AMERICAN WOMEN'S INTELLECTUAL HISTORY IN THE
REVOLUTIONARY AND NEW REPUBLICAN ERA:

Charting a Shift in Feminist Theory

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This paper is a study of American women's intellectual history in the period 1770-1815. My aim is to develop a coherent conception of women's moral point of view as it is presented in prescriptive literature, political tracts, and women's own writing. Because of the nature of my goal, I will attempt to glean women's ideas out of the extant primary source material of this period. As the aim of this study implies the existence of a prescribed point of view which women were to share, I will use numerous examples from the genre of prescriptive literature.

Unlike our world of today in which men and women are generally considered more alike than different, men and women of the late eighteenth century were thought to be different and complementary. I will use arguments about women's and men's education and economic lives to demonstrate the existence of large discrepancies between their roles in the last half of the eighteenth century in addition to the large differences which the authors of prescriptive literature described.

My basic premise is that women's and men's intellectual and moral points of view were shaped by their daily lives and by society's expectations of them, and, therefore, by their own expectations of themselves. I do not claim to be able to address the question of a male point of view. It is a fact, especially in these years of revolution and change, that men's lives were much more varied than women's lives. Because the sphere of women's role was more narrowly defined, it is possible to discover within this sphere outlines of
a prescribed and coherent woman moral point of view. Further, I will address the question of the division between what women were instructed to think and feel and what they actually felt and thought.

Many women in the late eighteenth century may have shared a viewpoint, but they did not necessarily articulate it. It was a synergistic combination of many historical influences and the specific ways which they affected women: the Enlightenment, Christianity, the Scientific Revolution, the world situation of revolution, the still great influence of Classical antiquity. In addition to the immense level of intellectual ferment, women were influenced and defined through popular culture including novels and "how-to" non-fiction articles and books.

The description of women as portrayed in the prescriptive literature was not an accurate description of women in the eighteenth century, but it was a symptom of the mood of the country. I will show that in the last third of the eighteenth century, the young nation was undergoing a period of transition, and these changes directly affected how women were to behave and what women were to be like.

One of the primary concerns of the Europeans who sailed to America in the seventeenth century and the Colonists who fought the American Revolution was their preoccupation with virtue. The former believed that religion was becoming corrupted in the Old World, and the latter believed that the British form of mixed government was becoming corrupted by the government ministers.
The Americans wanted so desperately to retain their virtuousness, yet many things seemed to be working against them. They were attempting to put into practice significantly altered economic and political forms than what they had experienced in Britain. These experiments created both opportunities and problems, but most importantly, they created uncertainty.

I will argue that a symptom of this uncertainty for the virtue of the young republic was the popularity and generation of large numbers of books of the prescriptive genre. This type of literature located the virtuousness of the country in women and women's role. Women were said to be the repository and guardians of virtue for the nation. Men, too, were advised to be virtuous, but ultimately the responsibility rested with women. Although the genre of prescriptive literature was not created in America, its immense popularity is a symptom of the hesitancy in the mood of the country.

Throughout the history of feminist theory, two interwoven perspectives may be identified and untangled from one another. In its pure form the one perspective stresses the equality of the sexes; such an argument is based on women's possession of rationality. Historically, feminist theorists have used this line of thought to support the causes of equal legal rights of the sexes and women's suffrage. This type of argument is well-suited to support plans for institutional change.

A second perspective of feminist theory acknowledges and values differences between women and men. When arguing this line of thought, theorists
identify qualities such as a highly developed morality which are peculiar to women or are present in women to a higher degree than in men. Feminists arguing this tack in its pure form are especially concerned that women achieve individual autonomy and the ability to carry out their own decisions. One method to obtain autonomy as described by theorists is the formation and strengthening of a community of women.

The first perspective of feminist theory I shall call the 'equality perspective,' the second I shall call the 'valuing perspective.' Many feminist theorists seem to fit into one or the other category. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton seems to be a dimension of the equality perspective, while Margaret Fuller and Charlotte Perkins Gilman seem to be dimensions of the valuing perspective. Some theorists, Emma Goldman for instance, seem to defy this type of categorization. Most theorists tend to integrate both perspectives while being a stronger proponent of one or the other.

My aim in presenting this particular conceptualization of feminist theorists is to chart and describe a shift from the valuing perspective to the equality perspective in the time period I am studying. I will attempt to demonstrate the pervasiveness throughout the period 1770-1815 of the feminist ideology I am titling the valuing perspective. The literature primarily revolved around identifying and explaining the special characteristics peculiar to women. Women considered themselves and were considered by men as complementary beings by virtue of their sex and the concomitant characteristics of the nature of their sex. In writings focusing on American women in
the late eighteenth century, the valuing perspective of feminist theory was implied or emphasized while the equality perspective was not invoked.

Mary Wollstonecraft's classic feminist tract, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, was published in London in 1791. The following year it was available in America. Wollstonecraft's book was the first full-blown statement of the equality perspective of feminist thought. She argued that women's and men's souls are equal before God, and therefore, the sexes should be treated similarly on earth. She called particularly for equal education. While her argument was anchored on the inherent equality of the sexes, her examples make clear that she thought that women would not participate in society as equals to men if they had the same advantages, but would retain many aspects of their role. By nature women are equal, but through different and unequal nurture women lag behind, Wollstonecraft argued. Finally, I will discuss a book by Charles Brockden Brown which was widely read in the United States after it was published in 1798. *Alcuin: A Dialogue* appears to be a debate between the merits of the valuing perspective versus the equality perspective of feminist theory.

My argument will proceed from defining the valuing feminist ideology in the United States in terms of education, economics, and political theory to defining the equality perspective as proposed by Wollstonecraft and Brown. In the first chapter I will discuss the impact of education on the valuing
ideology. I will argue that education strengthened the force of the valuing perspective. Woman's particular virtues and role were defined in terms of serving others. The Enlightenment education theory as promulgated by John Locke did not affect women and children to a great extent at this time even though it was widely written about and discussed. The Lockean emphasis on learning by experience and the notion of tabula rasa served to strengthen the force of the prescriptive literature because readers were eager to read as much as possible on the best way to raise and educate their children.

In the next chapter I will discuss how women's economic role also contributed to and strengthened the valuing perspective. In a period of transition when the use of markets of supply and demand became much more widespread in the United States, women remained in a pre-modern economic role because they had much less experience with markets and market relations than men did. I also consider how the Enlightenment premises of individuality and rationality which could have profoundly changed the direction of feminist theory were integrated into the valuing perspective of feminist theory. Enlightenment assumptions were eventually used by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1791 to shift feminist arguments to the equality perspective, but this came after the valuing perspective and Enlightenment assumptions had been integrated.

In the final chapter I will consider the complex effect of political theory on feminist theory. I will describe the political legacy of the
Colonists who fought and won the Revolution and discuss how women fit into the contemporary political theory. My aim is to demonstrate that women's role in the politics of the late eighteenth century was an aspect of the valuing perspective of feminist theory. Finally, I discuss two books which defined the shift in feminist theory from the valuing to the equality perspective, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Brown's *Alcuin: A Dialogue*.
Many of the examples I will cite in this paper are from a genre of literature which I am entitling the prescriptive genre. There appears to be an enormous amount of literature written on both sides of the Atlantic in the eighteenth century instructing women how to act. Most of the books and essays were non-fiction "how-to" books which have their roots in bestselling fiction books. My purpose in this paper is to explore the significance and function of the prescriptive literature.

It must first be acknowledged that only 40% of women were literate at the time of the American Revolution.1 This necessarily narrows the influence of the prescriptive genre; however, it was such a pervasive form that one is certainly justified in studying it. It appears that the prescriptive genre was in competition with a profuse amount of romantic literature intended for a female audience. In the eighteenth century literature became an important tool because it could be used either to educate or to corrupt, many people believed. "Indeed," exclaimed James Armstrong Neal in 1795 in an essay on women's education, "the false lustre of a romantic education, has been productive of many evils..."2 On the other hand, according to historian Lillie Losche, Tobias Smollet wrote in Micellaneous Works in 1800:

That branch [novels] of business is now engrossed by female authors who publish merely for the propagation of virtue, with so much ease and spirit, and delicacy, and knowledge of the human heart, and all in the serene tranquility of high life, that the reader is not only enchanted by their gratitude but reformed by their morality.3
Many early American novelists were women; however, the didactic, non-fiction books written for women were primarily by men. The American novels and non-fiction had their roots in books from the 1740's by the British novelists Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. According to Loshe, the themes presented in Richardson's and Fielding's works appeared in American novels. "The influence of Richardson persists rather in subject than in manner," she wrote. "He has contributed the Fascination exerted by tales of seduction, as Fielding has given the nobly devoted wife, who becomes one of the stock figures of the domestic tale."\(^4\)

Books such as Richardson's *Clarissa* were widely read in England and America. In 1784 Nancy Shippen, a young woman of Philadelphia, wrote in her journal what she thought of *Clarissa*:

> Wednesday 7—Very busy all the Morning, & in the Evening alone reading *Clarissa* H. I like it very much, her character is fine & her letters are full of sentiments—I must adopt some of her excellent rules.\(^5\)

On another occasion she wrote, "Read Clarissa Harlowe in the evening. It's a charming book fraught with instruction."\(^6\) It would seem that Richardson's book produced the type of reaction in Nancy Shippen for which it was written.

In his book *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, Jay Fliegelman discusses the results of studies completed by historians of the bestselling books in the Colonies at the time of the American Revolution. In 1772 the bestselling title was Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) while in 1774 it was
Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Adventures of Tristram Shandy* (1760). According to Fliegelman both of these novels were concerned with how best to raise and educate children. Fliegelman cites research of Frank Luther Mott: "The three 'bestsellers' of 1775 were *Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son* (New York: Rivington and Gaine), John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (Philadelphia: Dunlop), and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Gaine)." The first two were didactic works with the purpose of instructing children how to act and parents how to raise their children. Defoe's book was expressly for children and constituted what Rousseau called a natural education for a child.

American women novelists wrote a significant amount of literature in the tradition of the British authors. The genre of prescriptive literature which I will use as examples throughout this paper is a non-fiction, constituted form of the themes presented in the novels of the age. They were works written by teachers, clergymen, and parents who believed in the power of literature and education as tools to inculcate moral behavior.
The point of this chapter is to demonstrate that women were educated solely to serve others. While this may seem almost self-evident, I think the implications of this point are crucial to understanding the contemporary feminist theory. The sexes received qualitatively different types of education. Women as a group received vocational training in the domestic skills and moral training so as to enable them to pass on this education to their children. They served their husbands and children in an intimate manner through their domestic labor. At the same time they saved the Republic by educating their male children who would be the future citizens. Women were not educated in developing their own special skills and talents.

This type of education strengthened what I have described as the valuing perspective of feminist theory. Women's value was measured by their unique traits and "womanly duties." They were praised for being "the fairer sex," for being different than men. Education was a social mechanism which contributed to the popularity of the valuing perspective of feminist theory. Education for women focused on the values of community and on the individual woman in her domestic sphere. The language of rights so prominent in the political theory of the age, was not applicable to discussing womanhood in the context of the valuing perspective of feminist theory.

The effects of the Enlightenment were wide and deep in the late eighteenth century. In an Age of Reason intellectually dominated by men such as Newton, Bacon, and Locke, even women were thought to be subject to the
newly discovered natural laws of education. In an advice book to "young ladies," a woman named Ann Murry draws similarities between the human and non-human worlds. "The intrinsic value of your mind, depends on the care you take to embellish and adorn it. Like the diamond in its natural state, it is unpolished; the one derives its lustre from the skill of the lapidary, the other from education," she wrote. The purpose of education for women as well as men was to develop each individual's natural abilities.

While the purpose of education in the eighteenth century began to focus on particular strengths and weaknesses of individuals in theory, it was not a full-blown theory of individual self-development. Women, particularly, were encouraged to value education for vocational purposes, and not just as a tool for acting properly in high society. Books on women's education emphasized needlework and other domestic arts instead of French and music. "No superiority of rank or fortune should exempt a woman from domestic offices," claimed the Englishman John Burton in Letters on Female Education and Manners.  

