

# A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects

Mary Wollstonecraft

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type.—If this work gets you interested in its author, read Claire Tomalin's fine *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1974).

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## **Contents**

<b>Dedicatory Letter</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Human rights and the duties they involve</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 2: The prevailing opinion about sexual differences</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter 3: The same subject continued</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter 4: The state of degradation to which woman is reduced by various causes</b>	<b>36</b>

<b>Chapter 5: Writers who have rendered women objects of pity, bordering on contempt</b>	<b>53</b>
Section 1: Rousseau . . . . .	53
Section 2: Fordyce . . . . .	61
Section 3: Gregory . . . . .	62
Section 4: Some women . . . . .	65
Section 5: Chesterfield . . . . .	66
<b>Chapter 6: The effect that an early association of ideas has on the character</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Chapter 7: Modesty comprehensively considered and not as a sexual virtue</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Chapter 8: Morality undermined by sexual notions of the importance of a good reputation</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Chapter 9: The pernicious effects of the unnatural distinctions established in society</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Chapter 10: Parental Affection</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Chapter 11: Duty to Parents</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Chapter 12: National education</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Chapter 13: Examples of the harm done by women's ignorance</b>	<b>99</b>
Section 1: Charlatans . . . . .	99
Section 2: Novel-reading . . . . .	101
Section 3: Dressing up . . . . .	103
Section 4: Sensibility . . . . .	103
Section 5: Ignorance about child-care . . . . .	104
Section 6: Concluding thoughts . . . . .	105

## Glossary

**accomplishment:** That is a kind of sneer-word when MW uses it writing about the ‘accomplishments’ that women are trained to have. To ‘accomplish’ something can be to complete or finish it; a few decades ago some young women were sent to a ‘finishing school’ before being launched into society.

**address:** skill, elegance, dexterity; usually thought of (by MW at least) as something learned, practised, contrived—not natural. See page 58.

**amuse:** In MW’s time ‘amuse’ had a central meaning which it now has only at the margins: to ‘amuse oneself by. . .’ was to pass the time by. . . . A child who is ‘amusing herself’ by dressing her doll (page 29) needn’t be taking much pleasure in this.

**animal spirits:** These figured in a theory, popularised by Descartes: they were supposed to be an extremely fine-divided liquid or gas—much less lumpy than water or air—that could move with great speed and get in anywhere; among their roles was to transmit causal influences from the sense-organs to the brain, almost instantaneously.

**brute, brutal:** A brute is a lower or non-human animal. A brutal or brutish way of behaving is one that falls below a minimum standard for being human—e.g. the ‘brutal’ behaviour of a mother [on page 89] who indulges her child without thinking about the effects of her conduct on the child’s later development or on •other people.

**docile:** Strictly and originally this meant ‘able to learn’ and/or ‘willing to learn’. In MW’s usage, as in ours today, a ‘docile’ person is one who is easy to manage, persuade, manipulate, etc. One who is biddable.

**education:** In MW’s time this word had a wider meaning than it tends to have today. It wouldn’t be far wrong to replace most occurrences of it by ‘upbringing’. See MW’s discussion of ‘education’ starting on page 14.

**genius:** In the present work this means something like ‘extremely high-level intellect’; similar to the word’s present meaning, but not as strong.

**he or she:** MW never uses ‘he or she’, ‘his or hers’ or the like. These occur in the present version to avoid the discomfort we feel in her use of ‘it’, as when she says ‘every being’ can become virtuous by the exercise of ‘its own reason’.

**(im)mortal:** MW ties •being immortal to •having reason and to •being answerable to God.

**mistress:** In this work, a ‘mistress of a family is in charge of a family; and a ‘mistress of a man is a sexual partner of a man. The word is not used here except in those two kinds of context.

**person:** When MW refers to a woman’s ‘person’ she is always referring to the woman herself considered as sexually attractive. A man’s interest in a woman’s ‘person’ is his sexual interest in her body, though clothing and jewellery may also come into it.

**prescription:** In several important places MW uses ‘prescription’ in its sense as a legal term, now obsolete, referring to something’s being accepted or unchallenged etc. *because it has been in place for so long.*

**sceptre:** An ornamental rod held in the hand of a monarch as a symbol of royal authority. MW uses the word several times, always as a metaphor for power or authority: ‘beauty

is woman's sceptre' means that beauty is woman's source of power.

**sense:** MW speaks of 'a man of sense' she means 'a fairly intelligent man' or, in her terms, 'a man with a fairly enlarged understanding'.

**sensibility:** Capacity for refined emotion, readiness to feel compassion for suffering, or the quality of being strongly affected by emotional influences. MW uses the adjective 'sensible'—e.g. on page 63—in pretty much our sense of it.

**sentimental:** This meant 'having to do with feelings'; the implication of shallow and unworthy feelings came after MW's time. On page 1 'sentimental lust' presumably means 'intense hankering for various kinds of feelings'.

**sex:** For MW 'sex' is a classificatory term—e.g. 'I speak for my sex' meaning 'I speak for all women'. (The use of 'sex' as short for 'copulation' is of more recent vintage.) See the striking example on page 36. MW uses phrases about 'giving a sex to X' meaning (page 6) treating X as though it related to only one of the sexes, or (pages 24, 29 and 41) treating X as though there were one version of it for females and a

different one for males.

**subtlety:** In MW's usage this means something close to 'address' (see above).

**vice, vicious:** For an 18th century writer vice is simply wrong conduct, with no necessary implication of anything sexual (except perhaps on page 55); and a vicious person is simply someone who often acts wrongly, with no necessary implication of anything like savage cruelty.

**virtue:** On a few occasions in this work MW uses 'virtue' with some of its older sense of 'power'. One example is on page 36. On page 65 MW personifies virtue as feminine.

**voluptuous:** Having to do with sexual pleasure.

**vulgar:** In MW's day 'vulgar' as applied to people meant 'common, ordinary, not much educated, not very thoughtful'. More generally, 'vulgar x' meant 'the kind of x that would be associated with vulgar people'.

**woman:** This version follows MW exactly in her uses of 'woman', 'women', 'lady', 'female' and 'feminine', and in her use of the masculine counterparts of these.

## Chapter 5: Writers who have rendered women objects of pity, bordering on contempt

We now have to examine the opinions on the female character and education that have been plausibly argued for in some modern publications, and have given the tone to most of the briefer and more casual things said about the sex [see Glossary].

### 1: Rousseau

I shall begin with Rousseau, giving a sketch of the character of women in his own words and interspersing comments and reflections. My comments will all spring from a few simple principles, and could be derived from what I have already said; but his argument has been constructed with so much ingenuity that I think I have to attack it in a more detailed manner, and make the application of my principles myself rather than leaving it to the reader.

Sophie, says Rousseau, should be as perfect a woman as Émile is a man, and to make her so he has to examine the character that nature has given to the female sex.

He then proceeds to argue that woman ought to be weak and passive because she has less bodily strength than man; from which he infers that she was formed to please him and be subject to him, and that making herself *agreeable* to her master is the grand purpose of her existence. Still, to give a little mock dignity to lust he insists that when a man goes to a woman for pleasure he should not use his strength and should depend on her will.

[In quotations from Rousseau's *Émile*, three centered asterisks mean that the next quotation comes from a few pages later than the preceding one.]

·ROUSSEAU·

So we deduce a third conclusion from the different constitutions of the sexes, namely: The stronger should be master •in appearance but should depend on the weaker •in fact. . . . This is because of an invariable law of •nature, which goes like this:

Nature gives woman a greater ability to arouse desires ·in man· than it has given man to satisfy them; so it—·nature·—makes the man dependent on the good pleasure of the woman, and forces him to try to please her in his turn, *in order to obtain her consent that he should be stronger.*<sup>8</sup>

On these occasions, the most delightful circumstance that a man finds in his victory is to be unsure whether she has yielded to his superior strength or whether her inclinations spoke in his favour. The females are usually artful enough to leave this in doubt. Women's understanding in this matter corresponds exactly to their constitution: far from being ashamed of their weakness, they glory in it; their tender muscles make no resistance; they pretend to be unable to lift the smallest burdens, and would blush to be thought robust and strong. What is the purpose of all this? Not merely for the sake of appearing delicate, but. . . also to prepare the way for being feeble whenever that suits their purposes.

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

. . . If Rousseau is right about woman's duty—if *pleasing man* is the iron bed of fate that her character should be made to fit, stretching or contracting it regardless of moral and physical

<sup>8</sup> What nonsense! [That is MW interrupting; and it was she who put that last clause in italics.]

distinctions—then it does indeed follow that woman ought to sacrifice every other consideration to make herself agreeable to man. . . . But I think it can be shown that practical rules built upon this ignoble base would undermine the purposes of even this life as distinct from the after-life; and that gives me room to doubt whether woman *was* created for man. This means, of course, that I don't accept every sentence of the Bible as literally true. But if the cry of 'irreligion' or even 'atheism' is raised against me, I will simply declare that if an angel from heaven told me that Moses' beautiful, poetical account of the beginning of the world cosmogony and of the fall of man is literally true, I still couldn't believe what my reason told me was derogatory to the character of the Supreme Being. And having no fear of the devil before my eyes, I venture to call this a suggestion of reason, instead of resting my weakness on the broad shoulders of the first seducer of my frail sex.

·ROUSSEAU·

Once it has been demonstrated that man and woman aren't and oughtn't to be constituted alike in temperament and character, it follows of course that they should not be educated in the same manner. In pursuing the directions of nature they ought indeed to act in concert [= 'their sexual intercourse ought to be a collaborative joint enterprise'], but they shouldn't be engaged in the same employments: the final goal of their activities should be the same, but the means they take to accomplish them, and thus their tastes and inclinations, should be different.

\* \* \*

. . . Men depend on women only because of their desires; women depend on men because of their desires and also because of their needs. We could survive without them better than they could without us.

