

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Written by W.J.Pais

By: [Mary Wollstonecraft](#) (1759-1797)

Regarded as the one of the earliest examples of feminist philosophy, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is written as a direct response to Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, a French politician who delivered a report to the French National Assembly suggesting that women should only receive domestic education and additionally encourages women to stay clear of political affairs. In her treatise, Wollstonecraft avidly criticizes this inadequate perception of women as an inferior sex and attacks social inequality, while also arguing for women's rights in the hope of redefining their position both in society and in marriage. Exploring themes of oppression, feminism, social reforms, education, sensibility, reason, and marriage, Wollstonecraft successfully sets the foundation for liberal feminism which had later inspired many to express their support.

Published in 1792, the piece begins with Wollstonecraft's argument that the power of reason is what places humans above all other forms of natural life, and this position is further reinforced by virtue and morality, and finally secured with the accumulation of knowledge. So, she believes that the key to happiness lies in the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge exercised within society. Furthermore, this allows Wollstonecraft to express the notion that women are not naturally inferior to men, but instead this invalid perception is a direct outcome triggered by society's failure to employ reason and properly educate women. Subsequently, she illustrates the ways in which women's position in society is obstructed from early on in life, as they are encouraged to care for superficial attributes, surrender themselves to sensibility, and tend to their husband's every need. Consequently, they are prevented from developing the ability to become autonomous members of society. In addition she expresses her belief that women should be equal in marriage and viewed as companions through life, rather than serve the sole purpose of pleasing their husbands and serving as decorative ornaments in society.

Needless to say, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is an influential and highly valuable piece in the history of feminist theory and activism, as it vividly portrays the political and social scene of the 18th century and marks the first step to the emancipation of women.

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