In the real world of the eighteenth century, the quickest way for a woman to move into a higher social class was to marry a well-to-do man. The advice given to women in the prescriptive literature of the day attempted to discourage this type of behavior and to encourage using education to better serve one's family in a domestic capacity. It was a reality, however, that for women to move into a higher social class, they needed to participate in what can be called the 'marriage marketplace.' For women to be competitive in this
market, they had to possess social graces and talents such as music and art. If a woman did not have wealth or social status, she could view education as a way to improve her competitive position in the marriage marketplace.

Some authors borrowed the language of constitutional theory so prominent in the period to argue for women's education, but this was only a literary device which implied no support for true individual rights for women. Other writers express women's education as a benefit to the entire society. James Armstrong Neal wrote in An Essay on the Education and Genius of the Female Sex, published in Philadelphia in 1795:

To show, as reflected from a mirror, the dignity, excellence, and intrinsic worth of the Female Mind, is a generous important, and delightful exertion of genius. To direct the Fair Sex in the attainment of useful and ornamental acquirements— to caution against improper, nugatory, and trivial pursuits; and to destroy vulgar prejudices, and errors of every kind, is rendering an essential service to our country.

In this manner women were to have a stake in society. The purpose of education for women was argued for in terms of the universal good, but the central purpose remained domestic in kind and located in the matrix of the family.

If education in the Platonic sense is philosopher-kings arising from the cave into the light of knowledge, then the Enlightenment is an age when the light of knowledge was taken down into the cave for all to view. Even women, though they were considered to be different and complementary to men, were subject to such revolutionary thought about knowledge. This view is suggested by Ann Murray in a book published in 1791 on women's education:
Lady Louisa. Why, my dear Madam, do you compare the sun to our understandings?
Mentoria. For these reasons, they are respectively the most glorious works of the creation, and often shine with resplendence, though they are sometimes obscured by clouds.
Lady Mary. What clouds can possibly affect the mind, and take from it's lustre?
Mentoria. Those of ignorance, prejudice, superstition, and every other quality which makes us deviate from our duty, or impedes our pursuing any laudable purpose.5

This fictitious dialogue between eighteenth century women demonstrates, through the imagery of physics, the widespread influence of the educational theory of the Enlightenment.

The most influential educational theory was that of the British political theorist and philosopher John Locke. While we think of Locke as the major theoretician behind the political paradigm, liberalism, which has controlled American political life from the eighteenth century to the present, Jay Fliegelman points out that many people were familiar with his work on education, but not familiar with his political Treatises.6

Locke's two most distinctive contributions to educational theory were his belief that persons are born with minds that are tabula rasa, or blank pages to be written on, and his description of what is called sensational psychology. The latter contribution focused educational methods on the senses and experiential learning. It can be closely linked contextually with the dominance of Newtonian physics. Both Newton and Locke stressed the pre-eminence of knowledge that was discovered through experience and observation.
The picture which Locke transmitted in his educational philosophy was of a child born with a mind which must be filled through example and influence. The prescriptive literature for women reiterated these same themes:

However mortifying it may be to our pride, we are constrained from experience, to acknowledge with the oriental sage, that man is born like the wild ass's colt, equally ignorant, and much more helpless and wretched ... And were it not for the means of instruction, which a state of civilization affords, the resemblance between him and the foul of an ass, would continue through life.7

Natural man, then, was no better than the animals. It was only through education that this situation could be remedied so that man could rise above the animals to accomplish good in this life. Because nurture was stressed over nature, education became significantly more important for the entire population than it had previously been.

The populizers of Locke placed the greatest emphasis on increasing their reader's awareness of the immense responsibility they had in the lives of their children.8 "Every scene and situation, every object and occurrence, is an instructor and monitor," wrote Reverend Nathan Fiske of Worcester, Massachusetts in 1801.9 If mothers realized their responsibility, the prescriptive literature advised, then they would be likely to act correctly according to the standards held by the proponents of the new education theory. I will delve precisely into what these standards were later in this paper. For the present I would briefly describe them as centering around virtue in the republican sense of doing what is best for one's country and in the familial, moral sense of doing what is best for one's family.
According to Benjamin Rush, one of the most prominent educators of the day, women were to be educated to instruct their sons in liberty and the proper form of government. Linda Kerber explores this point at length in her influential book *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in the Early Republic*. She argues that women invented the concept of "Republican Motherhood" so as to play a role in the newly formed government. Republican Motherhood was women educating male children so they would grow up to become virtuous citizens. Women were said to play a critical, albeit indirect role in the government. Although Kerber's argument is useful, it relies too heavily on the questionable assumption that the new nation's government was built using the unit of a family as a model. In effect, Kerber overstates the motivations of the Republican woman.

The fact that women had the primary responsibility for educating their children in morality and exerting their moral influence over the entire family is confirmed by the literature. In a pamphlet on female obligations and influence, one author wrote that "to mothers, more than to any other human beings, is committed the important business of moulding the intellect and heart of every successive generation." As Kerber suggests, what women taught would affect the moral and political values of the young country.

Although the prescriptive writers concentrated on rationality and the effects of this world, they did not deny the existence and supreme influence of God. In fact they clearly worked God into their theories. "Will it be
extravagant to say, that we are more indebted to education, than to nature?," one minister asked rhetorically. Of course it was not, but the writer explained that the Deity created all things including the way in which humans process knowledge. In the final analysis, advice on girl's education focused primarily on developing moral character through a combination of reason and Christian religion. Madam Livingston advised Nancy Shippen on educating her daughter Peggy:

The greatest external accomplishments can be no counter-balance to art and deception of any kind. Watch over her heart, her morals. Implant the fear and love of God in her tender docile mind. So shall her happiness and your comfort be insured.

As Ruth H. Bloch points out in "American Feminism Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815," Enlightenment rationalists and evangelical Protestants disagreed on many issues, but they agreed on the great influence which mothers had over their children's moral education. Many books encouraged women to use this control to spread Christianity. In a book entitled Women Invited to War by a "daughter of America" published in Boston in 1787, the author claimed that the real enemy was not Britain, it was sin. This book advised women to use their influence to fight the corruption which was spreading. In a pamphlet written in 1818 in Hartford, Connecticut, one author argued that women should use their influence to spread Christianity for the improvement of conditions for their sex. According to this pamphleteer:
Where Jesus Christ and his Gospel are not known women are ignorant and debased, and almost, if not altogether, slaves. They are depressed by the hand of a rough and unsparing despotism. Look at the females of Turkey, of India, and of our Western wilderness.\textsuperscript{17}

The focus of education according to Locke was the infant. Because of his belief in the concept of \textit{tabula rasa}, Locke thought that education begun immediately after birth. The advice books for women picked up on this theme claiming that the earliest impressions were the most durable.\textsuperscript{18} Some writers went so far as to develop pseudo-scientific explanations for this process.

For example in a famous French work translated into English, entitled \textit{Fenelon's Treatise on the Education of Daughters}, the bestselling author wrote, "the brain of children, from being at the same time moist and warm, produces continual motion. This softness or pliancy of the brain causes impressions to be easily made, and images of every sensible object to be vividly and strongly imprinted."\textsuperscript{19}

Advice to women about developing the mind of the child came from many sources. In a letter to his sister dated June 9, 1797, Elihu Hubbard Smith of New York City advised her on how to educate her infant:

Your great object must be to excite an active & persevering curiousity, & to turn it toward natural objects ... According to the ordinary [non-Lockean] process of education, we learn much of books, & little or nothing of nature ... Much depends on our being able to impress the infant mind with an habitual bias to observation & examination. Time will ripen the fruit, which these seeds will produce.\textsuperscript{20}

Smith continued by explaining to his sister that using the mind at all is much better than not using it. In this way the brain is like any muscle;
it must be exercised.

With the rise in the importance of education of children during their early years, children's literature became more defined and more widely available. In *A Critical History of Children's Literature*, Cornelia Meigs writes, "Thanks to Locke, and to Locke's theory and to John Newberry's practice, books for children finally stood on their own feet. Literature for the young was to have its vicissitudes later, but it was never really to go back into the no man's land where it had wandered for three hundred years." The significance of the genre of children's literature was that children were being viewed and treated not just as young adults, but as humans with different needs because they were in a highly impressionable state of their development. In the visual arts children began to be portrayed not as smaller versions of their parents, but as persons with a different type of body and face. A similar change took place in literature in which children were recognized as having needs which could only be met through creating children's literature.

The prescriptive literature also began to advise parents to treat their children as individuals. One writer stressed that a mother should know the individuality of each of her children. Another advised educators to use different methods for different children. "As different disorders, require different remedies, so the careful teacher must administer his instruction in a manner adapted to their several dispositions," James Armstrong Neal
wrote in 1795 in Philadelphia. Instead of fitting children for a specific type of education, many writers expressed the desirability of tailoring education to children's individual needs. Although the Lockean theory of education was being put into practice by some people, it remained for many only a theoretical model. Parents attempted to put Lockean theory into practice, but they did not always succeed as I will discuss below.

Because of the immense influence of Locke's education theory, the relationship between children and their parents was perceived as even more important than it had been previously. In part, education is always a process of instilling parents' and society's values into children. At the end of the eighteenth century new methods were used to facilitate this process. There seem to be three stages of appeals or arguments that parents used so as to ensure that their children accepted their values. The first and most untraditional was predetermined by Locke's theory; the use of reason. In this type of argument, parents appealed to their children's sense of reason by claiming that what was asked of the children by their parents was only reasonable. Arguments of this kind were predicated on the belief that if a child was convinced of the soundness of following his or her parents' instructions then the child's behavior rested on a solid basis which would probably not be swayed.

As one fictional mother's daughter was leaving for boarding school, she advised her to respect the wishes of a Mrs. Bromley who would act as her
guardian while at school:

First of all then, my dear Sophy, let me advise you to obey Mrs. Bromley in every thing she commands. She is a gentle woman of so much good sense, that she will desire you to do nothing but what is reasonable; and, I know, she will explain to you the reasonableness of all her injunctions, where you are able to comprehend it.24

A second argument used was one which stressed the child's self-interest. It was believed that if a child was convinced that she was acting in her own best interest, then she would be more inclined to follow her parent's instructions. One child was told by Jonathan Swift to "beware of despising or neglecting my instructions; whereon will depend not only your making a good figure in the world, but your own real happiness, as well as that of the person who ought to be the dearest to you."25 The arguments from reason and self-interest were untraditional because they treated children as independent decision-makers. The fact that parents and the authors of prescriptive literature believed that it was important to convince a child to accept her parents' values demonstrates the rising status of children in the eighteenth century.

The latter part of the previous quotation illustrates the third type of argument parents made to their children to inculcate their own values. In addition to appealing to reason and self-interest, the advice books written by and for parents encouraged the use of the moral emotion, shame. An argument from shame, which often appeared in the parent/child advice books of the
late eighteenth century was the most traditional of the three arguments. When this argument was used successfully, the child felt shame as a result of being unwilling or unable to act ideally in her parents' eyes. "The passion of shame in the human breast," declared Nathan Fiske of Boston in 1801, "and which, [is] a principle designed for the regulation of conduct, therefore, should be directed and exercised to this end: To excite to that which is fitting and laudable, and to prevent that which is improper and discommendable. To be ashamed of somethings, and to value ourselves upon others, is a quality inherent in human nature." 26

In the case of children's education advice books and advice books for and about women in general, the ideal was spelled out by listing numerous characteristics which girls and women should possess: chastity, modesty, temperance, industry, patience, humility, sensibility, obedience, submissiveness, persuasiveness, softness. Many of the authors discussed each characteristic one by one devoting entire sections to describing how and why a woman should be modest, for example.

In 1777 L. M. Stretch described what the good wife should be like. She characterized her as:

Strictly and conscientiously virtuous, constant and faithful to her husband; chaste, pure, and unblemished, in every thought, word and deed; she is humble and modest from reason and conviction, submissive from choice, and obedient from inclination. 27

In a commencement address to the graduates of the Young Ladies' Academy of
Philadelphia on December 18, 1795, one student told her classmates, "We are the weaker part of our species—it is in vain to subdue nature; masculinity of action, and ferocity of manners are inconsistent with our character. To soften the passions, should be our object." This student claimed that the characteristics which the prescriptive literature promoted were natural.

