessary to superintend her family and tuckle her children, in order to fill her part of the social compact. But vain is the hope, whilst great masses of prop-

2 [Plato, Phaedrus 246c.]
3 [Ogilby, An Essay on Man 2136.]
4 [Cf. Shakespeare, Hamlet 3 i. 71.]
erty are hedged round by hereditary honours; for numberless vices, forced in the hot-bed of wealth, assume a glisterning form to dazzle the senses and cloud the understanding. The respect paid to rank and fortune damps every generous purpose of the soul, and stiles the natural affection on which human contentment ought to be built. Who will venously ascend the steep of virtue, or explore the great deep for knowledge, when the one thing needful, attained by less arduous exertions, if not inherited, procures the attention man naturally pants after, and vice “loses half its evil by losing all its grossness.” – What a sentiment to come from a moral pen!

A surgeon would tell you that by skimming over a wound you spread disease through the whole frame; and, surely, they indirectly aim at destroying all purity of morals, who poison the very source of virtue, by smearing a sentimental varnish over vice, to hide its natural deformity. Stealing, whoring, and drunkenness, are gross vices, I presume, though they may not obliterate every moral sentiment, and have a vulgar brand that makes them appear with all their native deformity; but overreaching, adultery, and coquetry, are venial offences, though they reduce virtue to an empty name, and make wisdom consist in saving appearances.

“On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order.” – All true, Sir; if she is not more attentive to the duties of humanity than queens and fashionable ladies in general are. I will still further accede to the opinion you have so justly conceived of the spirit which begins to animate this age. – “All homage paid to the sex in general, as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly.” Undoubtedly; because such homage vitiated them, prevents their endeavouring to obtain solid personal merit; and, in short, makes those beings vain inconsiderate dolls, who ought to be prudent mothers and useful members of society. “Regicide and sacrilege are but fictions of superstition corrupting jurisprudence, by destroying its simplicity. The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, are only common homicide.”  

– Again I agree with you; but you perceive, Sir, that by leaving out the word father, I think the whole extent of the comparison invidious.

You further proceed grossly to misrepresent Dr. Price’s meaning; and, with an affectation of holy fervour, express your indignation at his profaning a beautiful rapturous ejaculation, when alluding to the King of France’s submission to the National Assembly; he rejoiced to hail a glorious revolution, which promised an universal diffusion of liberty and happiness.

Observe, Sir, that I called your piety affectation. – A rant to enable you to point your venomous dart, and wound your period. I speak with warmth because, of all hypocrites, my soul most indignantly spurns a religious one; and I very cautiously bring forward such a heavy charge, to strip you of your cloak of sanctity. Your speech at the time the bill for a new regency was agitated now lies before me. – Then you could in direct terms, to promote ambitious or interested views, exclaim without any pious qualms – “Ought they to make a mockery of him, putting a crown of thorns on his head, a reed in his hand, and dressing him in a raiment of purple, cry, Hail! King of the British!” Where was your sensibility when you could utter this cruel mockery, equally insulting to God and man? Go hence, thou slave of impulse, look into the private recesses of thy heart, and take not a mote from thy brother’s eye, till thou hast removed the beam from thine own.

Of your partial feelings I shall take another view, and shew that

1 [Burke, Reflections; Writings 8: 128 (Appendix A 4.0). The titles are Wollstonecraft’s; and, as she implies, Burke includes parricide in his list of uncommon homicide.]
2 In July, when he first submitted to his people, and not the mobbing triumphal catastrophe in October, which you chose, to give full scope to your declamatory powers.
4 [Burke, Speech… to the House of Commons on the 8th of February 1789. Wollstonecraft recalls Burke’s behaviour during the crises precipitated by the insanity of George III (1788-1820) in 1788-89. The biblical allusion to which Wollstonecraft objects is to the mockery of Christ: Matthew 27: 28-29; Mark 15: 17-19; Luke 23: 11; John 19: 2-3.]
5 [Matthew 7: 1.]
"following nature, which is," you say, "wisdom without reflection, and above it" — has led you into great inconsistences, to use the softest phrase. When, on a late melancholy occasion, a very important question was agitated, with what indecent warmth did you treat a woman, for I shall not lay any stress on her title, whose conduct in life has deserved praise, though not, perhaps, the scurrile eulogiums which have been lavished on the queen. But sympathy, and you tell us that you have a heart of flesh, was made to give way to party spirit and the feelings of a man, not to allude to your romantic gallantry, to the views of the statesman. When you descanted on the horrors of the 6th of October, and gave a glowing, and, in some instances, a most exaggerated description of that infernal night, without having troubled yourself to clean your palate, you might have returned home and indulged us with a sketch of the misery you personally aggravated.