\* \* \*

For this reason, the education of women should always be relative to men. To

please us,  
be useful to us,  
make us love and esteem them,  
educate us when we are young,  
take care of us when we are grown up,  
advise us,  
console us,  
make our lives easy and agreeable—

those are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy. Whenever we lose touch with this principle, we run wide of the mark and all the precepts that are given to them contribute neither to their happiness nor to ours.

\* \* \*

Girls are from their earliest infancy fond of dress. Not content with being pretty, they want to be thought to be pretty. . . . They are to be governed by talking to them of what 'people will think' of their behaviour; this thought—this control-device—works with them almost as early as they are capable of understanding anything that is said to them. But it. . . doesn't have the same effect with boys. They don't care much what people think of them, as long as they can pursue their amusements without interference. Time and care are necessary to get boys to be motivated by the thought of what 'people will think'.

This first lesson, wherever girls get it from, is a very good one. As the body is in a way born before the soul, our first concern should be to care for the body; this order—body first, then soul—is the same for both sexes, but the object

of that care is different. In the male sex it is the development of bodily powers; in the female sex, the development of personal charms. I'm not saying that either strength or beauty should be confined exclusively to one sex, but only that the priorities for them should be reversed in the two sexes. Women certainly need enough strength to be able to move and act gracefully, and men need enough address [see Glossary] to be able to act with ease.

\* \* \*

[A paragraph about the kinds of play that children like: tops, drums, and carts for one sex, mirrors, trinkets and dolls for the other.]

\* \* \*

Here then we see a basic propensity firmly established; all you ·as a parent· need to do is to go with it and regulate it. The little girl will doubtless want to know how to dress up her doll, to make its sleeve knots, its flounces, its head-dress, etc. She needs a lot of help from members of the household; so much help that it would be much more agreeable to her to do all this for herself. That provides a good reason for the first lessons that are usually taught to these young females: in which we seem not to be setting them a task but doing them a favour by instructing them in something immediately useful to themselves. They nearly all learn *with reluctance* to read and write, but they *very readily* apply themselves to the use of their needles. They imagine themselves already grown up, and think with pleasure that such qualifications will enable them to decorate themselves.

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

This is certainly an education only of the body; but Rousseau isn't the only man who has indirectly said that merely

the person [see Glossary] of a young woman—without any mind. . . .—is very pleasing. To make it weak and what some may call 'beautiful', the understanding is neglected and girls are forced to sit still, play with dolls, and listen to foolish conversations; the effect of •habit is insisted on as an undoubted indication of •nature. I know it was Rousseau's opinion that the first years of youth should be employed in forming the body, though in educating Émile he deviates from this plan. But the body-strengthening on which strength of mind largely depends is very different from the body-strengthening that enables the person to move easily.

Rousseau's observations. . . .were made in a country where the art of pleasing. . .

**how MW went on:** . . . was refined only to extract the grossness of vice. He did not go back to nature, or his ruling appetite disturbed the operations of reason, else he would not have drawn these crude inferences.

**what she seems to have meant:** . . . was developed only so as to make vice [see Glossary] more elegant. He wouldn't have drawn these crude conclusions if he had gone back to nature and his thinking about it hadn't been disturbed by his dominating sex-drive.

In France boys and (especially) girls are educated only to please, to manage their persons, and regulate their exterior behaviour; and their minds are damaged at an early age by the cautions—some worldly, some pious—that they are given to guard them against immodesty. In past times, the confessions that mere children were obliged to make, and the questions asked by the confessors (I have good authority for this), were enough to impress a sexual character—i.e. to reinforce the society's idea of femininity in the girls, and its idea of masculinity in the boys. The education

of society was a school of flirting and art [here = 'the skillful management of the other sex']. At the age of ten or eleven—even sooner, indeed—girls began to flirt, and to talk (without being reproved for it) of establishing themselves in the world by marriage.

In short, almost from their very birth they were treated like *women*, and were given compliments instead of instruction. Compliments weaken the mind. When society treated girls in this way, it was assuming that •Nature acted like a *step*-mother when •she formed this after-thought of creation.

Not allowing them understanding, however, it was only consistent to subject them to authority independently of reason; and to prepare them for this subjection Rousseau gives the following advice:

·ROUSSEAU·

As well as being active and diligent, girls should be early subjected to restraint. This misfortune, if that's what it is, is inseparable from their sex; and if they *ever* throw it off they will suffer evils much crueller than that. They must throughout their lives be subject to the most constant and severe restraint, which is that of *decorum*; so they must get used to it early, so that it won't hit them too hard later on. They should also get used to the suppression of their caprices, so that they will be readier to submit to the will of others ·later on·; even if it is work that they are most fond of, they should be sometimes compelled to lay it aside. If their upbringing is too permissive, their basic propensities will give rise to dissipation, levity, and inconstancy. To prevent this abuse, we should teach them above all things to restrain themselves properly. Our absurd institutions reduce the life of a modest woman to a perpetual conflict with herself, though it is fair that this sex should share in the sufferings arising from the evils it has caused us.

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

And *why* is the life of a modest woman a perpetual conflict? Because this very system of education makes it so. Modesty, temperance, and self-denial are the sober offspring of reason; but when sensibility is developed at the expense of the understanding, such weak beings must be restrained by arbitrary means [i.e. not by nature but by rules devised by humans], and so be subjected to continual conflicts. If you give more scope to their activity of mind, nobler passions and motives will govern their appetites and sentiments; ·and this government will be less conflicting because it will come from within the woman rather than from outside·. . . .

·ROUSSEAU·

Women ought not to have much liberty. When something is permitted to them, they are apt to indulge in it excessively. Addicted in everything to extremes, they are even more carried away in their diversions than boys.

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

Well, slaves and mobs have always gone to excesses in that way once they have broken loose from authority. The bent bow straightens with violence when the hand that is forcibly holding it is suddenly relaxed; and sensibility, the plaything of outward circumstances, must be subjected to authority or moderated by reason. Rousseau continues:

·ROUSSEAU·

This habitual restraint makes women tractable in a way that they'll need throughout their lives: they are constantly under subjection either to the men ·who are their partners or husbands· or to the opinions of mankind, and they are never permitted to set themselves above those opinions. The most important qualification in a woman is good-nature or sweetness of temperament. Formed to obey such an imperfect being as man is—often full of vices and always full

of faults—she ought to learn even to suffer injustice and to bear her husband’s insults without complaint. This is for her sake, not his: if she becomes stubborn and hostile this will make her husband worse. . . .

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

. . . .The being who patiently endures injustice and silently puts up with insults will soon become unjust, i.e. unable to tell right from wrong. Anyway, the factual premise is wrong: this is *not* the true way to form or improve the temperament; for in general men have better temperaments than women because they are occupied in pursuits that interest the head as well as the heart, and the head’s steadiness gives a healthy temperature [MW’s word] to the heart. People of sensibility seldom have good temperaments. The formation of the temperament is the cool work of reason, which brings helpful skill to bear on bringing together jarring elements. I never knew a weak or ignorant person who had a good temperament, though the constitutional good humour and the docility that fear causes in the behaviour if often *called* ‘good temperament’. Note: ‘causes in the *behaviour*’—because genuine meekness reaches the heart or mind only as an effect of reflection. The simple restraint ·arising from fear· produces a number of unpleasant moods in domestic life, as many sensible men would agree after finding some of these gentle irritable creatures to be very troublesome companions. Rousseau goes on to argue:

·ROUSSEAU·

Each sex should preserve its own special tone and manner: a meek husband may make a wife behave badly, but mildness of disposition on her part will always bring him back to reason—at least if he isn’t absolutely a brute—and will sooner or later triumph over him.

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

Perhaps the mildness of reason might sometimes have this effect; but abject fear always inspires contempt, and tears are eloquent only when they flow down fair cheeks.

A heart that can melt when insulted, and instead of revolting at injustice can kiss the rod—what materials can it be made of? If a woman can caress a man with true feminine softness at the very moment when he treats her tyrannically, isn’t it fair to infer that her virtue is built on narrow views and selfishness? Nature has never dictated any such insincerity. You may call prudence of this sort a virtue; but morality becomes vague when any part of it is supposed to rest on falsehood. These are mere expedients, and expedients are only useful for the moment ·whereas the good in virtues is everlasting·.

Let the husband beware of trusting too completely in this servile obedience; for if his wife can sweetly •caress him when she is and ought to be angry. . . .she may •do the same after parting with a lover. These are all preparations for adultery! If fear of the world or of hell restrains her desire to please other men when she can no longer please her husband, what alternative is there for this being who was formed by nature and art only to please man? What can compensate her for this privation? Where is she to look for a fresh employment? Where can she find sufficient strength of mind to decide to begin the search, when her habits are fixed and her chaotic mind has long been ruled by vanity?

But this biased moralist ·Rousseau· makes a plausible case, based on his own system, in favour of *cunning*.

·ROUSSEAU·

Daughters should always be submissive, but their mothers should not be inflexible. To make a young person tractable, she shouldn’t be made unhappy; to make her modest, she shouldn’t be made stupid. On the contrary, I wouldn’t be

displeased at her being permitted to use some skill not to escape punishment if she has disobeyed but to exempt herself from the necessity of obeying. . . . Subtlety is a talent that is natural to the female sex; and in line with my view that all our natural inclinations are right and good in themselves, I hold that subtlety should be cultivated as well as the others. All we need is to prevent it from being abused.

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

A little later he triumphantly proclaims: 'Whatever is is right.' Granted; but perhaps no aphorism ever contained a more paradoxical assertion than this. It is a solemn truth with respect to God. He. . . sees the whole at once; but man, who can inspect only the disconnected parts, finds many things wrong; and it is. . . right that he should try to alter what appears to him to be wrong, even while bowing to his Creator's wisdom and respecting the darkness he is working to disperse.

Given the principle that whatever is is right, Rousseau is correct in what he infers from it.