In 1797 in Boston, George Wright published The Lady's Miscellany for the "instruction and entertainment of the female sex." He claimed that "for the improvement of female manners, something more must be necessary than the mere acquisition of knowledge; and this something I take to be the cultivation of benevolence and sincerity." Many more virtues will develop from these, Wright claimed. Another author held that all virtues are derived from chastity. In 1809 an author identified only as F. L. wrote in The Female Friend that "chastity, in the maiden state, crowns all other virtues: it exalts above human nature, raises to that of angels, and participates of that of God himself."

In a book entitled The Wife written by A. Newell and published in Boston in 1806, the author said that "temperance and sobriety are not noticed in women. The reason of this is, that these excellent qualities seem natural to the sex, and born with them." John Swanwick told his audience, "The female breast especially ... is for sensibility and a delicate sense of honor,"
in his address to visitors to the Young Ladies' Academy in Philadelphia on October 31, 1787. The bestselling French author Fenelon noted that women possess "a carefulness, attention to particulars, industry, and a soft and persuasive manner."34

A woman possessing all these individual virtues could be described as virtuous. The description by authors of prescriptive literature and by women themselves of what a virtuous woman was in the eighteenth century must be compared with conceptions of virtue in other time periods. Initially in the history of Western thought, children were morally educated through the epic tradition and oral history. In the world of the Greek city-state (the polis), virtues which were important were ones that promoted public activities such as education, war, and culture. The Greek word arete meant excellence or superiority and was the general term which encompassed all types of virtue. Arete was the quality which enabled one to act well. Implied in the idea of arete was that one would act correctly if one possessed it; there was no conception of moral sin or knowing what is wrong and still doing the wrong.

In his well-known study of Classic culture, C. M. Bowra discusses the four cardinal virtues which comprised arete and which citizens were to ideally possess: courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom. Bowra explains that "physical courage was highly valued at all times by a people much given to war ...", and "temperance was largely a matter of style, of doing things without display or vulgarity, of behaving without arrogance." It is clear from
the definitions of the Greek words of courage and temperance given by Bowra that the meaning of words change and that words cannot be translated precisely. According to Plato, justice is a quality of the whole when each part performs its particular function. This definition is significantly different from later conceptions of justice.

In contrast to Greek society, Christian morality emphasized personal redemption and personal virtues. Because Christianity was based on other-worldliness, Christians would have reason to be less concerned with their position in this world. Therefore, the aggressive, public virtues of the polis were not emphasized. Although the history of Christian thought and practice is complex and long, it is fair to generalize that Christian thought as promulgated by Jesus Christ taught the necessity of personal, self-sacrificing virtues in contrast with the aggressive, public virtues of Greek society. Clearly, the Greeks emphasized intellectual qualities such as wisdom much more than Christ did.

There are both similarities and differences in the conception of virtue found in the prescriptive literature and women's own writing of the eighteenth century when compared with earlier conceptions. The virtues, themselves, such as humility, patience, and love, were virtues of the Christian tradition. The public virtues, wisdom and courage of the polis, were alien to lists of women's virtues in the prescriptive literature. The omission of wisdom
from lists of women's virtues would later be the basis on which Mary Wollstonecraft would write her revolutionary work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The virtues temperance and justice were rendered completely different with different definitions. It is not surprising that women's virtues were from the Christian tradition because these types of virtues served to promote the role women presently played in society. These virtues were a conserving force.

The question of men's virtues at this time was in a state of transition. The possession of more aggressive virtues was considered favorable for men generally, but as was true for women at this time, virtues were private, not public. In Chapter 2 I will discuss this point further by considering the change to an economic market system of supply and demand and how this shifted the virtues which men were to possess. Generally in the prescriptive literature, women's virtues were private and non-assertive while men's virtues were private but increasingly more aggressive as competition became more important, as it had been in Greek culture.

In one respect, the discussion of women's virtues echoes the classical culture. Women had a well-defined role in American society of the late eighteenth century which is reminiscent of the Platonic conception of justice. The community is just, said Plato, when each person fills a particular role; women of eighteenth century America all filled a similar role. In her Valedictorian address, one student acknowledged this idea and also the fact that
she would never again speak in public. Women in general, she said, "who, anticipating soon to be called to fill their various domestic stations in society, will, it is probable, never more be required, or never more have an opportunity of delivering their sentiments in public." To conclude as Plato did and as the authors of the prescriptive literature did that women were to be treated without regard to the individuality of each woman, is to treat women qualitatively differently from men who were considered different from one another. Historically, all human beings confined to a specific function or role have been stripped of their individuality.

In 1801 Nathan Fiske of Boston gave a rationale for why it is necessary to create and promote an ideal, virtuous woman for others to emulate. He declared that progress only occurs when action is based on uncorrupted principles of virtue and religion. Fiske wrote in The Moral Monitor:

"Reason suggests, and history confirms the truth that nations and individuals advance in strength, in reputation, in every thing that is really excellent and dignifying, by adhering strictly to the uncorrupted principles and practice of virtue and religion; and that, in proportion as they deviate from these, they decline from true greatness."

The American experiment, as it was conceived by the first European settlers, was originally one to reclaim original religious principles which had been corrupted in Britain. Ironically, by the time of the American Revolution the authors of the prescriptive literature were desperately trying to reclaim the American virtues which they felt were eroding. In the face of
the changing social, economic, and political realms, the authors of the prescriptive literature were attempting to secure a bedrock of virtuousness for the young nation. In their advice books to women, these authors identified an ideal of the virtuous woman; their purpose was that women should be the ultimate protectors of virtue in the new country at a time of numerous perceived corrupting influences. Examples of the influences were the new market system of supply and demand and the imbalance in the British constitutional form of mixed government created by the ministers of the government. The tremendous weight of women's responsibility in these times was clearly expressed in a pamphlet entitled "Female Influence and Obligation," in which the author stated that women are responsible not only for their own souls, but for the souls of their family members as well. 39

In addition to reacting to the tumultuous nature of the times, the authors of the prescriptive literature were also reacting to real or perceived changes in women's social behavior. As I discussed earlier, there was the component I described as the marriage marketplace in which women would compete for husbands. There was also concern about premarital sex and pregnancy although it was never actually discussed directly in books of the prescriptive genre.

The description of the ideal woman in the prescriptive literature was in fact theoretical because it existed only in the writer's mind. Rarely did authors point to real life examples for a child to emulate. In one quotation
I have discussed, the parent stressed to her daughter that she heed her father's instructions not only for her own benefit, but also for the benefit of those "dearest" to her. This type of example appears frequently in the literature: the daughter is reminded that she is being educated for the benefit of others. The threat of evoking shame is used by the parent by describing an ideal which the daughter is to follow.

The influence of the argument to evoke shame is apparent in remarks made by children about their parents. Sophia wrote to her mother in a fictional account, "I think myself bound in duty to obey all your orders whether I understand the reasonableness of them or not...." In her diary Nancy Shippen remarked, "I was invited to a Ball at the French Ministers, but I refus'd to go at my Papas request, but my heart was there; It was certainly prudent not to go; how happy am I to have a wise parent to judge for me." In both fiction and in real life daughters deferred to their parent's decisions and values.

Ultimately, it was not the argument from reason or self-interest, but the argument from shame which the daughters cite as the one which convinced them to obey their parents. Sophia made this clear when she wrote to her mother, "I can only say, I shall do all that lies in my power to learn this, and every other thing you desire me ... as you are pleased to say, that nothing gives you greater pleasure, than to hear of my improvement; so, you may be assured, nothing gives me so great pleasure, as to receive your approbation."
What was at stake for the child was her worth in her parents' eyes. Needless to say this is a potent argument in favor of conforming to one's parents' values.

The prescriptive literature concentrated on two facets of women's education, domestic and moral. The argument for both facets based women's need for education on their potential service to men and children. There was no discussion of education as a good in itself. In fact one Englishman suggested that the only alternative to defining education as a preparation for service to others was to define it as a self-interested process of learning how to behave in high society. These alternatives left no room for the idea that women might be educated for self-fulfillment or to develop their own individual talents.

Curiously, domestic and moral education were not presented as different in character or function. In other words, they were viewed as leading to the same ends. A woman who performed her domestic duties well was considered to be acting morally. Likewise, a complete moral education involved clearly understanding and fulfilling one's domestic service to others. In a letter written to her daughter, Nancy, Mrs. Shippen alternated between giving advice about domestic education and moral education. "Tell me how you improve in your work," she wrote with domestic skills clearly in mind, "needlework is a most important branch of a female education." In her next letter she wrote,
"but above all let me know how you improve in humility, patience & love, these will make my dear Girl shine to all eternity." Mrs. Shippen stated that what is most important is for Nancy to develop her moral qualities. In the same letter she showed how moral and domestic education were intertwined for American women in the late eighteenth century:

I was pleased with your last & only letter I received since I left you. I say it pleased me because it inform'd me your good Mrs Rogers has found out a way of encouraging you in your work & pays great attention to your improvement & by of joining her in encouraging you to be industrious, which makes so great a part of a female character. The key to creating a moral woman seemed to be to keep her occupied with domestic labor.

The fictional character of Sophy's mother tied many themes of women's education together when she wrote:

Go on, my dear Sophy, thus to encresce the happiness of your mother, by consulting your own interest: and, indeed, you cannot consult it more affectually, than by making yourself a complete mistress of the needle ... For though there are many other female accomplishments more showy and specious, yet there is not any one more useful. In this passage Sophy's mother referred to Sophy's ability to make her mother happy; appealed to Sophy's self-interest; and reiterated the supreme importance of a domestic skill. Both Sophy's mother and Nancy Shippen's mother implied that domestic labor was an important aspect of female character. Nancy, herself, seemed to agree that being industrious could help solve her moral dilemmas. "There are fogs in the moral as well as the natural world;
& the soul like the sky hath its clouds: the best way to dispel such glooms is to seek employment," Nancy concluded.48
INDEPENDENCE, HAPPINESS, AND SECURITY

As I have demonstrated in the first chapter, women were educated in the late eighteenth century, not for their own self-fulfillment, but to enable them to serve others. This role strengthened the valuing perspective of feminist theory because it contributed to categorizing women as a group and denying each woman's individuality. While the Lockean theory of education was discussed in the literature, women did not reap the benefits which this theory entailed. The valuing perspective in contrast with the equality perspective, is a type of feminist theory which acknowledges and values those characteristics which are unique to women. It can be used both to expand or to confine women's role. Because women were educated to serve others, they could identify with other women in this aspect of their lives.

In this chapter I will discuss another factor which tended to strengthen the valuing perspective, women's and men's economic role. I will argue that men acted for the family in the rapidly expanding market economy while women typically had much less contact with markets and had fewer market relationships. At this time in effect, women remained in a role based on pre-market relationships. Their economic lives remained more closely akin to medieval relations than to the new ways of the market.

The generation following the American Revolution saw the greatest change from the medieval and puritan concept of the just price to the widespread reliance on markets of supply and demand in the economic sphere. It was at this time that the political and economic paradigm known as the commonwealth
gave way to a new economic and political structure in practice and in people's minds. This change was not a goal of the American Revolution nor was it a direct result of the war. The conditions of life in the Colonies, dependent particularly on the lack of an ingrained social structure, allowed for the development of new economic structures. In 1776 Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations* which clearly described the benefits of a market economy. Life in the New World seemed particularly adapted to a market economy as it seemed to the Europeans to be a virtual Lockean state of nature.

Markets were praised for their efficiency, fairness and the incentives they created for people to produce. A competitive spirit in economic relations became an important asset when participating in the market. In *After Virtue* Alasdair MaCIntyre suggests that Benjamin Franklin included the drive to acquire itself as a part of virtue.

Ben Franklin did not approve of the use of standards of wealth to regulate other aspects of life. For example, he decried the practice of judging a person by his wealth and not accounting for other meaningful characteristics. In a book on courtship and marriage written in 1779 Franklin stated:

> Every man of observation and thought does, I believe, find that exterior show, and the possession of wealth, is become the common standard of merit; that a slavish obsequiousness is paid to it, at the expense of all that is truly great and manly.

According to Franklin, markets were useful and beneficial but only if used solely for goods bought and sold in the economic sphere, not as a means to judge people.
Some citizens were appalled at the effect that the competition of a market system had on people's behavior. In 1801 Reverend Nathan Fiske of Worcester, Massachusetts criticized "this age of emulation, when the strife is, who shall excell in raising, cooking, or carrying to market, the most curious dainties to please the public palate." One of the obtrusive trappings of the market system, claimed Fiske, was that "traders must make elaborate signs, writers alluring titles." Many worried that the market system needed to be controlled but had become uncontrollable.

The prescriptive literature emphasized the desirability of characteristics which helped women contribute to the productivity of the new economic age. As I briefly discussed in Chapter 1, women were constantly advised to be industrious. In a chapter entitled "On Industry, Truth, and Sincerity," Ann Murry declared, "There is scarcely any thing of more importance, and, what is more extraordinary, less attended to, than habitual INDUSTRY." In her diary written from 1771 to 1773, 12 year old Anna Green Winslow of Boston made a point of noting her industry with pride. "How strangely industrious I have been this week, I will inform you with my own hand," she exclaimed.

For women the quality of the job that was performed seemed to be much less important than the fact that they were busy. According to the prescriptive literature, industry was not merely a good in itself; when preoccupied with work women would refrain from immoral activities. According to one author,
"Employment is the grand preservative of health and innocence. When we have nothing to do, we immediately become a burden to ourselves; the mind and body languish for want of exercise, and we fall into a thousand dangerous temptations." This logic presents a pessimistic view of women's ability to make responsible choices and decisions. Following this line of argument, women would not seem able to make a positive contribution to society, but they must be kept busy so they do not fall prey to temptation.

Ben Franklin listed three necessary characteristics of a good housewife as being: "a prudent frugality ... neatness [and] harmonious economy." He advised wives not to be too extravagant nor too niggardly in running the household. Women should strive for moderation in economic matters when acting for their husbands and children.

Many writers warned women to beware of becoming too concerned with fashion and their appearance. The reasons given were that dressing fashionably can be very expensive, and it distracted the mind from other concerns. The ideal woman was described in this manner by clergyman, John Bennett; in his advice book for women:

She will endeavour to convince every beholder, that she knows the proper medium betwixt a ridiculous profusion, and a total want, of ornament ... that she does not wish to seduce by her appearance, but only to please; that she has cultivated her mind, much more than her person—placed the highest value on her inside.

This statement echoed Franklin's desire for frugality and neatness in women's actions and appearance, but it went much further in cautioning them of the
dangers of being too concerned with one's external self. The clergyman's advice was the type given to women to convince them not to participate in the marriage market (that I discussed in Chapter 1) in which women compete to marry men who would raise their social standing. As this quote from the clergyman makes clear, women's dress and manners should be contrived to please others, but not to indiscriminately attract men. In contrast with appearance, the author stated that the ideal woman places the highest value on her mind, her "inside." He was not nearly so complete in instructing women in what he considered this to be as he was in telling them what not to do.

Although women were not significant participants in the economic marketplace when compared to men, they were an economic force. Women produced many goods in their homes as well as attending to virtually all of the domestic duties. As Mary Beth Norton points out in her book Liberty's Daughters, women played a significant role in leading and furthering economic boycotts of British goods before the American Revolution. In her diary, eight year old Anna Green Winslow declared herself to be a "Daughter of Libery." "As I am (as we say) a daughter of liberty I chuse to wear as much of our own manufactory as pocible," she wrote. This quotation demonstrates that even the young children of Boston revolutionaries were at least superficially knowledgable of their mothers' activism.

A clergyman recognized another way in which women could participate economically for the overall benefit of the society. "Young ladies," he observed, "have many methods of charity besides the mere act of giving money.
That time which sometimes hangs heavy on their hands, might be usefully employed in making garments for the naked, or providing cordials for the sick. Women's domestic skills are more useful than "mere" money, wrote the author. In one sense, he was praising women's versatility and abilities, in another sense, however, he was pressing women to act productively and discouraging what he perceived as wasting time.

There were some parallels between the roles of late eighteenth century men and women in the economic sphere including acting as political activists and giving to charity. The difference, of course, was that women's sole means of participation in the economics and politics of the fetal nation was through the domestic sphere. One of the greatest changes of this period was that men began to work away from the home, but a woman's domain was the family; she had immense influence in the matrix of personal relations. In the following chapter, I will analyze the relationship between the domestic sphere and the larger political sphere. For the purposes of this chapter, it is clear that the writers of prescriptive literature drew specific lines of division between women's and men's economic roles.

Examples from the literature illustrate this point. In a pamphlet written in 1818 entitled "Female Influence and Obligation," the author stated that "while the husband and the father is pursuing his business abroad, the wife and mother is, perhaps, imparting a cast of character to those around her home, which may extend through generations." It is clear that the
author of this quotation was describing two distinct roles for the sexes which took place in two different locations. His purpose in this didactic work was to convince women of the importance of their role. Women were not just told to mind their domestic duties. They were also instructed by the writers of this genre in general about the enormous dimensions of their role.

In this quotation from the pamphlet, men's economic role is contrasted with the possibilities women have in influencing the morality of future generations. Women, the author wrote, would "perhaps" take advantage of the immense influence they possessed. In effect, the author was attempting to persuade women to assert their prerogative in the domestic sphere to spread the influence of Christianity. Men's economic role, located to a great extent outside the home, was obviously an important component in the early republic; however, when contrasted in this quotation with the possibilities open to women inside the domestic sphere, it appears greatly reduced in importance.

Ben Franklin presented an untraditional case of an ideal relationship between the sexes in his book Reflections on Courtship and Marriage. Franklin's major theme was "that as the standard of human felicity in general is the practice of wisdom and virtue, so also of the conjugal union in particular." In this book written in the form of two letters to a friend, Franklin analyzes precisely how he thinks such an ideal marriage should develop. A man and a women must form an enduring friendship for a marriage to be successful
because companionship is the most important goal of marriage, he believed. Franklin wrote, "to marry without an union of minds, a sympathy of affections, a mutual esteem and friendship for each other, is contrary to reason and virtue, the moral happiness of our nature."16 Most unhappy marriages, cautioned Franklin, occur because one or both parties "are occasioned by mercenary views."17 The author continued on a familiar theme discussed in Chapter 1 that women should not participate in the marriage marketplace.

After criticizing the practice of judging men by the amount of wealth they have accumulated (see p. 34), Franklin observed, "the same little, sneaking, and selfish spirit, is crept into matrimonial pursuits; and not, I think, less with the fair than our own sex."18 In this example, Franklin clearly found fault with men's actions as well as women's.

Benjamin Franklin promoted the valuing perspective of feminist theory in his work on courtship and marriage in spite of the fact that he believed that companionship is necessary for a successful marriage. He furthered the valuing perspective because he claimed that marriage should be based on the illusion of equality in relations between the sexes, rather than the genuine practice of equality. Franklin described the ideal relationship in this way:

A man of sense and breeding will be, as it were, superior without seeming to know it; and support his influence with so great a delicacy, that his wife shall ever seem to be his equal, make use of a thousand polite methods even to deviate her character. What an amiable and engaging scene must such a couple exhibit! How firm in their union! and how harmonious their lives!19
For Franklin the ideal couple was one in which the woman had a sense of being her partner's equal while in reality the man was superior to his wife. The relationship he described is based on subtle control, not the outright exercise of power.

According to Franklin, the superiority of man over women was a combination of natural and environmental factors. "Really nature, and the circumstances of human life," explained Franklin, "seem to design for man that superiority, and to invest him with a directing power in the more difficult and important affairs of life." The problems with marriages arise, he wrote, when this balance is disrupted.

In this book Franklin was obviously concerned with women's happiness in marriage. He defined marriage as "a certain voluntary and mutual contract between the sexes; the end or design of which is, or should be, their joint happiness." The language of contracts certainly did not imply that the parties would be equal, but it did describe a type of relationship which was well thought out and made by individuals who controlled their own decisions.

The theoretical stance on marriage which Franklin held integrated the premises of the Enlightenment with the valuing perspective of feminist theory. The Enlightenment assumptions of what qualities individuals possessed, such as rationality, education, and individuality, were meshed with an argument in the tradition of the valuing perspective which emphasizes women's differences from men in a positive light. Franklin could value women's differences while also claiming that they were rational beings. He did not apply the
Enlightenment theory of justice based on rights to his discussion of companionate marriage. This theory did not radically influence feminist theory in late eighteenth century America. While it is conceivable that Enlightenment premises about equality and individuality could have shifted the focus of feminist theory to the equality perspective, this was not initially the case. Instead, the impact of the Enlightenment was not revolutionary at first because the authors of the valuing perspective integrated most of the major tenets of the Enlightenment into their own work. Benjamin Franklin provided the reader with a theoretical model of the conjugal relationship which integrated ideas of the Enlightenment into a statement in the valuing perspective tradition. Next, I will discuss a specific example of marriage which did not work and the surrounding circumstances.

Nancy Shippen was born in 1763 into the wealthy Lee family of Philadelphia. She kept a detailed diary from 1783 to 1800. It appears from Nancy Shippen's journal that women and men had a difficult time forming the type of friendship which Benjamin Franklin suggested. An "illeberal custom prevents a correspondence between the sexes," Nancy informs us. At age 18 she married Henry Beekman Livingston, a colonel in the Continental Army. The marriage was not her own decision, but one made for her by her parents. Nancy was not adverse to her parents' decision, in fact she was happy to please her mother and father. After being married for two years, she wrote:
April 18 - This day I spent entirely alone, enjoying my own meditations—they were not unpleasant—I feel calm & composed, & please myself with the reflection of having conform'd to the will of my parents in the most important action of my life-[marriage] O! may I reap the benefit of it! I'm sure I shall! I have the sweetest child that ever was born—in her I shall be most blest. 24

Nancy's marriage was not without problems. Her husband had numerous affairs, but Nancy found fulfillment and comfort caring for her daughter Peggy. The mother viewed her daughter as a go-between with her husband. She seemed imminently hopeful for a reconciliation with her husband arranged by their daughter. Speaking of Peggy in June 1783 she wrote:

What a sweet little mediator!—can he but relent when he sees her—his picture in miniature—will he not be glad to see me—fold me in his arms—& repent that he has treated me ill—wonder at my forgiveness & condescension—And become a new man. 25

Nancy's hopes for reconciliation were to no avail. For years her husband did not live with her. Eventually, she fell in love with Louis Guillaume Otto, Comte de Masloy, a French diplomat who had been her first love. Because of her love for Otto, Nancy decided to attempt to obtain a divorce from her husband. In 1789 she wrote to her uncle Arthur Lee who was a lawyer. He replied mockingly that she was probably not serious about the divorce, but if she was then she would need the approval and help of her father. Arthur Lee wrote:

But if you are serious—which is rather too much to expect—my opinion is—that yr Father should come here & instruct those Gentleman [the lawyers he recommends] in every thing necessary to conduct the business. 26
Nancy Shippen's parents did not support her decision to try to divorce Livingston, but Madam Livingston, Henry's mother saw herself as Nancy's only supporter.

Nancy took her divorce case to court. According to Ethel Armes who edited Nancy's journal:

The litigation ended in defeat for Nancy. The record at this point is incomplete and more or less incoherent, but it appears that a divorce could have been given to Nancy on condition that Colonel Livingston have custody of their child.27

Women in America at this time as in England relinquished their legal rights when they married. Couveture, which was retained from English Common law, made it virtually impossible for a woman to obtain an equitable divorce settlement if she could obtain a divorce at all. Because Nancy would lose custody of her daughter Peggy, divorce was out of the question.

Ben Franklin cautioned against complete adherence to one's parents' wishes. He advised his readers to follow the lessons of reason and virtue over the dictates of one's parents. Franklin claimed that parents are not infallible as Nancy Shippen had been brought up to believe. Franklin wrote "that no parental authority that is repugnant to the dictates of reason and virtue, or (which is the same thing) the moral happiness of our natures is any wise binding on children."28 Franklin equated moral happiness with the dictates of reason and virtue. His advice was that following reason and virtue is moral happiness, and that it is imperative for one to be true to
reason and virtue over what one's parents teach. Franklin set up a universal standard for good action which was independent of the variability of parents feelings or whims. "It follows therefore, that no parental authority, thus to make ourselves unhappy by marriage, is any wise binding on children," concluded Franklin.29

In reality, such as in the example of Nancy Shippen, decisions were made according to family self-interest more than reason. As a young woman of 18 years of age, Nancy was not an independent decision-maker; her marriage, the most important decision of her life in her own estimation, was decided by her parents. This example demonstrates the contrast between feminist theory and practice in the new republic; Benjamin Franklin's updated version of the valuing perspective which combined Enlightenment theory of rationality and individual responsibility with valuing women based on their unique, unduplicated role as experts in the domestic realm and as mothers, did not affect Nancy Shippen's life decisions. Theory must inevitably lag behind practice, but signs of the integration and origins of putting theory into practice are apparent from studying the extant sources. Women, including Nancy Shippen, showed signs of a growing self-confidence as women and as individuals.

As Nancy contemplated nature and the changing of the seasons, she came to the same conclusions as Franklin did about having a bedrock of reason and virtue to anchor one's life. Nancy speculated that "perhaps the lot of man
hath also its seasons; if it be so I will during the mournful days of my winter, nourish and support my soul with the fruits that education and experience have amassed for me ...."\(^{30}\) As a youngster of eight years old, Anna Green Winslow of Boston already seemed to be generating a spirit of self-assurance. She explained that she was not completely under the power of her guardian. Anna was concerned about her education, "but all the intreaties in the world will not prevail upon me to do always as well as I can, which is not the least trouble to me, tho' it's a great grief to aunt Deming."\(^{31}\) Eventually, Nancy Shippen became satisfied with her life, and attributed her self-assurance and contentment to experience and the ultimate benefits of living a virtuous life. She summed up her real life experiences of what I have entitled the valuing perspective of feminist analysis in this way:

And a whole year of experience added to it; I cannot accuse my self of vanity, when I say I think myself more wise, more patient, more resign'd to my situation than I was last year. Yes! I think I am upon the whole much happier altho' there is no difference in my manner of living—no prospect yet of there being a change for the better; but I begin to think that happiness consists more in our minds being at ease, than in all the variety of accidental circumstances. If that is really the case, why may I not be happy! Yes I may be compleatly if I persevere in the path of my duty, & always remember that a virtuous life insures happiness, & eternal felicity.\(^{32}\)

It is apparent that Nancy found a separate peace with her situation on her own terms. She did not resign herself to the specific details of her life out of desperation, but instead, out of the self-confidence she gained from discovering a bedrock of reason and virtue as Franklin so eloquently described.
POLITICS

It cannot be doubted that the era surrounding the American Revolution was a period of great political change. It has been forcefully argued by American historians that the revolution was not a social or economic one, but an intellectual and political revolution.¹ I tend to agree with such arguments. By studying the role of women and the class structure before and after the war, it becomes apparent that little was changed in the social and economic circumstances of the residents of the young country because of the war itself.² Unlike the French Revolution, there was no concomitant women's rights movement during the American Revolution. Since the American Revolution did not significantly alter women's social or economic position, we cannot use it as the simple answer to the hypothesized shift in feminist theory which I am proposing. In this chapter I will consider the complex effect of political theory on feminist theory.

First, I will describe the political legacy of the Colonists who fought and won the Revolution. I will then consider the position of women within the contemporary political theory. My aim is to demonstrate how women's role in the politics of the late eighteenth century was part of the valuing perspective of feminist theory—how women were valued and valued themselves as a unique and powerful, but indirect force in the political world. Next I will discuss a most important tract in the history of feminist theory, Mary Wollstonecraft's book A Vindication of the Rights of Woman which was published
in England in 1791. Wollstonecraft's work was the first full-fledged statement of the equality perspective of feminist theory. Using a completely different approach than that of the valuing argument, Wollstonecraft used a rights-based argument to put forth a theory of women's equality with men.

Finally, I will consider a book by Charles Brockden Brown which was widely-read in the United States after it was published in New York in 1798. Brown presents his reader with a dialogue between a man and a woman who discuss the position of women in American politics. The two characters seem to be debating the merits of the valuing perspective versus the equality perspective of feminist theory.

The politics of the American revolutionaries was borrowed from the British and greatly expanded upon. It was Lockean in origin and its legacy was the Real Whig tradition of eighteenth century Britain. There is no doubt that John Locke, the seventeenth century English philosopher, had an immense influence on the founders of the United States. Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence (1776) directly borrows phrases from Locke's work.

The American use of a theory of natural rights, the social contract, consent of the governed, the importance of private property, and individuality were all a legacy of Locke.

The Real Whig tradition was developed in the early eighteenth century by writers who were influenced by the anti-authoritarianism of the English Civil War. They expounded the belief that the ultimate sovereignty of a
nation was located with the citizens. While only a minority of white males were allowed to vote in the early decades of the United States, the sovereignty of the country was said to rest with individuals, not with a king or some other entity. This implied a need for greater individual virtue and participation.

Historians of the period of the American Revolution point to other influences in addition to the Real Whig tradition. Eric Foner attempted to convey a radical strand of revolutionary thought through a biography of Tom Paine. Paine was a radical in the sense that he thought about how to change the existing social and political climate and he attempted to put his ideas into action, according to Foner.

In Common Sense (1776) and his other political tracts, Paine was the author of a new secular language which transformed the terms of political debate. Instead of supporting the mixed government of the English Whig tradition, Paine changed the use of the term republicanism from abusive to a vision of utopia. His ideology unified mass political participation, and the widespread use of market relations which were becoming more prominent in the states. The strands of Paine's thought were Newtonian science, deism, political egalitarianism, and promotion of business enterprise. He emphasized that people could create new institutions and control their own destinies.
Many American historians emphasize the importance of the concept of virtue in the American Revolution. Most Americans, especially those influenced by Real Whig ideology, were partisan to the British form of mixed government. The problem they saw was that the British Ministry was corrupting the balance of power in the British mixed constitutional form of government. They worried that this corruption might spread to America. In *From Resistance to Revolution* Pauline Maier emphasizes the gradual, well thought out transition the Colonists made to republicanism. She argues that neither side took drastic action because they did not believe that the other side was doing anything wrong.

According to Edmund S. Morgan, the Colonists' proof that Britain was corrupt was acts such as the Townshend Act which unfairly took advantage of the Colonies. He argues that the Revolution was guided by the values of Puritanism such as a belief in productivity as a benefit to the entire society, an emphasis on frugality and thriftiness and a de-emphasis on consumption. Persons influenced by Puritanism saw themselves forever trying to improve the world. Boycotts of British goods were strengthened by a belief in Puritanism, as defined by Morgan, because it encouraged frugality and home manufacture as virtuous. Women, as I noted in Chapter 2 were particularly virtuous in this respect.

The overarching political idea which found a home in America was that
of liberalism. Both economics and politics were integrated into the theory of liberalism. The individualistic, natural rights-based political philosophy of Locke was combined with the supply and demand market economic system developed by Adam Smith. The premier political value of the age was liberty, liberty from British corruption to create a new virtuous republic and individual liberty to compete in the market.

One of the most revolutionary theoretical points of liberalism was that one's self-interest and the public good could be served at the same time. This idea had its roots in classical antiquity. In the Republic, Plato formulated the possibility of the absence of conflict between the public good and an individual's good, but in such a way that it had much different implications for political action than did liberalism. The major theoretical difference between Plato and the theory of liberalism was in defining liberty. There are two types of liberty, each meaning is distinct from the other but they are often used in conjunction. There is liberty defined negatively as freedom from interference from others. This is the definition of liberty which was prevalent in the political theory and practice of the American Revolution and the new Republic. There is also the liberty defined positively which when possessed allows one to create an environment where it is possible to take some sort of positive action for the community by discovering and developing one's own special talents and interests. This second definition is the one Plato referred to in the Republic although he did not use
the term liberty.

There was a history of the definition of positive liberty in America long before the American Revolution. For the Puritans, liberty was the ability to do good and to avoid evil; there existed no tension between this type of liberty and authority. John Winthrop presented these ideas in a speech "A Model of Christian Charity," while sailing to the New World. He told the passengers that the differences between people is not for the good of any particular individual, but for the good of the entire community. He presented a model of a community akin to the community discussed in Plato's Republic. According to Winthrop and Plato, one is free if one accepts limits.

Europeans originally settled in the New World with both definitions of liberty in mind; they wanted freedom from religious persecution and they needed liberty to create an environment necessary for them to flourish spiritually. Eventually, the definition of liberty as freedom from interference became preeminent, largely due to the rise in economic laissez-faire which was an integral aspect of liberalism.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, women had much less contact with capitalist markets and market relations than did men. Men were the primary actors for the family in the economic marketplace. In effect, then, they were more accustomed and concerned with the liberty to interact without interference. Women were brought up to be more concerned with creating an environment (i.e. marriage) in which they could fulfill their role (i.e. child-rearing and
domestic labor). As I noted in Chapter 2, however, women did have experience with markets through the marriage marketplace. But the liberty to use the marriage marketplace was severely discouraged in the prescriptive literature of the period. (see p. 40)

A letter from Rochefoucauld Liancourt, a French Duke provides some telling insights into the perceived and actual liberty of women in the United States in the late 1700's. Unmarried women, he suggested, have greater freedom from interference to do as they wish, but this liberty was tempered by the desire to obtain a husband. In other words, the informal rules of the marriage marketplace restrained women's liberty. The Duke wrote:

The Young women here enjoy a liberty, which to French manners would appear disorderly, they go out alone; walk with young men, and depart with them from the rest of the company in large assemblies; in short, they enjoy the same degree of liberty which married women do in France, and which married women here do not take. But they are far from abusing it; they endeavor to please, they desire to obtain husbands, and they know that they shall not succeed if their conduct becomes suspected. 

The Duke's observations show the great and wide-ranging power of the marriage marketplace.

The French Duke was extremely critical of American women's behavior once they were married. He claimed that married women unthinkingly love and obey their husbands as a result of custom. In a sense, he was blaming the victim when he stated:

When they have obtained a husband, they love him because he is their husband; and because they have not an idea that they can do otherwise; they revere custom by a kind of state religion which never varies.
The Duke, from his outside cultural perspective, criticized the dependent role which married American women play. From his observations it appears that they have lost liberty in both senses of the word because they unquestioningly followed the custom of obeying their husbands. While there is certainly some truth in the Duke's observations, the role of women in America at this time was much more complex.

Because the theory of liberalism stressed the primacy of the individual's liberty to remain free from interference, the challenge of Liberalism was to make authority and liberty compatible with one another. In a republic based on Liberalism, all citizens were considered to be able to contribute individually to the good of the society. No one person was believed to have had a monopoly on the knowledge needed to make decisions for the entire society. However, some citizens were considered able to contribute more than others.

On October 31, 1787, John Swanwick addressed the visitors of the Young Ladies' Academy in Philadelphia. He noted that "in a republic like this, where every citizen is, on every principle, bound to contribute his proportion to the general mass of information and usefulness," that he, too, could contribute his sentiments. Swanwick's remarks demonstrate that there was a theoretical strain of equal opportunity of contributions in the new republic. He used a metaphor which was not quite true if taken exactly on its own terms because each citizen did not have formal outlets for his ideas and beliefs,
but it can be taken as an allusion which represents a shift in political theory. Authority was the aggregate of numerous individual thoughts and feelings, some weighted greater than others. Obtaining and distributing knowledge (not wisdom) became a skill which every adult male was assumed to possess to some degree by virtue of his rationality.\(^{14}\) Because it was generally assumed that women did not possess rationality to the same degree as men, they were not included in the equation of authority (neither were property-less men).

Similarly, because of the emphasis in Lockeian education on individuality and learning by experience, the family faced the same challenge of making authority and liberty compatible as did the state. Children were to be treated as individuals with different needs, yet at the same time the parents needed to retain a measure of authority over their children's wills.

Government and families were compared in numerous respects in the late eighteenth century. In his book on courtship and marriage, Ben Franklin presents an extended metaphor comparing marriage and government.\(^{15}\) In examples such as this, the discussion revolved around the division of power and authority, and how to ensure that the parts were functioning for the benefit of the whole. Echoing the medieval concept of corporate collectivism, Franklin wrote of the necessity of harmony of the parts for the successful ends of all social institutions. "We just now observed," he remarked, "that the well being of marriage, as of all other societies, arose from a harmony and correspondence of its several parts to their respective ends and
relations."\(^{16}\)

In London in 1735, a group of Englishwomen had presented an address to
the Legislature entitled "The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to
Wives." In that address the women accentuated the idea that women were treat-
ed as if they existed in the medieval world. An excerpt from that address
reads:

I humbly hope therefore, that this will not be thought an unreasonable
Representation of our Condition, since supposing a Man no Christian,
he may be as Despotick ... as the Grand Seignoir in his Seraglio, with
this difference only, that the English Husband has but one Vassal to
treat according to his variable Humour, whereas the Grand Seignoir having
many.\(^{17}\)

Although the circumstances for women had changed drastically from those af-
fecting women in England in 1735 to those affecting women in the United States
at the turn of the nineteenth century, I present this example to demonstrate
that women were partially viewed and partially viewed themselves as remnants
of the medieval period in a political sense as well as in economics which
I discussed in Chapter 2. As political theory and the politics of the United
States became concerned with formalizing the rules of participation for all
male citizens (in theory), women used and were encouraged to use informal,
indirect means of political participation through their influence in the
family.

In Locke's theory there were only superficial similarities between the
family and the government.\(^{18}\) In popular writing, however, the family was
assumed to be a microcosm of the state. In 1806 in an English translation of the French theorist Fenelon's treatise on the education of daughters, the author claimed, "the world is not a phantom, it is the aggregate of all its families; and who can civilize and govern these with a nicer discrimination than woman?" According to Fenelon, the government, the structure of the world, is the sum of all of its families. Indirectly, women were said to be responsible for the success of the government.

This view was popular in general in Western theory at this time. A Briton described two kinds of government as political and domestic. "And indeed," he declared, "the two modes of Government I have just mentioned, are more closely connected than may at first sight appear." This is true, he explained, because women are responsible for their children's education, and have the power to raise them to be virtuous people. While Locke himself, who had the largest theoretical influence on the young country, did not imply deep connections between the family and the government, his popularizers and other writers described women's role in government as being effectively played out through the family.

Generally, it was believed that women should not have a formal role in politics. In a book published in 1793 entitled Letters on the Female Mind, its Powers and Pursuits Laetitia Matilda Hawkins exclaimed, "the study, my dear madam, which I place in the climax of unfitness, is that of politics; and so strongly does it appear to me barred against the admission of females,
that I am astonished that they ever ventured to approach it." There were some of the opposite opinion. Nancy Shippen's younger brother Tommy, believed that women should have an interest in politics. In a letter to Nancy in 1785 Tommy Shippen wrote:

You see I cant help wanting you to be a little of a politician and indeed I do most exceedingly and always have reprobated that fashionable notion of entirely excluding from political study or action, all your sex, on the pretence forsooth that they are too weak to be useful, too unsteady to be learned and because they I mean the men undertake to assert that God has intended you for an inferior sphere ... Although Tommy expressed his belief that women should have a much greater political role, ideas such as his were the exception rather than the rule.

As I have discussed in Chapter 1, women were responsible for educating male children to become virtuous citizens. A boy's political education, however, was not the domain of his mother because she was not instructed in politics herself. A woman author suggested to her female readers in 1793 that:

I should think it necessary that a boy after having been carefully instructed at home, should be sent to run the gauntlet of a public school, where he would learn mankind in miniature. He would see the jarring interests, the circumventing fraud, the open violence of the great world, brought there under his eye; his feelings would be blunted by the collision he must meet with, and his reasoning faculties would come out unbiassed by them, which, however unamiable, I need not say is requisite to a passage through the bustling world.

The home, this British author claimed, was not the type of environment in which a boy could learn power politics, and a mother was not the proper teacher.
It was the harsh realities of living in a new country which was undergoing major transitions in the economic and political spheres that had made women's role of educating their young sons in virtue so important. Many Americans, though, began to respect the validity of market emphasis on competition in spheres of life other than the economic sphere. The radical version of egalitarian politics which Paine espoused did not always mesh with the original intentions of separating from Britain to avoid spreading corruption. The gulf between these two visions of politics deeply involved women and women's role.

In reality boys could conceivably learn much about politics from their mothers. Women were instructed and encouraged to use their influence in the family for certain political and moral ends. Even if boys could not learn about formal or power politics from their mothers, they could certainly observe the practice of informal politics. Because of their role, women became experienced in certain political skills which had nothing to do with the formal institutions of politics. In a pamphlet entitled "Female Influence and Obligation," written in 1818, W. C. Walton wrote of the great influence women have in society:

It is not your province to fill the chair of state, to plan in the cabinet, or to execute in the field; but there is no department of human life, and no corner of the world, were your influence is not felt. To say nothing of the indirect control which females often have over the great movements of society, by that influence, which they possess with
their husbands and sons, and with their other family connections ... it must be seen that they [women] are intrusted with a moral power that hardly knows a limit.24

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Nancy Shippen of Philadelphia was faced with the dilemma of wanting to divorce her husband who had abandoned her, but knowing that she would lose her daughter Peggy in the divorce settlement if she did. On March 21, 1789, Nancy's uncle Arthur Lee "refers her to the lawyers Aaron Burr and Jared Ingersoll," and encourages her to interest the judge's wives in the case so that they could use their influence over their husbands to Nancy's favor.25 In his letter Arthur Lee wrote, "Try to interest the Ladies--particularly Mrs McKean & Mrs Judge Shippen. It is the cause of humanity--& in that cause the female voice is irresistible."26 In effect, Nancy's uncle claimed that in the realm of humanity and morality, women's opinion had power equal to or greater than the law.

While women took advantage of the indirect political power they possessed, some writers advised them not to use it. In a book entitled The Wife published in Boston in 1806, the author A. Newell advised, "if a woman cannot bring herself to the same way of thinking as her husband, nor ought always to endeavour it, she has it nevertheless in her power to forbear thwarting his opinion; and how irksome soever such a restriction at first may seem to her, I am very well satisfied she will afterwards find her account in it."27

It is evident from the examples I have discussed thus far that the valuing
perspective of feminist theory was used to discuss women's role in American politics. Women were said to be different from men; their differences were valued and used as evidence for arguments to conserve women's role. While there was certainly debate about woman's role, the debate generally revolved around the valuing perspective of feminist theory. Whether one's argument was essentially pro-women or anti-women, an argument in the valuing tradition on feminist theory was applied. There is an everpresent tone in the writing that while men moved into the modern age, women were left behind in the medieval age. I previously observed this point in Chapter 2. In effect, what had happened was that the usefulness of appealing to the valuing perspective had reached a breaking point. Women and men had used valuing arguments about women's unique role to widen and define women's role, but eventually such arguments could break no new ground for women and were forcefully used against women to confine them to a narrow sphere.

The valuing perspective, like the equality perspective, is potentially a source of arguments for change or conservation. The use of the valuing perspective was an attempt to conserve a legacy of the past by positing past qualities in women while the remainder of the country lurched forward at an alarming rate. In the years before the Revolution, the Colonists protested what they described as Britain's corruption. At this time national concern with virtue was accentuated as the United States went through
a period of political and economic transition. The Americans seemed to take to heart the advice of the French political theorist Montesquieu as relayed through Englishman John Burton in 1793. "The celebrated Montesquieu," he said, "speaking of the influence of the female Sex on public manners, says, that the safety of a state depends upon the virtues of the Woman." With important changes taking place in education, economics, and especially in politics, the Americans attempted to give to women the main responsibility to possess and guard the virtue of the entire country.

This is not to argue that men were allowed or encouraged to act without virtue. On the contrary, men were also instructed to act in a virtuous manner. The difference was that men's role was in greater flux in all spheres of life. Men were participating in the newly-developing capitalistic market system; men were creating and participating in a new type of political system. In the aggregate, men's lives were full of uncertainty. To counteract this, women's role became more severely defined through the valuing perspective and the virtues of the country were posited in woman. This framework is the basis for the genre of prescriptive literature for and about women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Because women showed signs that they could not be confined within a definite role while the country was changing at such a rapid pace, a continuous stream of "advice" books was written to compel women to feel their responsibility to remain in a prescribed role.
In 1791 in England, Mary Wollstonecraft published a book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. It was a remarkable work which initiated a shift in feminist theory from the valuing to the equality perspective. In the framework I am using, Wollstonecraft's book was the first full-fledged statement of the equality perspective of feminist theory. She argued that by virtue of the fact that women's and men's souls are equal before God, the sexes should have equal opportunities because they both possess reasoning powers. Using *a priori* religious beliefs as the basis of an argument for women's rights was uncommon in Wollstonecraft's time. In 1798 in *Memoirs of the Author of "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,"* Mary's husband, William Godwin, discussed her unique ideas about religion. It was not a formal part of Mary's life and education, according to Godwin. He wrote:

> IN FACT, She had received few lessons of religion in her youth, and her religion was almost entirely her own creating. But she was not on that account the less attached to it. The tenets of her system were the growth of her own moral taste, and her religion therefore had always been a gratification, never a terror to her.

Godwin's comments help to clarify Wollstonecraft's reliance on religion as the basis of her argument. Religion was for her a personal endeavor which aimed at developing one's moral sense.

Wollstonecraft was not original in claiming that reason and faith both come from God. She was influenced in this thought by John Locke and Richard Price both of whom believed as Eleanor Flexner has put it that "reason is
not necessarily the agent of destruction for religious belief as many philoso-
phers of the Enlightenment believed—and hoped.” But Wollstonecraft did
set a precedent in extending this point to include women.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born in London in 1759. Her father was a weaver
by trade. Because of her middle-class origins, Wollstonecraft had little
hope of obtaining an education or living a comfortable life. She left home
when she was 19 years old to serve as a companion to a wealthy woman who va-
cationed in Bath. For two years Mary was exposed to a variety of educated
and wealthy individuals in Bath. She returned home in 1780 to take care of
her dying mother and to attend to her two younger sisters. In 1784 she open-
ed a school with her closest friend Fanny Blood. It was at this time that
she met Reverend Richard Price whose ideas of morality and liberalism influ-
enced her greatly.

With little formal education Wollstonecraft embarked on a writing career
in 1786 with Thoughts on the Education of Daughters. By 1788 after working
as a governess in Ireland, Wollstonecraft could support herself through her
writing. In 1791 A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was published. It
"was so provocative and popular that a second edition appeared in the same
year, and Dublin, Paris, and American editions soon followed."32

Although it is difficult to trace the impact of Wollstonecraft's thought
in the United States, it is apparent that her books were read and appreciated.
In "An Essay on the Education and Genius of the Female Sex," written in 1795, the author James Armstrong Neal alluded to Wollstonecraft's major work while discussing women’s education. Neal wrote:

"To vindicate the Rights of Women, is a task pleasing as it is uncommon. To show, as reflected from a mirror, the dignity, excellence, and intrinsic worth of the Female Mind, is a generous, important, and delightful exertion of genius. To direct the Fair Sex in the attainment of useful and ornamental acquirements—to caution against improper, nugatory, and trivial pursuits is an object of the greatest magnitude; and to destroy vulgar prejudices, and errors of every kind, is rendering an essential service to our country."\(^{33}\)

In "The Salutatory Oration," by Miss Ann Harker of the class of 1794 at the commencement of the Young Ladies’ Academy of Philadelphia, the author listed her heroines. She exclaimed, "in opposition to your immortal Paine, we will exalt our Wollstencraft ..."\(^{34}\)

Wollstonecraft directly challenged the validity of the valuing perspective of feminist theory. "Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence," she charged;

that I do not mean to add paradox when I assert, that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength which leads them to play off those contemptible infantive airs that undermine esteem even whilst they excite desire.\(^{35}\)

Wollstonecraft believed that it was her job to shatter the misconceptions which had been built up around women's lives. In this book she concentrated on peeling away layers of elaborate arguments which, she believed, kept women in a dependent, servile position.
Wollstonecraft forcefully criticized the valuing perspective of feminist theory by devoting much attention to discrediting three authors of women's education. Her husband said that she "repels the opinions of Rousseau, Dr. Gregory, and Dr. James Fordyce."36 She began with the Frenchman Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the eminent social and political philosopher. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was written in response to Rousseau's book Emile published in 1762.

Through the fictional account of the lives of Emile and Sophy, Rousseau emphasized women's qualities of weakness and subservience to men. A woman's greatest ambition should be to please her husband, Rousseau claimed.37 Wollstonecraft argued that in Emile Rousseau stereotyped women's real life actions without delving into the reasons why they act as they do. According to Wollstonecraft, women exhibit numerous faults, but this is not their natural state.

Wollstonecraft also discussed the books of Dr. Fordyce and Dr. Gregory which were published in 1765 and 1774, respectively. She berated these authors for encouraging practices which render women unnatural and weak. There is a tension in Wollstonecraft's book. She was torn between disgust at the actions of members of her sex, and understanding that individual women were not at fault. She felt that the male writers who can be classified within the valuing perspective such as Dr. Fordyce and Dr. Gregory were at fault because they served to promote a restricted and servile role for women.

In demolishing contemporary notions of the role of women, Wollstonecraft realized she must replace them with something else. "In the present state
of society," she wrote, "it appears necessary to go back to first principles in search of the most simple truths, and to dispute with some prevailing prejudice every inch of ground." In effect, Wollstonecraft advocated doing away with the elaborate valuing theories which had come to deceive and greatly influence women. What she substituted in their place was the argument that women had the right to education just as men did by virtue of their possession of rationality. Simply put, Wollstonecraft stated, "the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness, must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguish the individual, and direct the laws which bind society; and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow, is equally undeniable, if mankind is viewed collectively." Wollstonecraft stressed throughout the book that virtue and knowledge are dependent upon reason, not some other quality. For Wollstonecraft there should be no distinction between how the sexes acquire knowledge and virtue: But I still insist, that not only the virtue, but the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures ought to endeavor to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of half being—one of Rousseau's wild chimeras.

Wollstonecraft claimed that the sex distinctions, which had been prolonged and aggravated by writers of prescriptive literature for women, were not natural. The distinctions were created by men and only served to keep women
in a servile position. In fact, she claimed, when defined so loosely, the
meaning of virtue became almost useless. Wollstonecraft wrote:

I wish to sum up what I have said in a few words, for I here throw down
my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting
modesty. For man and women, truth, if I understand the meaning of the
word, must be the same; yet the fanciful female character, so prettily
drawn by poets and novelists demanding the sacrifice of truth and sin­
cerity, virtue becomes a relative idea, having no other foundation than
utility, and of that utility men pretend arbitrarily to judge, shaping
it to their own convenience.41

It is apparent from reading A Vindication of the Rights of Woman that
Wollstonecraft is a theoretician in the Enlightenment tradition. She empha-
sized the importance of reason as the basis of other positive qualities.
She was also influenced by Locke's theory of education. Children, especially
girls, should be given more freedom to develop their bodies and minds, she
believed. Wollstonecraft quoted Locke on the subject that "a slavish bondage
to parents cramps every faculty of the mind."42 She continued by describing
women's education in this way:

This strict hand may in some degree account for the weakness of women;
for girls, from various causes, are more kept down by their parents,
in every sense of the word, than boys. The duty expected from them is,
like all the duties arbitrarily imposed on women, more from a sense of
propriety, more out of respect for decorum than reason; and thus taught
slavishly to submit to their parents, they are prepared for the slavery
of marriage.43

Wollstonecraft identified a pattern of women's dependence which begins when
girls are treated differently and given a different education than boys in
childhood. This pattern continues throughout a women's adult life.
Wollstonecraft emphasized that presently women are products of their environment and the nurturing they have received more than they are products of their true natures. Her aim was to categorize what aspects of women's character are the result of women's prescribed role in life and to uncover and describe what woman in her natural state would be like.

In presenting an argument to give women a greater stake in society so that they will "acquire a rational affection for their country," Wollstonecraft claimed that public virtue is the aggregate of private virtue. 44 This idea was not original, but one which was frequently espoused by Enlightenment thinkers. Wollstonecraft took it a step further by observing that "the private or public virtue of woman is very problematical." 45 Women should be given a stake in society, she argued, because this is a much more solid ground on which to base their participation and loyalty to society than basing it on their restrictive role. "Rousseau, and a numerous list of male writers," she asserted:

insist that she [woman] should all her life be subjected to a severe restraint, that of propriety ... Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a surer guard, only to sweeten the cup of man? Is not this indirectly to deny woman reason? for a gift is a mockery, if it be unfit for use. 46

Wollstonecraft thought that "society can only be happy and free in proportion as it is virtuous; but the present distinctions, established in society, corrode all private, and blast all public virtue." 47
In speaking of a vindication of the rights of woman, Wollstonecraft emphasized the solidarity with which women had been educated and directed into a narrowly-defined role in life. This theme can be contrasted with another theme which pervades her work— that of self-actualization. She thought that women had never been given the opportunity to become individuals by developing their talents and interests. Wollstonecraft contrasted the differences in the possibilities open to men and women to self-actualize:

Men are allowed by moralists to cultivate as Nature directs, different qualities, and assume the different characters, that the same passions, modified almost to infinity, give to each individual ... but all women are to be levelled, by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compliance.48

Wollstonecraft believed that the possibility for self-actualization should be open to all human beings. Women should not be treated as an undifferentiated mass, she said, because they are as different from one another as one man is from another man. At issue for Wollstonecraft was not just women's role in life, but each individual women's self-esteem. "I do not wish them [women] to have power over men;" Wollstonecraft stated, "but over themselves."49

As a practical solution to the problems she discussed, Wollstonecraft devoted an entire chapter to explaining the need and describing a plan of national education.

Next I will discuss a book written in the United States which is in the tradition of Mary Wollstonecraft's ground-breaking work. Charles Brockden
Brown's dialogue *Alcuin* was first published in New York in 1798. That same year it appeared in slightly abridged form in the *Weekly Magazine* of Philadelphia where Brown resided. Brown represented a new phase of American literature. Preceding him was a period of didactic fiction written mainly by women. "In England, as in America, sentimental and diactic fiction was still produced in quantity, but the fashion of the hour at which Brown wrote was the Gothic," historian Lillie Loshe writes.\(^5\) Brown was familiar with the thought of both Mary Wollstonecraft and her husband William Godwin.\(^5\) Loshe claims, "It is from Godwin that Brown received the impulse to write the first American novels that possess any real merit."\(^5\)

Brown was a Quaker, born in Philadelphia in 1771. As a child he was not in good health so he spent much of his time reading books. After finishing school, he moved to New York and joined a literary society called the Friendly Club where he met men who were interested in discussing literature, politics, and social concerns.\(^5\)

The author of *Alcuin* was familiar with the works of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, but he was also influenced by the great liberal thinker of the preceding century, John Locke, whose vocabulary of natural rights and social contract was the common mode of communication for politically educated Americans. In a study of *Alcuin* written in 1922, the author, David Lee Clark, makes a case that what I have named the equality perspective of feminist theory

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During the last decade of the eighteenth century, America became the asylum for the radicals and the political refugees of France and England, and as a rule these men joined in vigorously in the political disputes of the day. It is no wonder, then, that America was for a time a forum for the discussion of the rights of men and women.\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{Alcuin} was the first detailed argument for the rights of women published in America.\textsuperscript{55} In particular, Charles B. Brown's Quaker religion provided him with a basis for arguing for the equality of the sexes. Clark wrote that "as a religious sect the Quakers stood alone in maintaining the essential equality of men and women, and in all important matters women were allowed the same rights as men."\textsuperscript{56} Whereas \textit{A Vindication of the Rights of Woman} concentrated on women's social and educational inequalities, \textbf{Alcuin} also discussed women's economic and political rights.

It is known that Wollstonecraft's book, \textit{A Vindication of the Rights of Woman}, has been read by and inspired numerous American feminists of later generations. \textbf{Alcuin}, however, has been largely ignored. There are some obvious reasons for this discrepancy. Wollstonecraft's book was written with the passion of a woman subject to life's inequalities. Her work retains this quality for women decades later. Brown's dialogue was a much more intellectual endeavor. This is not to claim that Brown did not truly believe in the equality of the sexes, but that he was viewing the debate as an intellectual and as a Quaker, not as a victim. Another reason which in part explains the
The majority of the text of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is concerned with criticizing the present treatment of women in the social and educational realms of the eighteenth century. Brown discussed the more problematic issues of women's economic and political role and rights in *Alcuin*. He was an advocate of institutional change whereas Wollstonecraft provides only a sketchy outline of a plan for national education. Furthermore, Brown's stylistic decision to use a dialogue format lends an antiquated air of the middle ages to his book while Wollstonecraft's book, though it is disorganized and repetitive, is spirited and forceful. Brown's dialogue is much more understated.

*Alcuin* is a dialogue between a male character named Alcuin and a woman named Mrs. Carter whose home Alcuin visits. Alcuin was a historical figure who was an educator and philosopher in the court of Charlemagne in the eighth century. Brown's use of the name Alcuin may be to suggest to the reader that this character will present outdated but traditional views. It has been suggested by the historian David Lee Clark that the character Mrs. Carter is an allusion to the well-known English bluestocking Elizabeth Carter.57

In his diary, Elihu Hubbard Smith of New York wrote about *Alcuin*. He said, "'Alcuin,' is still with us. I have read it repeatedly, with pleasure. Dunlap & Johnson have also read it. And I have permitted two ladies to peruse
it, whose minds I thought equal to the subject." Later he explained what a Mrs. S. Johnson thought of the dialogue:

Mrs. S. Johnson has read the 1st & IIInd parts, & is anxious to know how all this is to end. She commends the performance, on the whole—particularly the style; thinks there is much truth delivered on either side of the debate: but is at a loss to know what is the writer's ultimate design. From what she has seen, she infers his object to be to render women satisfied with their present civil condition. I cannot pretend to enlighten her. 59

The dialogue begins with a discussion by Alcuin of why he and other educated men gather at Mrs. Carter's house for discussion and debate. He claims that the primary reason is the other guests, but the skill and the hospitality of the hostess is yet another reason. Alcuin explains the duties of the hostess:

Skill in the superintendence of a teatable, affability, and modesty, promptness to inquire, and docility to listen, were all that were absolutely requisite in the mistress of the ceremonies ... Some one was required to serve the guests, direct the menials, and maintain, with suitable vigilance, the empire of cleanliness and order. The influence of an unbribed inclination might constitute the whole difference between her and a waiter at an inn, or the porter of a theatre. 60

Alcuin lists many of the virtues to describe Mrs. Carter as the authors of the prescriptive literature claimed formed the ideal woman. Alcuin mockingly points out that the only difference between Mrs. Carter and a waiter is that Mrs. Carter is not paid for her work. The tone of Alcuin's remarks suggests his almost complete lack of respect for woman's traditional duties.

Next, Alcuin points out the educational value of discussion over the
value of learning through books or lectures. Brown used this opportunity to foreshadow for the reader that the dialogue which follows will be a valuable educational tool. Eventually, Alcuin opens his dialogue with Mrs. Carter with a question. "Pray, Madam," he exclaimed, "are you a federalist?" 61

Surely (she replied) you are in jest. What! ask a woman—shallow and inexperienced as all women are known to be, especially with regard to these topics—her opinion on any political question! What in the name of decency have we to do with politics? If you inquire the price of this ribbon, or what shop I purchased that set of china, I may answer you, though I am not sure you would be wiser for my answer. 62

Alcuin likens women's role with a profession or a trade. Mrs. Carter replied that it is a very narrow sphere if it is a profession. Alcuin then described a Lockeian view of human beings. He claimed that people are almost entirely products of their circumstances. Women have been fortunate, he claimed, because although they have not been the greatest thinkers neither have they been the epitome of what is worst about human nature as men have been. Alcuin proceeded to seemingly use circular logic to justify women's position in society:

Women are defective. They are seldom or never metaphysicains, chemists, or lawgivers. Why? Because they are sempstresses and cooks. This is unavoidable. Such is the unalterable constitution of human nature. They cannot read who never saw an alphabet. 63

While Alcuin points out that it is women's nurture which prevents them from attaining greater heights, he claimed that this is a result of human nature.

In general, Alcuin claimed, "the state of the ignorant, servile, and
laborious, is entitled to compassion and relief; not because they are women, nor because they are men; but simply because they are rational." 64 Alcuin's point sounds very similar to the basis of Wollstonecraft's argument. However, as I will demonstrate, there are significant differences in their arguments.

At this point in the dialogue, Mrs. Carter seems to want to educate Alcuin as to the concrete conditions of women's lives, especially the suffering related to being mothers and nurses. Alcuin replies that men's work is much more difficult than women's work. Typically, his stances are more theoretical than they are practical.

Throughout the book, Mrs. Carter points out that women are not formally given access to education and professions and trades. In other words, she argues that women do not have rights. Alcuin consistently replies that it is not important that women have formal rights because individuals will achieve what they want in life by virtue of their own talents and perseverance. While Mrs. Carter presents a rights-based argument from the equality perspective of feminist theory, Alcuin presents a form of the valuing perspective.

Alcuin's argument is a completely different form of the valuing perspective than the prescriptive literature which I have discussed throughout this paper. These two examples of the valuing perspective can be seen as two extremes of a continuum of forms of that perspective. Alcuin is at the extreme which emphasizes individuality; the authors of the prescriptive
literature are at the extreme which emphasizes community. Both types are categorized as parts of the valuing perspective of feminist theory because they acknowledge and value differences between men and women. The prescriptive literature is based on defining the ideal woman by listing and describing her necessary virtues. It stresses a community of women in a negative fashion by prescribing that all women should act in a certain way. On the other extreme of the continuum, Alcuin's discussion of feminist theory completely ignores that strengthening the community of women is one method of developing individual autonomy. He argues that women have the liberty to become whatever they want to be. Both of these versions of the valuing perspective of feminist theory are used against women to narrowly-define their role. The prescriptive literature does this in an outright fashion, and Alcuin does this by denying women any formal rights. For Alcuin what is, is right. For authors of the prescriptive literature, what is changing, should not be. Both are arguments for conservation of women's traditional role.

Mrs. Carter rejects both of these versions of the valuing perspective. She does not present her argument as openly as Wollstonecraft did in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, but at every turn of the dialogue she confronts Alcuin with counterpoints to make her case. Through Alcuin, Charles Brockden Brown presents his own version of the equality perspective of feminist thought.
CONCLUSION

What I hope to have shed light on in this paper is the way in which political, social, and economic conflicts and concerns in the late eighteenth century defined women's role in America. I have identified and used the prescriptive genre of literature to illustrate these conflicts and the transitional nature of many spheres of life in America at this time. I have described the prescriptive literature as a symptom of and a reaction to great change. Because women showed signs that they could not be confined within a definite role while the country was changing at such a rapid pace, a continuous stream of "advice" books was written to compel women to feel their responsibility to remain in a prescribed role. The authors of this genre attempted to posit the virtue of the country in women's role in the face of perceived corruptions.

I have also classified the prescriptive literature in the tradition of the valuing perspective of feminist theory. The valuing perspective, as I have defined it, acknowledges and values differences between men and women. The prescriptive literature clearly functioned in this way. Theorists who have used the valuing perspective as a progressive argument are concerned that women achieve individual autonomy, particularly in community with other women. The authors of the prescriptive literature, however, used the valuing perspective as a conserving argument. Their aim was to encourage women to act in a narrowly-defined way for what they thought was the good of the
country.

As I have said, the prescriptive literature was a symptom of larger uncertainties of the society. As I have shown, women's role and prescribed virtues were taken from Christianity and the recent past while men's virtues were increasingly more aggressive. Women were to act as a secure, stable force in society as men moved into new uncharted grounds in the economic and political realms. There was a certain tension in the society between returning to original principles and moving ahead into the future; women's and men's roles divided along these lines. I have characterized the prescriptive literature as a symptom of the transitional nature of the United States, but I am not claiming that these uncertainties pervaded each person's mind or that they were clearly defined for each person. The existence and popularity of a branch of literature does not necessarily imply a characterization of the mood of a country; however, it does clearly suggest a deep concern in the minds of those Americans who wrote such literature and those who read it. Such persons were numerous.

What was so confusing about the question of virtue for the Americans was that it was paradoxical. They had left Britain because of religious corruption to built a 'shining city upon a hill' for the rest of the world to admire and emulate. The Americans were to serve as examples for the other countries of the world. Such high expectations would seem to inevitably lead
to disillusionment. The Americans also fought the Revolution partially because they thought that the British Ministers were upsetting the balance of the revered mixed form of government. As the citizens of the newly-formed country grappled with developing their own structure of politics and economics, they confronted difficulties in integrating their old values with these new forms. Virtue was paradoxical for the Americans because they seemed to be losing it.

A second dimension of the politics of the new Republic will shed light on these problems. Competing with the view of Britain as possessing a government to be emulated until the Ministers corrupted it, Tom Paine presented a completely different strand of revolutionary thought. He advocated a republican form of government and greater use of markets of supply and demand in the economic sphere. These became attractive alternatives, yet they were in conflict with widespread belief in the Real Whig tradition. Gordon S. Wood identifies a point of transition in the United States which was implied by this political conflict:

By 1785 Noah Webster was directly challenging Montesquieu's opinion that public virtue was a necessary foundation for democratic republics. Such virtue or patriotism, said Webster, could never predominate. Local attachments would always exist, self-interest was all there ever was. But under a democracy, argued Webster, a self-interested man must court the people, thus tending to make self-love coincide with the people's interest.¹ This transition to a new definition of virtue is theory lagged behind the type of virtue which was already practiced by men in the United States.
The political and economic conflict I have described, had deep implications for women in the late eighteenth century. A large extent of women's prescribed role, if not factual role, was determined by the larger political debate in the young nation. Women could serve as the guardians and repositories of virtue for the entire nation as it went through a difficult period of transition.

In education, the Lockean theory was influential in the literature, but not, apparently in women's lives. Children were to be treated as individuals according to Locke's theory of education while in fact women were treated as an undifferentiated mass. What the Lockean theory actually did, in effect, was to strengthen the validity of the prescriptive literature. As long as it was believed that women had a crucial impact on their child's development, then Americans would continue to buy non-fiction "how-to" books.

Some Americans worked for greater educational opportunities for women, but they were in the minority. In 1791 Caleb Bingham published a grammar manual especially for girls. He explained his motivations in the preface:

The author is not backward in declaring it as his opinion, that, were the same means of education allowed the FAIR SEX, which the other enjoys, many would find cause to alter their abilities; and, perhaps the foundations of so many unjust reflections would be removed.2

By 1850 women's literacy rate was equal to men's at between 90 and 94%.3 Education for women had become greatly improved between the period I am discussing and 1850. Bingham's book and Wollstonecraft's theoretical basis

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were the forerunners and contributors to future change.

Enlightenment premises of individuality and rationality did not significantly change arguments for and about women until Wollstonecraft's revolutionary book in 1791. As I observed in Chapter 2, Enlightenment assumptions did not radically affect feminist theory because they were initially integrated into the valuing perspective. In late eighteenth century America, the valuing perspective was used as an argument for conserving women's traditional role. While the valuing perspective can also be used to enlarge woman's role, the usefulness of appealing to the valuing perspective had reached a breaking point in the late eighteenth century. No new ground could be broken with this type of argument; instead, it was forcefully used against women to confine her to a narrow role.

As I have described, liberty was the most potent political value of the age. The theory of liberalism was viewed by the revolutionaries as a means to achieve both individual and public liberty in the political and economic realms. Women, I have demonstrated, possessed neither liberty defined as freedom from interference nor liberty defined as the ability to fulfill one's potential. The reasons for this were women's prescribed role, the marriage marketplace, and women's lack of educational opportunities. Women did, however, possess a powerful type of political power within the family, but because it was not a formal power it was variable and inconsistent. It was
influence dependent on individual situations, but nevertheless, women possessed some important political skills because of their role.

In 1791 Wollstonecraft theoretically tore down the valuing arguments which had been used against women. Her new vision of feminist theory was continued by Brown in 1798 and many other writers. Because the public world of politics was based on rights and duties in the tradition of Liberalism, the only way for women to enter this world was to claim rights of their own. Therefore, it was the equality perspective of feminist theory as presented by Wollstonecraft and Brown that brought women more fully into the public sphere. Shifting to the rights-based equality vision of feminist theory was a way to break new theoretical ground for women, and eventually, to break new ground for women in practice.
Notes on The Literature

1Carl Degler, "What the Woman's Movement has Done to American History," in A Feminist Perspective in the Academy, ed. Elizabeth Langland and Walter Gove (Chicago, 1983), p. 74, men's literacy rate was 80% at this time.


4Loshe, Early Novel, p. 5.


6Shippen, Nancy Shippen, p. 178.


8Fliegelman, Prodigals and Pilgrims, p. 39.

Notes on Education


3Murry, *Mentoria*, p. 3.


8Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, pp. 19-22, also, many of the authors of the prescriptive literature can be described as populizers of Locke’s educational theory.


14Shippen, *Nancy Shippen*, p. 278.


40 Portia, *Polite Lady*, p. 36.


42 Portia, *Polite Lady*, p. 23.


45 Shippen, *Nancy Shippen*, pp. 41-42.


Notes on Independence, Happiness, and Security

5Fiske, Moral Monitor, p. 15.
7Anna Green Winslow, Diary of Anna Green Winslow, ed. Alice Morse Earle (Boston, 1895), p. 11.
8John Bennett, Letters to a Young Lady on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects (Warrington, 1789), p. 232.
9Franklin, Reflections, p. 87.
10Bennett, Letters to a Young Lady, v. 2, p. 2.
11Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters (Boston, 1980).
13Bennett, Letters to a Young Lady, pp. 150-51.
14Walton, "Female Influence," p. 3.
15Franklin, Reflections, p. vii.
16Franklin, Reflections, p. 55.
17 Franklin, Reflections, p. 19.
18 Franklin, Reflections, p. 21.
19 Franklin, Reflections, p. 63.
20 Franklin, Reflections, p. 61.
21 Franklin, Reflections, p. 61.
22 Franklin, Reflections, p. 59.
23 Shippen, Nancy Shippen, p. 191.
24 Shippen, Nancy Shippen, pp. 139-40.
26 Shippen, Nancy Shippen, p. 267.
27 Shippen, Nancy Shippen, p. 291.
28 Franklin, Reflections, p. 55.
29 Franklin, Reflections, p. 55.
30 Shippen, Nancy Shippen, p. 217.
31 Winslow, Diary of Anna Winslow, p. 39.
32 Shippen, Nancy Shippen, p. 240.
Notes on Politics

1 Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967), is the foremost statement of this belief. Bailyn argues that the American Revolution did not significantly alter the economic or social structure of the United States, however, ideology and constitutionality were revolutionized. The Colonists were convinced that Britain was corrupt, and they felt it was their duty to preserve the ancient form of mixed government. The view that the American Revolution did not revolutionize the social and economic spheres of American life is also presented by Cecelia Kenyon, "Republicanism and Radicalism in the American Revolution: An Old-Fashioned Interpretation," *William and Mary Quarterly* 19 (April 1962), pp. 153-82.

2 In *Liberty's Daughters* (Boston, 1980), Mary Beth Norton argues that the American Revolution signified a change in women's private lives, but not in their public roles. Her thesis does not contradict my point that there was little change in the social and economic standing of Americans as a result of the American Revolution.


9Shippen, Nancy Shippen, p. 91.

10Shippen, Nancy Shippen, p. 91.


12This was the idea of natural aristocracy formulated particularly by John Adams.

13Swanwick, Thoughts on Education, p. 5.

14I am purposefully contrasting knowledge and wisdom because they are significantly different. In America at this time all white males were considered able to possess knowledge, but wisdom as a well-thought out, almost transcendent type of intellect was rarely even mentioned.

15Franklin, Reflections, pp. 84-85.

16Franklin, Reflections, pp. 84-85.


28Burton, *Lectures*, p. 73.

29Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 54.


35Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 11.


38 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 11.
41 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 51.
42 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 155.
44 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 192.
45 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 144.
46 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 145.
48 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 95.
57 Clark, *Brockden Brown*, p. 94.
58 Smith, Diary of Elihu Smith, p. 349.

59 Smith, Diary of Elihu Smith, p. 364.


61 Brown, Alcuin, p. 9.

62 Brown, Alcuin, p. 9.


64 Brown, Alcuin, p. 15.
Notes on Conclusion


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