With what eloquence might you not have insinuated, that the sight of unexpected misery and strange reverse of fortune makes the mind recoil on itself; and, pondering, traced the uncertainty of all human hope, the frail foundation of sublunary grandeur! What a climax lay before you. A father torn from his children, — a husband from an affectionate wife, — a man from himself! And not torn by the irresistible stroke of death, for time would then have lent its aid to mitigate remorseless sorrow; but that living death, which only kept hope alive in the corroding form of suspense, was a calamity that called for all your pity.

The sight of august ruins, of a depopulated country — what are they to a disordered soul! when all the faculties are mixed in wild confusion. It is then indeed we tremble for humanity — and, if some wild fancy chance to cross the brain, we fearfully start, and pressing our hand against our brow, ask if we are yet men? — if our reason is undisturbed? — if judgment hold the helm? Marius might sit with dignity on the ruins of Carthage, 3 and the wretch in the Bastille, who longed in vain to see the human face divine, 4 might yet view the operations of his own mind, and vary the leaden prospect by new combinations of thought: poverty, shame, and even slavery, may be endured by the virtuous man — he has still a world to range in — but the loss of reason appears a monstrous flaw in the moral world, that eludes all investigation, and humbles without enlightening.

In this state was the King, when you, with unfeeling disrespect, and indecent haste, wished to strip him of all his hereditary honours. — 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 into a confirmed madness, but, prying into the secrets of Omnipotence, you thundered out that God had put 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. — And who was the monster whom Heaven had thus awfully deposed, and smitten with such an angry blow? Surely as harmless a character as Lewis XVth; and the queen of Great Britain, 1 though her heart may not be enlarged by generosity, who will presume to compare her character with that of the queen of France? 2

Where then was the infallibility of that extolled instinct which arises above reason? was it warped by vanity, or hurled from its throne by self-interest? To your own heart answer these questions in the sober hours of reflection — and, after reviewing this gust of passion, learn to respect the sovereignty of reason.

I have, Sir, been reading, with a scrutinizing, comparative eye, several of your insensible and profane speeches during the King's illness. I disdain to take advantage of a man's weak side, or draw consequences from an unguarded transport — A lion preys not on carcasses! But on this occasion you acted systematically. It was not the passion of the moment, over which humanity draws a veil; no; what but the odious maxims of Machiavelian policy could have led you to have searched in the very dregs of misery for forcible arguments to support your party? Had not vanity or interest steeld your heart, you would have been shocked at the cold insensibility which could carry a man

1 [From Shakespeare, Cymbeline 3.3.139.]
2 [Burke, Speech . . . to the House of Commons on the 6th of February 1789.]
3 [Charlotte Sophia (1728-1818).]
4 [Marie Antoinette (1755-93).]

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to those dreadful mansions, where human weakness appears in its most awful form to calculate the chances against the King's recovery. Impressed as you are with respect for royalty, I am astonished that you did not tremble at every step, lest Heaven should avenge on your guilty head the insult offered to its viceroy. But the conscience that is under the direction of transient ebullitions of feeling, is not very tender or consistent, when the current runs another way.

Had you been in a philosophizing mood, had your heart or your reason been at home, you might have been convinced, by ocular demonstration, that madness is only the absence of reason. The ruling angel leaving its seat, wild anarchy ensues. You would have seen that the uncontrolled imagination often pursues the most regular course in its most direful flight; and that the eccentricities are boldy relieved when judgment no longer officiously arranges the sentiments, by bringing them to the test of principles. You would have seen every thing out of nature in that strange chaos of levity and ferocity, and of all sorts of follies jumbled together. You would have seen in that monstrous tragicomic scene the most opposite passions necessarily succeed, and sometimes mix with each other in the mind; alternate contempt and indignation; alternate laughter and tears; alternate scorn and horror. This is a true picture of that chaotic state of mind, called madness; when reason gone, we know not where, the wild elements of passion clash, and all is horror and confusion. You might have heard the best turned conceits, flash following flash, and doubted whether the rhapsody was not eloquent, if it had not been delivered in an equivocal language, neither verse nor prose, if the sparkling periods had not stood alone, wanting force because they wanted concatenation.