·ROUSSEAU·

The female sex's superiority in address is a very fair pay-back for their inferiority in strength: without this superiority woman would be man's slave, not his companion. Her superior skill and ingenuity lets her preserve her equality, and governs man while she pretends to obey. Woman has everything against her—our faults as well her own timidity and weakness. She has nothing in her favour except her subtlety and her beauty. Isn't it very reasonable that she should cultivate both?

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

Greatness of mind can never cohabit with cunning or address [see Glossary]. Those words really refer to *insincerity* and *falsehood*; but I shan't go on about that, and merely point

out that if any class of mankind is so created that it has to be educated by rules that aren't strictly deducible from truth, then virtue is an affair of convention. . . .

Men have superior strength of body; but if it weren't for mistaken notions of beauty, women would become strong enough to be *able to earn enough to live on*, which is the true definition of 'independent'; and to bear the bodily inconveniences and exertions that are needed to strengthen the mind. . . .

·ROUSSEAU·

Beauty can't be acquired by dress, and flirting is an art not so early and speedily attained. But even when girls are young they can work to have

- agreeable gestures,
- a pleasing tone of voice,
- an easy way of walking and moving, and
- skill in gracefully suiting their looks and attitudes to time, place, and occasion.

. . . .I would like a young Englishwoman to cultivate her agreeable talents in order to please her future husband with as much care and persistence as a young Circassian woman cultivates hers so that she will be ready to be in the harem of an Eastern potentate.

The tongues of women are very voluble; they speak earlier, more readily, and more agreeably than the men. They are accused also of speaking much more; but so they should, and I am willing to convert this reproach into a compliment. Their lips and eyes have the same activity as men's, and for the same reason. A man speaks of what he knows, a woman of what pleases her; the man's speech requires knowledge, the woman's requires taste; a man's discourse should aim mainly at being useful, a woman's at being agreeable. Their different conversations should have nothing in common but truth.

We should restrain the prattle of boys with the severe question ‘What is the purpose of what you are saying?’, but for girls’ prattle we need a different though equally difficult question, ‘How will what you are saying be received?’ In infancy, when they can’t yet tell good from evil, girls ought to observe it as a law never to say anything that the listener will find disagreeable. Not an easy law to obey, and made all the harder by having always to be subordinate to the former law against ever telling an untruth.

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

[She has introduced Rousseau’s ‘The tongues of women’ passage with the words: ‘To make women completely insignificant, he adds. . .’.]

To govern the tongue in this manner must require great address indeed; and it is too much practised both by men and women. How few people speak out of the abundance of the heart! So few that I, who love simplicity, would gladly give up •politeness for a quarter of the virtue that has been sacrificed to •it. Politeness is an equivocal quality which at most should only be the polish of virtue.

But to complete the sketch:

·ROUSSEAU·

It’s easy to see that if male children can’t form any true notions of religion, those ideas must be thoroughly out of the reach of female children. For that very reason, I would begin talking to them about religion earlier; if we waited until they were able to discuss such profound questions in a disciplined way we would risk never speaking to them on this subject. Reason in women is *practical* reason: it enables them to use skill in finding the means of achieving a known

end, but could never enable them to discover that end itself. The social relations between the sexes are truly admirable: what results from their union is a moral person, of which woman could be called ‘the eyes’ and man ‘the hand’—from the man the woman learns what she is to see, and from the woman the man learns what he ought to do. If woman could get back to the first principles of things as well as man, and if man could go into details as well as woman, neither would depend on the other for anything; they would live in perpetual discord, and their union could not survive. But in the harmony that in fact naturally exists between them, their different abilities tend to one common end, and it’s hard to say which of them contributes more: each follows the impulse of the other; each is obedient and both are masters.

Just because a woman’s conduct is subservient to public opinion, her faith in matters of religion should be subject to authority. Every daughter ought to be of the same religion as her mother, and every wife to be of the same religion as her husband. Even if the religion she acquires is false, God does not see her acceptance of it as wrong behaviour, because of the docility that induces the mother and daughter to submit to the order of nature.<sup>9</sup> As they can’t judge for themselves, they ought to abide by the decision of their fathers and husbands as confidently as by that of the church.

. . . There’s no great need to explain to women the reasons for their •religious• belief, but there is a need to state precisely the tenets they are to believe: a creed that presents only obscure ideas to the mind will lead to fanaticism; and a creed that presents absurdities will lead to loss of faith.

<sup>9</sup> MW interjects: What if the mother’s and husband’s religions *happen* to be different? An ignorant person cannot be •reasoned out of an error, and if she is merely •persuaded to give up one prejudice for another her mind will be unsettled. And what if the husband doesn’t have any religion to teach her? In that case she •won’t have any religion, and therefore• will lack something she need to support her virtue independently of worldly considerations.

·WOLLSTONECRAFT·

[MW comments briefly on this, in a manner you could now predict from what she has said up to here. What follows—at a length that would occupy about four pages of the present version—is a series of shorter quotations from Rousseau interspersed by MW's comments. Their over-all theme is the conflict between •Rousseau's wish to make women physically attractive and obedient and •MW's wish that women should above all be thoughtful and self-controlled. She fiercely attacks his emphasis on the need for a woman to be physically attractive so that she can be her husband's 'mistress' [see Glossary], especially in the light of his thesis that *that* relationship won't last for long in the marriage. She speaks of this whole emphasis in Rousseau as 'the reveries of fancy and refined licentiousness', meaning roughly that he is supplying himself with soft pornography. She continues:]

The man who can be contented to live with a pretty and useful companion who has no mind has lost in voluptuous [see Glossary] gratifications a taste for more refined pleasures; he has never felt the calm and refreshing satisfaction. . . .of being loved by someone who could understand him. In the society of his wife he is still alone, except when the man is sunk in the brute [here 'brute' = 'lower animal'; she means 'except when the man uses her for sexual satisfaction']. 'The charm of life', says a grave philosophical reasoner [Adam Smith], is 'sympathy; nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast.'

But, according to the line of thought by which women are kept from the tree of knowledge,

the important years of youth,  
the usefulness of age, and  
the rational hopes of a future life

are all to be sacrificed to making woman an object of desire for a short time. Besides, how could Rousseau expect them

to be virtuous and constant when they aren't allowed to base their virtue on reason or direct their inquiries towards truth?

Rousseau's errors in reasoning all arose from sensibility [see Glossary], and women are very ready to forgive sensibility to their charms! When he should have reasoned he became impassioned, and his thoughts inflamed his imagination instead of enlightening his understanding. Even his virtues led him astray: born with a warm constitution and lively imagination, he was naturally drawn toward the other sex with such eager fondness that he soon became lascivious. If he had given way to these desires, the fire would have extinguished itself in a natural manner; but virtue and a romantic kind of delicacy made him practise self-denial; but when he was restrained ·in his behaviour·—by fear, delicacy, or virtue—he let his imagination run riot, and the glowing images that it came up with sank deep into his soul.

. . . .And so warmly has he painted what he forcibly felt that readers' hearts have been drawn in and their imaginations inflamed; the stronger the readers' imaginations are, the more sure they are that they have been convinced of something intellectually, when really they have only shared the feelings of a poetic writer who skilfully exhibits the objects of sense, voluptuously shadowed or gracefully veiled; and by thus making us •feel when we think we are •reasoning he leaves a deposit of error in the mind.

Why was Rousseau's life divided between •ecstasy and •misery? It has to be because the effervescence of his imagination produced •both. If he had allowed his imagination to cool, he might have acquired more strength of mind. . . .

But peace to his spirit! I am at war not with his ashes but with his opinions. I am fighting only the sensibility that led him to degrade woman by making her the slave of love. Let us, my dear contemporaries, rise above such narrow prejudices! If wisdom is desirable on its own account,

if virtue properly so-called must be based on knowledge, then let us try to strengthen our minds by reflection, until our heads become a balance for our hearts; let us not confine all our thoughts to everyday trivial occurrences, or our knowledge to an acquaintance with our lovers' or husbands' hearts; rather, let the carrying-out of every duty be subordinate to the grand duty of improving our minds and preparing our affections for a more exalted state! . . .

If we really were created only to flutter our hour out and then die, then let us give full play to sensibility and laugh at the severity of reason! But even then this wouldn't be satisfactory, because we wouldn't have strong bodies or minds, and life would be lost in feverish pleasures or wearisome idleness.

But the system of education that I earnestly want to see exploded seems to presuppose something that ought never to be taken for granted.

·WHAT MW SAYS IN THE REST OF THIS PARAGRAPH·

The presupposition has two parts. **(1)** A woman who is well brought up by the standards of the system I am attacking will be protected from any mishaps; Fortune, the blindfolded goddess, will take off her blindfold and smile on this woman, bringing her an admirable male partner. **(2)** A woman who is devoted to virtue (and thus isn't well brought up by those standards) will get benefits only to her own frame of mind; she is likely to have to cope with serious worldly difficulties, and to put up with the vices and moods of people she can never regard as friends.

·HOW MW SAID THIS (VERBATIM)·

. . . namely, that virtue shields us from the casualties of life; and that fortune, slipping off her bandage, will smile on a well-educated female, and bring in her hand an *Émile* or a *Telemachus*. Whilst, on the contrary, the reward which

virtue promises to her votaries is confined, it seems clear, to their own bosoms; and often must they contend with the most vexatious worldly cares, and bear with the vices and humours of relations for whom they can never feel a friendship.

[The next paragraph **continues the statement of the 'presupposition' that MW has been attacking**, by saying more about the misfortunes of **(2)** the woman who devotes herself to virtue.]

Many women, instead of being supported by the reason and virtue of their fathers and brothers, have strengthened their own minds by struggling with their vices and follies; but they have never met with a hero in the shape of a husband. If they did have a husband, he might . . . manage to bring their reason back to its natural dependent state, and restore to *man* the privilege of rising above opinion—the privilege that had been usurped by the woman.

[•The second woman isn't rewarded much by virtue, although she is devoted to it. The upshot for the first woman is better, and we understand its being brought by fortune, luck; but it's not clear why in the verbatim passage it is also said to be worked by virtue. •In the second paragraph MW says that a husband might 'pay the debt that mankind owed' to the woman. . . etc. But Rousseau & co. don't think that mankind owes the second woman anything. Perhaps MW meant '. . . paying the debt that **the woman thinks** mankind owes her'.]

## 2: Fordyce

[James Fordyce, a Scottish Presbyterian minister and poet, had written two enormously popular books about the upbringing of young women. MW makes no secret of her contempt for these works—both for their overlap with Rousseau's views and for their style. He isn't worth discussing, she says; but he has to be attended to because he is so influential. This section would run to about five pages,

but it won't be presented here. A sense of why Fordyce isn't worth quoting, and of what MW thought of him, can be gathered from a few of her expressions regarding him:

- a most sentimental rant
- I have heard rational men use the word 'indecent' when they mention Fordyce's writings
- a display of cold artificial feelings. . . .the mark of a little vain mind
- lover-like phrases of pumped-up passion
- The lover has a poetic licence. . . .but why should a grave preacher interlard his discourses with such fooleries?]

### 3: Gregory

[Dr John Gregory, a Scottish physician, wrote *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, for the benefit of his motherless daughters; it was published posthumously two decades before the present work.]

Dr Gregory's legacy to his daughters is full of such paternal care that I embark on the task of criticism with affectionate respect. But just because this little volume has many attractions to recommend it to the notice of the most respect-worthy part of my sex, I can't silently let pass some arguments in it that make a plausible case for opinions that I think have had the most harmful effect on the morals and manners of the female world.

His easy familiar style is particularly suited to the over-all line of his advice, and the melancholy tenderness which his respect for the memory of a beloved wife diffuses through the whole work brings us onto its side; but our sympathy is disturbed by the trim elegance of many passages in the book—passages where, expecting to meet the •father, we are suddenly confronted by the •author.

Another drawback is that he has two purposes and doesn't often stay steadily with either of them. He wants to make his daughters lovable; but he doesn't want to give them sentiments that might make them unhappy by drawing them out of the track of common life without enabling them to act with appropriate independence and dignity. So he checks the natural flow of his thoughts, and advises neither one thing nor the other.

In the preface he tells them a sad truth: 'At least once in your lives you will hear the genuine sentiments of a man who has nothing to gain from deceiving you.' [Presumably the 'once' is the occasion of reading their father's book; what is sad is the implication that this may be the only occasion.]

Hapless woman! what can be expected from you when the beings on whom you are said naturally to depend for reason and support all have something to gain from deceiving you! This is the root of the evil that has shed a corroding mildew on all your virtues. Blighting in the bud your opening faculties, it has made you the weak thing that you are! This divergence of interests—this difference between what brings gain to a male and what brings gain to a female—is an insidious state of warfare that undermines morality and divides mankind!

If love has made some women wretched, how many more have been made vain and useless by the cold unmeaning interplay of 'gallantry'! Yet this heartless attention to the •female• sex is regarded as so manly, so polished, that I'm afraid this vestige of gothic manners won't be replaced by a more reasonable and affectionate mode of conduct until society is very differently organized. Also, to strip •gallantry' of its imaginary dignity, I should point out that in the most civilized European states •this lip-service is most prevalent where morals are extremely dissolute. I'm thinking of Portugal, where gallantry takes the place of the most serious moral

obligations—for in that country it seldom happens that a man is assassinated when he is in the company of a woman! The savage hand of murder is unnerved by this chivalrous spirit; and if the stroke of vengeance can't be delayed, the killer asks the lady to pardon the rudeness and to leave in peace, perhaps spattered with her husband's or brother's blood.

I shall pass over what Dr Gregory says about religion, because I mean to give religion a chapter to itself. [In the upshot, she didn't. Perhaps the chapter was to have been in a projected second volume, which didn't get written.]

Although many of the remarks about behaviour are very sensible [see Glossary], I entirely disapprove of them all, because they strike me as starting at the wrong end, so to speak. A cultivated understanding and an affectionate heart won't have any need for starched rules of decorum; without such rules they will lead to something more substantial than seemliness [= 'conventional properness of behaviour']. And on the other hand, obedience to such rules without understanding would be outright pretence. In Gregory's scheme of things, decorum is the one thing that is needed! Decorum is to supplant nature, and banish all simplicity and variety of character out of the female world. But what good can come of this superficial advice? It is easier •to list modes of behaviour •that are required or forbidden• than •to set reason to work; but once the mind has been stored with useful knowledge and strengthened by being *used*, the regulation of the behaviour may safely be left to its guidance •without the aid of formal rules•.

Consider for example this caution that Gregory gives to his daughters:

Be cautious even in displaying your good sense. If you don't, you'll be seen as regarding yourself as superior to the rest of the company. And if you

happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret—especially from men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on any woman who has knowledge, skill and a cultivated understanding.

Why should that warning be given, when artfulness of every kind must contaminate the mind; and why entangle the grand motives of action—motives supported by reason and religion equally—with pitiful worldly devices and sleight-of-hand tricks to gain the applause of gaping tasteless fools? . . .

If it were always proper to adopt the tone of the company one is in, there would be no end to rules for behaviour. With the key changing all the time •in tune with the company•, it would often happen that a *flat* was taken to be a *natural* note. [The adjectives are meant in their musical sense—e.g. mistaking a *b♭* for a *b♮*.]

Surely it would have been wiser to advise women to improve themselves until they rose above the fumes of vanity; and then let the public opinion come around •to seeing them for what they are. If they have to adjust themselves to the company they are in•, where are rules of accommodation to stop? The narrow path of truth and virtue doesn't veer to the right or the left: it is a straightforward business, and those who are earnestly travelling this road can leap across many. . . . prejudices without leaving modesty behind. Make the heart clean, and give the head work to do, and I predict that there will be nothing offensive in the behaviour.

The air of fashion that many young people are so eager to achieve always strikes me as being like the studied attitudes [MW's phrase] of some modern prints, copied slavishly and tastelessly from ancient works of art: the soul is left out, and none of the parts are tied together by *character* properly so-called. This varnish of fashion. . . . may dazzle the weak; but leave nature to itself, •unvarnished•, and it will seldom disgust the wise. Besides, when a woman has enough sense

not to pretend to anything that she doesn't understand in some degree, she has no need to hide her talents; let things take their natural course, and all will be well.

It is this system of pretence all through Dr Gregory's book that I despise. Women are always to *seem* to be this and that; but virtue might speak in Hamlet's words: 'Seems! I know not seems!—Have that within that passeth show!'

In another place, after indiscriminately recommending delicacy, he adds:

The men will complain of your reserve. They will assure you that a franker behaviour would make you more lovable. But, trust me, they aren't sincere when they tell you that. I acknowledge that on some occasions it [= a more open and forthright manner] might make you more agreeable as companions, but it would make you less lovable as women. And that is an important distinction, which many of your sex are not aware of.

This desire of always being women is the very frame of mind that degrades the 'female' sex. Except with a lover, it would (I repeat) be well if they were *only* agreeable or rational companions. But in this respect Gregory's advice is inconsistent with something else he says, which I now quote with strong approval:

The view that a woman may allow all innocent freedoms provided her virtue is secure is both grossly indelicate and dangerous, and has proved fatal to many of your sex.

I agree with this. A man or woman of any feeling must always wish to convince a beloved object that what he or she is getting and returning with pleasure are caresses of the individual, not of the sex; and that the heart is moved rather than the senses. Without this natural delicacy, love becomes a selfish personal gratification that degrades the character.

I take this view further. When love is out of the question, affection authorises many personal endearments that flow naturally from an innocent heart and give life to the behaviour; but the personal interplay of appetite, gallantry, or vanity, is despicable. Suppose a man is helping a pretty woman into a carriage—a woman he doesn't know—and he squeezes her hand: if she has any true delicacy she will regard this impertinent freedom as something like an insult, rather than being flattered by this meaningless homage to beauty. . . .

Wanting to feed the affections with what is now the food of vanity, I would like to persuade my sex to act from simpler principles. Let them merit love, and they will obtain it, though they may never be told that. 'I like Dr Gregory's remark: 'The power of a fine woman over the hearts of very able men is beyond what she conceives.'

I have already remarked on the narrow cautions Gregory offers relating to deceit, female softness, delicacy of constitution; for these are the themes that he keeps endlessly coming back to. He handles them in a more decorous manner than Rousseau does; but basically he agrees with Rousseau on these matters, and if you take the trouble to analyse these opinions 'of Gregory's' you'll find that the first principles are not quite so delicate as the superstructure!

You'll see in due course that my views about friendship, love, and marriage are non-trivially different from Gregory's. I don't want to get ahead of myself and talk about that now, important as it is. I want here merely to remark on the over-all spirit of Gregory's treatment of them, on his cautious family prudence, on his limited views of partial unenlightened affection. These views exclude pleasure and improvement by vainly wanting to fend off sorrow and error—and by thus guarding the heart and mind, destroy all their energy. It is far better to be often deceived than never to

trust; to be disappointed in love, than never to love; to lose a husband's fondness, than forfeit his esteem.

It would be a good thing for the world—and for individuals, of course—if all this useless care to attain a limited and limiting worldly happiness were turned into an anxious desire to improve the understanding.

—Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom; and with all thy gettings get understanding. (*Proverbs* 4:7)

—How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity and hate knowledge? (*Proverbs* 1:22)

That is Wisdom speaking to the daughters of men!

#### 4: Some women

I shan't mention all the writers who have written on the subject of female manners—it would in fact be only beating over the old ground, for they have in general said the same things; but I'm on the attack against man's. . . . *iron sceptre of tyranny*, and I declare against all power built on prejudices, however ancient.

If women's submission is to be based on justice, that is the highest court of appeal, for God is justice itself. So let us as children of the same parent. . . . reason together and learn to submit to the authority of •reason when •her voice is distinctly heard. And if it is proved that this throne of prerogative rests on nothing but a chaotic mass of prejudices that aren't kept together by

- any inherent principle of order, or
- any elephant or tortoise or even
- the mighty shoulders of a son of the earth,

anyone who escapes from it—braving the consequences—will not be guilty of a breach of duty, will not be sinning against the order of things. . . . [The middle one of those three refers to an

old Indian theory about what holds the world up, and the third refers to Greek myths about Atlas.]

The being who can govern him- or herself [see Glossary] has nothing to fear in life; but if anything is dearer to someone than his or her own respect, the price for that must be paid to the last farthing. Virtue, like everything valuable, must be loved for herself alone or she won't come to live with us. She won't impart the peace 'which passeth understanding' [Philippians 47] if she is •used merely as the stilts of reputation and •respected with pharisaical exactness because 'honesty is the best policy'.

It can't be denied—and it never is denied—that the plan of life that enables us to carry some knowledge and virtue into the after-life is the plan with the best chance to ensure contentment in this life; yet few people act according to this principle. This sober conviction is swept aside by present pleasure or present power. . . . How few—how very few!—have enough foresight or resolution to endure a small evil at the moment so as to avoid a greater evil hereafter.

Woman in particular, whose virtue is built on changeable prejudices, seldom attains to this greatness of mind; so that she becomes the slave of her own feelings and is thus easily subjugated by the feelings of others. When it is thus degraded, her reason—her misty reason!—is employed in polishing her chains rather than breaking them. I have indignantly heard women argue along the same lines as men, and adopt the sentiments that treat them as animals, doing this with all the stubborn persistence of ignorance. I shall illustrate this assertion with a few examples.

[MW then briefly discusses things that had been said about women by three women: these discussions add nothing to what she has already said, and they are mostly omitted here. The women in question are

**Hester Piozzi**, who before her second marriage was the Mrs Thrale who is still remembered for her long, close friendship with Samuel Johnson.

**Baroness de Staël**, who has been described as ‘the first woman of Europe’; prominent for literary and political activities, and for her personal life—one of her lovers was Talleyrand. As a young woman she had written a tribute to Rousseau, and that is what MW fastens on here.

**Stéphanie Félicité de Genlis**, wife of an aristocrat who was beheaded during the Terror; author of, among other things, books for children. MW’s main complaint concerns Madame Genlis’s ‘absurd manner of making parental authority supplant reason’; and she also throws in this: ‘I shall pass over her vehement argument in favour of the eternity of future punishments, because I blush to think that a human being should ever argue vehemently in such a cause. She concludes this section with a tribute to:]

**Catherine Macaulay**, who is certainly the woman of the greatest abilities that this country has ever produced. Yet she has been allowed to die without sufficient respect being paid to her memory. But posterity will be more just, and will remember that Catharine Macaulay was an example of intellectual acquirements supposed to be incompatible with the weakness of her sex. No sex appears in her style of writing, for it is like the sense it conveys, strong and clear.

I won’t say that she has a ‘masculine’ understanding, because I don’t accept that there is anything masculine about reason; but I contend that her understanding was sound and that her judgment—the mature fruit of profound thinking—was a proof that a woman can acquire *judgment* in the full extent of that word. . . . She writes with sober energy and tightness of argument; yet her sympathy and benevolence draw us to her side, and the vital heat of her arguments that forces the reader to weigh them.

When I first thought of writing the present work, I anticipated Mrs Macaulay’s approval with a little of the hopeful eagerness that it has been the business of my life to suppress; then I heard that she had died—hearing this with the sickly spasm of disappointed hope and the steady seriousness of regret.

## 5: Chesterfield

. . . Lord Chesterfield’s *Letters to his Son* must not be silently passed over. Not that I mean to analyse his unmanly, immoral system, or even to select any of the useful shrewd remarks that occur in his letters. No, all I intend to offer are a few thoughts about the purpose that the author says the letters have, namely **the art of acquiring an early knowledge of the world**. This is an art that •preys secretly, like the worm in the bud, on the •young person’s• expanding powers, and •turns to poison the abundant juices that should mount with vigour in the youthful frame, inspiring warm affections and great resolves. [There is no further mention of Chesterfield, by name or description, in this work.]

•AGAINST EARLY EDUCATION IN THE WAYS OF THE WORLD•  
‘For everything there is a season’, says the wise man [*Ecclesiastes* 3:1]; and who would look for the fruits of autumn during the genial months of spring? But this is mere rhetoric •on my part•, and I mean to *reason* with those worldly-wise instructors who, instead of cultivating the •young person’s• judgment, instil prejudices and •harden the heart that gradual experience would only have •cooled. An early confrontation with human infirmities—what is called ‘knowledge of the world’—is in my view the surest way to shrink the heart and dampen the natural youthful ardour which produces not only great talents but great virtues. The vain attempt to bring forth the fruit of experience before the

sapling has come into leaf only exhausts its strength and prevents it from taking on a natural form. . . . Tell me, you who have studied the human mind, isn't it a strange way to fix principles by showing young people that principles are seldom stable? And how can they be strengthened by habits when they are shown examples in which the habits work out badly? Why is the ardour of youth thus to be damped, and the luxuriance of imagination cut right back? It's true that this dry caution about how badly people sometimes behave may guard a character from worldly mischances, but it *certainly will* rule out excellence in virtue and in knowledge. The stumbling-block thrown across every path by suspicion will prevent any vigorous exertions of genius [see Glossary] or benevolence, and life will be stripped of its most alluring charm long before its calm evening when man should retire to contemplation for comfort and support.

A young man who has grown up in a family who are his friends, and has stored his mind with as much theoretical knowledge as can be acquired by reading and the natural reflections that youthful outbursts of animal spirits and instinctive feelings inspire, will enter the world with warm and *erroneous* expectations. But this seems to be the course of nature; and in morals as well as in works of taste we should obey nature's sacred pointers, and not presume to lead when we ought humbly to follow.

Few people act from principle; the grand springs of action are present feelings and early habits; but the feelings would be deadened, and the habits turned into rusting fetters, if young people were shown the world just as it is. What will make them uncensorious and forgiving is the knowledge of mankind and of their own hearts that can be slowly obtained through experience. If they have that, they will see their fellow creatures as frail beings, like themselves, condemned to struggle with human infirmities; sometimes displaying the

light side of their character and sometimes the dark, giving rise to alternate feelings of love and disgust. But the early warning system guards them against their fellow creatures, as against beasts of prey, until every enlarged social feeling is eradicated, i.e. until their humanity was eradicated.

In life, on the other hand, as we gradually discover the imperfections of our own nature we also discover virtues; and various circumstances attach us to our fellow creatures when we mix with them and view the same objects—circumstances that are never thought of in acquiring a hasty unnatural knowledge of the world such as Lord Chesterfield's indoctrination. We see a folly swell into a vice by almost imperceptible degrees, and we pity the person while we also blame him or her; but, if the hideous monster—the vice—burst suddenly on our sight, our fear and disgust would make us more severe than man ought to be, and might lead us in our blind zeal to put ourselves in God's place and pronounce damnation on our fellow mortals, forgetting that we can't read their hearts and that we have seeds of the same vices lurking in our own.

We expect more from instruction (I repeat) than mere instruction can produce. Instead of preparing young people to confront life's evils with dignity, and to acquire wisdom and virtue through the use of their own faculties, precepts are heaped on precepts and blind obedience to them is required, when conviction should arise from the use of reason.

Suppose, for instance, that a young person in the first ardour of friendship *deifies* the beloved object [i.e. regards him or her as a god]—what harm can arise from this mistaken enthusiastic attachment? It may indeed be better than merely harmless, because it may be necessary for virtue to appear first in a human form to impress youthful hearts; the ideal model, which a more mature and elevated mind

looks up to and shapes for itself, would elude their sight. 'He who loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God?' asked the wisest of men [1 *John* 4:20]... .

Our trees are now allowed to spread with wild luxuriance, and we don't expect by force to combine the majestic marks of time with youthful graces; rather, we wait patiently until the trees have driven their roots down deep and braved many a storm. Well, then, is the mind. . . . to be treated with less respect? To argue from analogy: everything around us is in a progressive state; and when an unwelcome knowledge of life gives us a sense of having had almost enough of life, and we discover by the natural course of things that everything that happens under the sun is vanity [*Ecclesiastes* 1:14], we are drawing near to the awe-inspiring close of the drama. The days of activity and hope are over, and as for the opportunities that our early years gave us for advancing in the scale of intelligence—we have nearly reached their bottom line. A knowledge of the futility of life is very useful at this late stage of our lives—or earlier, if it is obtained through experience. Useful because it is natural; but when a frail ·young, inexperienced· being is shown the follies and vices of man so as to teach him to •guard prudently against the common casualties of life by •sacrificing his heart—that's the wisdom of this world, contrasted with the nobler fruit of piety and experience.

·THE BELIEF IN LIFE AFTER DEATH: ITS EFFECTS ON OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS·

I will venture a paradox. . . .: if men were born only to form a circle of life and death, it would be wise to take every possible step to make life happy. Moderation in every pursuit would then be supreme wisdom; and the prudent voluptuary [= 'the sexually energetic person who takes care of his own interests'] might enjoy a degree of contentment although he didn't cultivate his understanding or keep his heart pure. If we were

mortal, prudence would be true wisdom; or, to put the point more explicitly, prudence would yield the greatest portion of happiness, considering the whole of life; but knowledge about anything other than the conveniences of life would be a curse, ·or at any rate the pursuit of it would be a curse, as I now proceed to explain·.

Why should we injure our health by close study? The exalted pleasure that intellectual pursuits provide would hardly compensate for the hours of exhaustion that follow, especially if we take into account the doubts and disappointments that cloud our researches. Every inquiry ends with empty hands and annoyance, because the cause that we particularly wanted to discover recedes before us as we advance, like the horizon. . . . Yet, disappointed as we are in our researches, the mind is strengthened through exercise, perhaps becoming strong enough to comprehend the answers which, at another stage of existence, it may receive to the anxious questions it asked ·back in its earthly life· when the understanding with feeble wing was fluttering round the visible effects ·and hoping· to dive into the hidden cause.

The passions also, the winds of life, would be useless or even harmful if the substance that composes our thinking being died with our bodies. The appetites would meet all our earthly needs and would produce more moderate and permanent happiness ·than our passions do·. But the powers of the soul

that are of little use in this life, and probably disturb our animal pleasures even while conscious dignity makes us glory in having them,

prove that ·this· life is merely an education, a state of infancy, to which the only hopes worth cherishing should not be sacrificed. The conclusion I draw from this is that we ought to have a precise idea of what we want to attain by education. •The immortality of the soul is contradicted

by the ·educational· activities of many people who firmly announce that they believe in •it!

If what you primarily want ·for your child· is ease and prosperity on earth, leaving the after-life to provide for itself, then you are acting prudently in giving your child an early insight into the weaknesses of human nature. You may not turn him into a vicious scoundrel, but don't think that he will stick to more than the letter of the law after taking in at a very early age a view of human nature as very low-down; nor will he think he needs to rise much above the common standard. He may avoid gross vices, because 'honesty is the best policy', but he will never aim at attaining great virtues. The example of writers and artists will illustrate this remark.

'It is always wise to regulate one's passions'—this has been thought to be an axiom in morals, but I think it is a dogmatic assertion made by men who have coolly seen mankind through the medium of books. And I don't believe it: I say in direct contradiction to it that the regulation of the passions is *not* always wisdom. On the contrary, one reason why men have better judgment and more endurance than women is that they give a freer scope to the grand passions, and by more frequently going astray they enlarge their minds. If then their use of their own reason leads them to settle on some stable principle, they have probably to thank the force of their passions •nourished by *false* views of life and permitted to jump across the boundary that guarantees contentment. If at the start of life we could soberly survey the scenes before us as . . . and see everything in its true colours, how could the passions get enough strength to unfold the faculties?

Let me now, as from a mountain-top, survey the world stripped of its false delusive charms. The clear atmosphere lets me to see each object in its true point of view, and I have no passions. I am as calm as the prospect on a morning

when the mists are slowly dispersing and silently unveiling the beauties of nature, refreshed by rest.

What will the world look like now? I rub my eyes and think perhaps that I am just awaking from a lively dream.

I see the sons and daughters of men pursuing shadows, and anxiously squandering their powers to feed passions that have no adequate object. . . .

[In case you are interested, that last ellipsis replaces the words:

—if the very excess of these blind impulses pampered by that lying, yet constantly-trusted guide, the imagination, did not, by preparing them for some other state, render short sighted mortals wiser without their own concurrence; or, what comes to the same thing, when they were pursuing some imaginary present good.

The two pages on the view from the mountain-top have a lot of that sort of obscurity, and are omitted from this version except for the striking half-sentence with which they end:] . . . the governing passion implanted in us by the Author of all good, to call forth and strengthen the faculties of each individual, and enable it to attain all the experience that an infant can obtain, who does certain things, it cannot tell why.

I descend from my mountain-top, and mixing with my fellow creatures I feel myself being hurried along the common stream; ambition, love, hope, and fear exert their usual power, although we are convinced by reason that their present and most attractive promises are only lying dreams. But if the cold hand of circumspection [= 'cautiously looking around'] had damped each warm feeling before it had left any permanent mark or fixed some habit, what could be expected other than selfish prudence and reason barely rising above instinct? Anyone who has read with a philosophical eye Dean Swift's disgusting description of the Yahoos, and his insipid account of the Houyhnhnms, must see the futility of degrading the passions or making man settle for being merely contented.

The youth should *act*. If he had the experience of a grey head, he would be fitter for death than life; his virtues, residing in his head rather than his heart, could produce nothing great; and his understanding, prepared for •this world, wouldn't embark on noble flights showing that it had a right to •a better world.

Besides, you can't give a young person a just view of life; he must have struggled with his own passions before he can estimate the force of the temptation that betrayed his brother into vice. Those who are entering life see the world from such a different point of view from that of those who are departing that they can seldom think alike, unless the unfledged reason of the former never attempted a solitary flight.

When we hear of some daring crime, it comes full upon us in the deepest shade of wickedness and raises our indignation; but the eye that saw the darkness gradually thicken—i.e. saw the psychological process that led to the commission of the crime—must observe it with more compassionate forbearance. The world can't be seen by an unmoved spectator: we must mix in the throng, and feel as men feel, before we can judge of their feelings. In short, if we mean to live in the world in order to grow wiser and better, and not merely to enjoy the good things of life, we must acquire a knowledge of others at the same time that we become acquainted with ourselves—knowledge acquired any other way only hardens the heart and puzzles the understanding.

I may be told that knowledge acquired in this way is sometimes purchased at too high a price. I can only answer that I very much doubt whether any knowledge can be acquired without labour and sorrow; and those who wish to spare their children both shouldn't complain if they are neither wise nor virtuous. All the parents aimed at was to

make their children prudent; and prudence, early in life, is simply the cautious craft of ignorant self-love. I have observed that young people to whose education particular attention has been paid have usually been very superficial and conceited, and far from pleasing in any respect; that is because they had neither the unsuspecting warmth of youth nor the cool depth of age. I can't help thinking that the main cause of this unnatural condition is the hasty premature instruction that leads them to repeat, confidently, all the crude notions they have taken on trust, so that the careful education they have been given makes them life-long slaves of prejudices. . . .

[MW now offers a couple of pages on prejudices, which she takes to be beliefs of long-standing that are held by people who have no reasons for them. This is aimed at theorists—she mentions Burke—who defend certain principles on the grounds that they are of great antiquity. She closes the chapter with a brief restatement of her basic view about education, followed by some remarks on religion:]

The senses and the imagination give a form to the character during childhood and youth; and in later years the understanding gives firmness to the first fair purposes of sensibility—until virtue, arising from the clear conviction of reason rather than the impulse of the heart, creates a morality that stands on a rock against which the storms of passion beat in vain.

I hope I shan't be misunderstood when I say that religion won't have this condensing energy—giving firmness, establishing a rock—unless it is based on reason. If it is merely the refuge of weakness or wild fanaticism, and not a governing principle of conduct drawn from self-knowledge and a rational belief about the attributes of God, what can it be expected to produce? The 'religion' that consists in warming the affections and exalting the imagination is only

the poetical part of religion; it may give pleasure to the individual, but it won't make him or her a more moral being. It may be a substitute for worldly pursuits, but it is no good because it narrows the heart instead of enlarging it. Virtue must be loved as something inherently sublime and excellent, and not for the advantages it brings or the evils it averts, if any great degree of excellence be expected. Men will not become moral when they only build airy castles in a future world to compensate for the disappointments that

they meet with in this world—turning their thoughts from relative duties to religious daydreams.

Most prospects in life are harmed by the shuffling worldly wisdom of men who try to blend contradictory things, forgetting that they *can't* serve God and mammon. If you want to make your son rich, pursue one course; if all you care about is making him virtuous, you must take another; but don't imagine that you can jump across from one road to the other without losing your way.

## Chapter 6: The effect that an early association of ideas has on the character

Educated in the enervating style recommended by the writers I have been criticising, and being deprived by their subordinate social status from recovering their lost ground, is it surprising that women everywhere appear to be a defect in nature? When we consider what a definite effect an early association of ideas has on the character, is it surprising that women neglect their understandings and turn all their attention to their persons? [see Glossary]

Storing the mind with knowledge naturally brings great advantages, as is obvious from the following considerations. The association of our ideas is either habitual or instantaneous; and instantaneous association seems to depend on the mind's original temperature [MW's word] rather than on the will. When the ideas and matters of fact are once taken in, they are stored for subsequent use, until some chance happening makes the information dart into the mind

with illustrative force—this being information that has been received at very different periods of our lives. Many recollections are like lightning: one idea assimilates and explains another, with astonishing rapidity. I am not now talking about the quick perception of truth which is so intuitive that it baffles research, and leaves us at a loss to discover whether what has opened the dark cloud is •reminiscence or •thinking which we don't detect because of its speed. Over *those* instantaneous associations we have little power: when the mind is enriched in some way, the raw materials will to some extent *arrange themselves*. The understanding, it is true, may keep us from going out of drawing when we group our thoughts, or transcribe from the imagination the warm sketches of fancy; but the •animal spirits [see Glossary], the individual character, give the colouring. We have little power over this •superfine electric fluid, and our reason has

little control over that power! These fine intractable spirits appear to be the essence of genius, and shining in its eagle eye they produce in the highest degree the happy energy of associating thoughts that surprise, delight, and instruct. These are the glowing minds that concentrate pictures for their fellow-creatures, forcing them to take an interest in objects reflected from the impassioned imagination—objects that they hadn't attended to in nature.

Let me explain. Most people cannot see or feel *poetically*; they lack imagination, so they fly from solitude in search of objects they can sense; but when an author lends them his eyes, they can see as he saw, and be entertained by images that they couldn't select for themselves, although they were lying before them.

Education thus only supplies the man of genius with knowledge to give variety and contrast to his associations; but there is an habitual association of ideas that develops along with us, and has a great effect on the moral character of mankind. Such associations give the mind a slant that commonly remains throughout life. So ductile is the understanding, and yet so stubborn, that the associations that depend on chance happenings before the body arrives at maturity can seldom be disentangled by reason. One idea calls up another, its old associate, and memory—faithful to the first impressions, especially when the intellectual powers are not employed to cool our sensations—retraces them with mechanical exactness.

This habitual slavery to first impressions has a more harmful effect on the female character than on the male, because business and other dry employments of the understanding tend to deaden the feelings and break associations that do violence to reason. But females—who are •turned into women when they are mere children, and •brought back to childhood when they ought to leave the go-cart

forever—haven't enough strength of mind to erase the overlay of *art* that has smothered *nature*.

Everything they see or hear serves to fix impressions, call up emotions, and link ideas, giving the mind its feminine character. . . . And the first idea-associations that are forced on them by every surrounding object are allowed to run wild instead of being examined. •Given how females are educated, how could they attain the vigour that is needed to be able to throw off their factitious character [= 'free themselves from the character-traits that have been *constructed* for them']? Where could they find the strength to resort to reason and rise above a system of oppression that blasts the fair promises of spring? This cruel association of ideas, which everything conspires to twist into all their habits of thinking (or, more accurately, of feeling) receives new force when they begin to act a little for themselves; for that's when they see that their only route to pleasure and power is through their skill in arousing emotions in men. Besides, the first impressions on their minds come from •books that offer to instruct them, and •they all teach the same lessons. It is unreasonable as well as cruel to scold women for faults that they—educated as they are in worse-than-Egyptian bondage—can hardly avoid, unless there are some who have a degree of native vigour that very few among mankind are blessed with. [The idea is that *native* vigour would be built into the person's constitution, making it safe from being undermined by education.]

For instance, the severest sarcasms have been levelled against the •female sex, ridiculing them for repeating 'a set of phrases learnt by rote' [Swift] when nothing could be more natural, considering •the education they receive, and •the widespread opinion that their 'highest praise is to obey, unargued' [Milton] the will of man. If they aren't allowed to have enough reason to govern their own conduct then of course everything they learn must be learned by rote!

And when they are led to spend all their ingenuity on their clothes, 'a passion for a scarlet coat' [Swift] is so natural that it never surprises me; and supposing that Pope's summary of their character is just, namely 'that every woman is at heart a rake', why should they be bitterly censured for seeking a congenial companion and preferring a rake to a man of sense? [A rake is a person—usually a man—whose way of living is stylish and fashionable but also morally lax and dissolute.]

Rakes know how to work on women's feelings, while the modest merit of reasonable men has less effect on their feelings and can't reach their heart via the understanding, because they—men and women—have few sentiments in common.

It seems a little absurd to deny women the uncontrolled use of their reason while still expecting them to be more reasonable than men in their *likings*. When do men *fall in love* with sense? When do they, with their superior powers and advantages, turn from the person to the mind? And how can they then expect women, who are only taught to observe behaviour and to acquire manners rather than morals, to despise what they have spent their lives struggling to acquire? Where are they suddenly to find judgment enough to weigh patiently the sense of an awkward virtuous man, when. . . his conversation is cold and dull because it doesn't consist of pretty repartees or well-turned compliments? In order to admire or esteem anything for long, we must at least have our curiosity aroused by knowing something about it; we can't estimate the value of qualities and virtues that are above our comprehension. When such a respect is felt, it may be very sublime; and the admirer's confused feeling of humility may have some tendency to draw people to her; but human love must also have cruder ingredients, and the woman's person very naturally will come in for its share—and what a big share it usually is!

Love is to a large extent an arbitrary passion, and—like some other stalking mischiefs—it will reign by its own authority, without bringing in reason; and it's easy to distinguish love from esteem—the foundation of friendship—because love is often aroused by fleeting beauties and graces; though love won't have much energy unless something more solid deepens the impression made by those beauties and graces, setting the imagination to work to make the loveliest the best.

Common passions are aroused by common qualities. Men look for beauty and the simper of good-humoured docility; women are captivated by easy manners—a gentlemanly man seldom fails to please them, and their thirsty ears eagerly drink in the suggestive nothings of politeness, while they turn away from the unintelligible sounds of the other charmer—reason—however wisely he produces his charm. When it comes to superficial accomplishments, the rake certainly has the advantage; and females can form an opinion about these because this is their own ground. Rendered gay and giddy by the whole tenor of their lives, the very look of wisdom or of the severe graces of virtue must strike them as gloomy, and produce a kind of restraint from which they and the playful child *love* naturally revolt. Without taste. . . ., which is the offspring of judgment, how can they discover that true beauty and grace must arise from the play of the mind? and how can they be expected to enjoy in a lover something that they so very imperfectly possess themselves? The sympathy that unites hearts and invites to confidence is so very faint in them that it can't catch fire and thus rise to the level of passion. No, I repeat it, the love cherished by such minds must have cruder fuel!

The conclusion is obvious: until women are led to exercise their understandings, they shouldn't be satirised for their attachment to rakes; nor even for being rakes at heart them-

selves, when that seems to be the inevitable consequence of their education. Those who live to please must find their enjoyments, their happiness, in pleasure! We never do anything well unless we love it for its own sake—a trite remark, but a true one.

Pretend for a moment that at some future time women will become what I sincerely wish them to be. Then love will acquire a more serious dignity, and be purified in its own fires; and because virtue will give true delicacy to women's affections they will turn with disgust from a rake. When that time comes they will •reason as well as •feel—whereas feeling is all they can do at present—so that it will be easy for them to guard against surface graces, and learn to despise •the sensibility that had been aroused in the ways of women and then grown stale there, the sensibility whose trade is vice; and •allurement's wanton airs. They will recollect that the flame. . . .they wanted to light up has been exhausted by lust, and that the sated appetite, losing all taste for pure and simple pleasures, can be aroused only by licentious arts of variety. What satisfaction could a woman of delicacy promise herself in a union with such a man, when the very artlessness [here = 'sincerity'] of her affection might appear insipid? . . . One grand truth women haven't yet learned, though it would do them a lot of good if they acted on it, namely: In the choice of a husband they should not be led astray by the qualities of a lover—because a husband, even a wise and virtuous one, can't remain a lover for long.

If women were more rationally educated and could take a more comprehensive view of things, they would be content to love only once in their lives; and after marriage calmly let passion subside into friendship—into that tender intimacy which is the best refuge from care. Friendship is built on such pure, calm affections that idle jealousies aren't allowed to •disturb the performance of the sober duties of life or •take up thoughts that ought to be otherwise employed. This is a state in which many men live, but *very* few women. It is easy to explain this difference without recurring to a sexual character [i.e. without supposing that there are basic, natural psychological differences between the sexes]. [MW devotes the final two pages of this chapter to the explanation in question. It doesn't add any content to things she has said already, except for this sad footnote about the fate of those 'who have not sufficient mind to be amused by innocent pleasure' and who, for one reason or another, have withdrawn from the scene of *uninnocent* pleasure:]

I have frequently seen this exemplified in women whose beauty could no longer be repaired. They have retired from the noisy scenes of dissipation; but, unless they became Methodists, the solitude of the select society of their family connections or acquaintance has presented only a fearful void; consequently nervous complaints and all the vapourish train of idleness rendered them quite as useless as, and far more unhappy than, they were when they joined the giddy throng.

## Chapter 7: Modesty comprehensively considered and not as a sexual virtue

Modesty! Sacred offspring of sensibility and reason!—true delicacy of mind! I hope you won't blame me if I investigate your nature and track to its lair the mild charm, the mellowing of each harsh feature of a character, that makes *lovely* something that would otherwise only inspire cold admiration. You who smooth wisdom's wrinkles and soften the tone of the more elevated virtues until they all melt into humanity! You who spread the ethereal cloud that encircles love and heightens every beauty that it half-shades. . . . Modulate for me the language of persuasive reason until I rouse my sex from the flowery bed on which they supinely sleep life away! [MW is here asking modesty to be with her, so that the reasoning she is going to present to the female sex will be found acceptable.]

. . . .In defining modesty we should distinguish these two:

- (1) The purity of mind that is an effect of chastity;
- (2) a simplicity of character that leads us to form a just opinion of ourselves, equally distant from vanity or presumption, but compatible with a lofty awareness of our own dignity.

Modesty in sense (2) is the soberness of mind that teaches a man not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think. It should be distinguished from humility, because humility is a kind of self-abasement. A modest man often conceives a great plan, and tenaciously sticks to it, conscious of his own strength, until it is crowned with success. Milton was not arrogant when he let slip a judgment that proved to be a prophesy; nor was General Washington arrogant when he accepted of the command of the American forces.

[When Milton was 17 years old, someone told him he would some day be famous, and Milton agreed. When Washington was called to lead

the revolutionary army in the American war of independence, he firmly declared that he was not good enough for the job.] Washington has always been described as a modest man; but if he had been merely *humble* he would probably have shrunk back, afraid of trusting to himself the direction of an enterprise on which so much depended.

A modest man is steady, a humble man is timid, and a vain one is presumptuous—or so my observation of many characters has led me to believe. Jesus Christ was modest, Moses was humble, and the apostle Peter was vain.

Modesty is different not only from humility but also from bashfulness. Bashfulness is so distinct from modesty, indeed, that the most bashful lass or raw country lout often becomes the most impudent; for their bashfulness is merely the instinctive timidity of ignorance, and custom soon changes it into assurance.

·A BIT OF VERSE THAT MW PUT INTO A FOOTNOTE HERE·

Such is the country-maiden's fright,  
When first a red-coat is in sight;  
Behind the door she hides her face,  
Next time at distance eyes the lace:  
She now can all his terrors stand,  
Nor from his squeeze withdraws her hand,  
She plays familiar in his arms,  
And every soldier hath his charms;  
From tent to tent she spreads her flame;  
For custom conquers fear and shame.

(John Gay, 'The Tame Stag')

The shameless behaviour of the prostitutes who infest the

streets of London, causing alternate emotions of pity and disgust, illustrate this remark. They trample on virgin bashfulness with a sort of bravado, and glorying in their shame they become more audaciously lewd than men. . . . ever appear to be. But these poor ignorant wretches never had any modesty to lose when they consigned themselves to infamy; for modesty is a virtue, not a quality. No, they were only bashful, shame-faced innocents; and when they lost their innocence their shame-facedness was roughly brushed off; whereas a *virtue*, if sacrificed to passion, would have left some traces in the mind to make us respect the grand ruin.

Purity of mind—i.e. the genuine delicacy that is the only virtuous support of chastity—is near kin to the refinement of humanity that resides only in cultivated minds. It is something nobler than innocence; it is the delicacy of reflection, and not the coyness of ignorance. The reservedness of reason—which like habitual cleanliness is seldom seen in any great degree unless the soul is active—can easily be distinguished from rustic shyness or wanton skittishness; and far from being incompatible with knowledge, it is its fairest fruit. Someone who wrote this had a gross idea of modesty:

The lady who asked ‘Can women be instructed in the modern system of botany, consistently with female delicacy?’ was accused of ridiculous prudery; but if she had asked me I would certainly have answered ‘No, they cannot’.

Thus is the fair book of knowledge to be shut with an everlasting seal! On reading things like that I have reverentially

lifted up my eyes and heart to God and said, ‘O my Father, have you by the very constitution of my nature forbidden me to seek you in the fair forms of truth?’ . . . .

A woman who has dedicated much of her time to purely intellectual pursuits, and whose affections have been exercised by humane plans of usefulness, must as a natural consequence have more purity of mind than the ignorant beings whose time and thoughts have been occupied by gay pleasures or schemes to conquer hearts.<sup>10</sup> The regulation of one’s behaviour is not modesty, though those who carefully obey rules of decorum are generally described as ‘modest women’. Make the heart clean, let it expand and feel for everything human instead of being narrowed by selfish passions; and let the mind frequently contemplate subjects that exercise the understanding without heating the imagination; and artless modesty will give the finishing touches to the picture.

Anyone who sees herself as immortal [see Glossary] will respect, as a sacred temple, the body that enshrines such an improvable soul. True love also spreads this kind of mysterious sanctity around the beloved object, making the lover most modest when in her presence. . . .

As a sex, women are more chaste than men, and as modesty is the effect of chastity they may deserve to have this virtue—modesty—ascribed to them. . . ., but I must be allowed to add a hesitating *if*, revising the above statement to ‘*If* modesty is the effect of chastity. . . .’; because I am not sure whether chastity *will* produce •modesty, though it may produce •propriety of conduct, when it is merely a respect

<sup>10</sup> I have conversed with medical men on anatomical subjects, conversing as man with man; and I have discussed the proportions of the human body with •male• artists; but I met with such modesty that I was never reminded by word or look of •my sex or of •the absurd rules that make modesty a pharisaical cloak for weakness. And I am convinced that in the pursuit of knowledge women would never be insulted by sensible men—and rarely by men of any description—if they didn’t by mock modesty remind them that they were women. . . . Men are not always men in the company of women; and women wouldn’t always remember that they are women if they were allowed to acquire more understanding.

for the opinion of the world. (The immodest behaviour of many married women who are nevertheless faithful to their husbands' beds will illustrate this remark). . . . Indeed, my experience and my reason lead me to expect to find more modesty among men than among women, simply because men exercise their understandings more than women do.

But when it comes to propriety of behaviour, women obviously have the advantage (except for one class of females). What can be more disgusting than that impudent dross of 'gallantry', thought to be so manly, which makes many men stare insultingly at every female they meet? Is this respect for the female sex? No. This loose behaviour shows such habitual depravity, such weakness of mind, that we can't expect to see much public or private virtue until both men and women grow more modest. . . .and treat each other with more respect—I mean the modest respect of humanity and fellow-feeling, not the libidinous mockery of gallantry or the insolent condescension of protectorship.

The sexual distinction respecting modesty is carried still further, and woman—weak woman!—whose education has made her the slave of sensibility, is required on the most difficult occasions to resist that sensibility. 'Can anything', says Knox, 'be more absurd than keeping women in a state of ignorance, and yet vehemently insisting that they resist temptation?' Thus, when virtue or honour make it proper to check a passion, the burden is thrown on the weaker shoulders, contrary to reason and true modesty which should at least make the self-denial mutual. . . .

When men boast of their victories over women, what are they boasting of? Truly the creature of sensibility was surprised by her sensibility into folly—into vice; and the dreadful reckoning falls heavily on her own weak head, when reason wakes. Where will you find comfort, forlorn and disconsolate one? The man who ought to have directed your reason and supported your weakness has betrayed you! In a dream of passion you consented to wander through flowery lawns and, carelessly stepping over the precipice to which your 'guide' lured you, you awake from your dream and find yourself faced by a sneering, frowning world. You are alone in a wasteland, for the man who triumphed in your weakness is now pursuing new conquests; but for you there is no redemption on this side the grave! . . .

But if the sexes are really to live in a state of warfare—if that's what nature has indicated—then let men act nobly, or let pride whisper to them that when they merely conquer sensibility that is a tawdry victory. The real conquest is that over affection not taken by surprise—when like Héloïse a woman deliberately gives up all the world for love. I am not discussing the wisdom or virtue of such a sacrifice; I merely contend that it was a sacrifice to affection and not merely to sensibility, though she had her share of that. I call her a modest woman. . . .

Now for another view of the subject, this time purely about women.

Mistaken notions of modesty lead people to tell children ridiculous falsehoods<sup>11</sup> that tend very early to inflame their

<sup>11</sup> Children very early see cats with their kittens, birds with their young, etc. Then why shouldn't they be told that *their* mothers carry and nourish them in the same way? As there would then be no appearance of mystery, they wouldn't give any more thought to the subject. Truth can always be told to children if it is told gravely; but it is *the immodesty of affected modesty* that does all the harm—it is a smoke that vainly tries to obscure certain objects but only succeeds in heating the imagination. If indeed children could be kept entirely from improper company, we need never talk to them about such subjects; but as this is impossible, it is best to tell them the truth, especially as such information won't impress itself on their imaginations because they won't be much interested in it.

imaginations and set their little minds to work on topics that nature never intended them to think about until their bodies arrived at •some degree of maturity. At •that stage, the passions naturally begin to take place of the senses as instruments to unfold the understanding and form the moral character.

Girls are first spoiled in nurseries and boarding schools, especially the latter. A number of girls sleep in the same room, and wash together. I wouldn't want to contaminate an innocent creature's mind by instilling false delicacy, or the indecent prudish notions that naturally arise from early cautions regarding the other sex; but I would be very anxious to prevent their acquiring indelicate or immodest habits; and as many girls have learned very indelicate tricks from ignorant servants, it is very improper to mix the girls in this indiscriminate way.

The fact is that women are in general too familiar with each other, which leads to that gross degree of familiarity that so frequently renders the marriage state unhappy. Why are sisters, female intimates, or ladies and their waiting women so grossly familiar as to forget the respect that one human creature owes to another? The squeamish delicacy that shrinks from the most disgusting offices—helping with urination and defecation—when affection or humanity lead us to care for a sick person is despicable. But why are healthy women more familiar with each other than men are, when they (the women) boast of their greater 'delicacy'? I have never been able to answer this.

In order to preserve health and beauty I earnestly recommend frequent ablutions (I'm putting this in words that won't offend the fastidious ear); and girls ought to be taught to wash and dress alone; and if they need some little assistance, they shouldn't ask for it until they have finished that part of the business that ought never to be done before a fellow-

creature because it is an insult to the majesty of human nature. Not because of modesty, but because of *decency*. . . .

[This is followed by about two pages on the subject of women's tendency to be too 'familiar' with one another, lacking in 'reserve' in a way that leads to talk and actions that are 'disgusting'. MW continues:] You may think that I am laying too great a stress on personal reserve; but it is always the hand-maid of modesty. If I were asked 'What are the graces that ought to adorn beauty?' I would immediately exclaim •cleanliness, •neatness, and •personal reserve. I hope it is obvious that the reserve I am talking about is equally necessary in both sexes. . . .

[This modulates into a couple of pages on the importance of being clean, neatly dressed, brisk in manner. Among other things, MW reports that she has 'often felt hurt, not to say disgusted' when a friend she has arranged to meet in the morning shows up in a state showing that she had stayed in bed until the last possible moment. Eventually she works her way back to the announced topic of this chapter:]

I need hardly add that I consider as *immodest* all those airs of grown women. . . .to which truth is sacrificed, to secure the heart of a husband or rather to force him to be still a lover when nature (if left alone) would have replaced love by friendship. The tenderness that a man will feel for the mother of his children is an excellent substitute for the ardour of unsatisfied passion; but it is indelicate, not to say immodest, for a woman to prolong that ardour by feigning an unnatural coldness of constitution. [This is one of several places where MW implies that a man's wish for sexual relations with his partner can be intensified by her pretending not to be interested.] Women as well as men ought to have the common appetites and passions of their nature; they are animal-like only when not controlled by reason; but the obligation to control them is the duty of mankind, not of one sex rather than the

other. In these respects, nature can safely be left to itself; let women acquire knowledge and humanity, and love will teach them modesty. There is no need for disgusting and futile falsehoods, because calculated rules of behaviour impose only on shallow observers; a man of sense soon sees through such an affectation and despises it. . . .

My sisters. if you really want to possess modesty, you must remember that the possession of *any* virtue is incompatible with ignorance and vanity! You must acquire the soberness of mind that can only come from the performance

of duties and the pursuit of knowledge; without it, you will remain in a doubtful dependent situation, and you will be loved only while you are beautiful! The downcast eye, the rosy blush, the retiring grace, are all proper in their season; but modesty is the child of reason, and can't co-exist for long with the sensibility that is not tempered by reflection. Besides, if you devote your lives to love, even innocent love, your hearts will be too soft to provide for modesty the tranquil retreat where she delights to dwell in close union with humanity.