It is a proverbial observation, that a very thin partition divides wit and madness. Poetry therefore naturally addresses the fancy, and the language of passion is with great felicity borrowed from the heightened picture which the imagination draws of sensible objects concentrated by impassioned reflection. And, during this "fine phrenzy,"

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1 [Cf. Shakespeare, Othello 3.3.65.]  
2 This quotation is not marked with inverted commas, because it is not exact. P. 11.  
[Burke, Reflections; Writings 8.66.]  
3 [Dryden, Absalom and Achitophel (1681). 1.163.]  
4 [Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream 5.1.12.]
those opinions are empty rhetorical flourishes, my respect is soon
drawn into that pith which borders on contempt; and the mock
dignity and haughty stalk, only reminds me of the ass in the lion’s
skin.1

A sentiment of this kind glazed across my mind when I read the
following exclamation. “Whilst the royal captives, who followed in
the train, were slowly moved along, amidst the horrid yells, and
shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and
all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused
shape of the vilest of women.” 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 under-
standing that I do not like to make a distinction without a differ-
ence. But it is not very extraordinary that you should, for throughout your
letter you frequently advert to a sentimental jargon, which has long
been current in conversation, and even in books of morals, though it
never received the regal stamp of reason. A kind of mysterious instinct
is supposed to reside in the soul, that instantaneously discerns truth,
without the tedious labor of ratiocination. This instinct, for I know
not what other name to give it, has been termed common sense, and
more frequently sensibility; and, by a kind of indefeasible right, it has
been supposed, for rights of this kind are not easily proved, to reign
paramount over the other faculties of the mind, and to be an authori-

This subtle magnetic fluid, that runs round the whole circle of
society, is not subject to any known rule, or to use an obnoxious
phrase, in spite of the sneers of mock humility, or the timid fears of
some well-meaning Christians, who shrink from any freedom of

thought, lest they should rouse the old serpent, to the eternal fitness of
thing.” It dips, we know not why, granting it to be an infallible
instinct, and, though supposed always to point to truth, its pole-star,
the point is always shifting, and seldom stands due north.

It is to this instinct, without doubt, that you allude, when you talk
of the “moral constitution of the heart.” To it, I allow, for I consider it
as a conglomeration of sensations and passions, Poets must apply, “who have
to deal with an audience not yet graduated in the school of the rights
of men.” 2 They must, it is clear, often cloud the understanding, whilst
they move the heart by a kind of mechanical spring; but that “in the
theatre the first intuitive glance”3 of feeling should discriminate the
form of truth, and see her fair proportion, I must beg leave to doubt.
Sacred be the feelings of the heart! concentred in a glowing flame,
they become the son of life; and, without his invigorating impre-
sation, reason would probably lie in helpless inactivity, and never bring
forth her only legitimate offspring — virtue. But to prove that virtue is
really an acquisition of the individual, and not the blind impulse of
unerring instinct, the bastard vice has often been begotten by the
same father.

In what respect are we superior to the brute creation, if intellect is
not allowed to be the guide of passion? Brutus hope and fear, love and
hat; but, without a capacity to improve, a power of turning these pas-
sions to good or evil, they neither acquire virtue nor wisdom. — Why
because the Creator has not given them reason.4

But the cultivation of reason is an arduous task, and men of lively
fancy, finding it easier to follow the impulse of passion, endeavour to
persuade themselves and others that it is most natural. And happy is it
for these, who indolently let that heaven-lighted spark rest like the
ancient lamps in sensuality, that some virtuous habits, with which the
reason of others shackled them, supplies its place. — Affection for par-
ents, reverence for superiors or antiquity, notions of honour, or that
worldly self-interest that shrewdly shows them that honesty, is the best

1 [See Aesop’s Fables: With Instructive Morals and Reflections, Abducted from All Party
Considerations; Adapted to All Capacities; and Designed to Promote Religion, Morality and Uni-
versal Benevolence, ed. Samuel Richardson (London: J.E and C. Rivington, et al.,
1740) 133. Fable 170. The ass gives himself away by braying.]
2 Page 106. [Burke, Reflections: Writings 8:112 (Appendix A,4.4).]
3 [Burke, Reflections: Writings 8:135.]
4 [Burke, Reflections: Writings 8:137.]
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

and

A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN:

WITH STRICTURES ON POLITICAL AND
MORAL SUBJECTS

by Mary Wollstonecraft

Edited by D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf