



## *Abolition* in Frances (Fanny) Wright (1795–1852)

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Frances Wright argued for abolition of slavery based on the rational principle that liberty and equality were the rights of every human being. Slavery, which consisted of slave and master, tyranny and inequality, was both morally wrong and constitutionally wrong. Thus slavery should be abolished as a moral and civic evil. Wright denounced those churches and ministers, particularly, for either promulgating slavery or passively accepting it. For, she argued, unlike them, a “modest Socrates and gentle Jesus” would have accepted death rather than allow oppression and ignorance.

Having met and corresponded with Thomas Jefferson, she discussed with him how best to put an end to slavery. Her theory of knowledge being “derived from positive sensation,” and based on observation and testing, she put into action an experiment with abolition on a tract of land she called Nashoba in Tennessee, which along with slaves she purchased with her own money. Then she arranged for an overseer to give them work and education, her theory being that “to give liberty to a slave before he understands its value is, perhaps, rather to impose a penalty than to bestow a blessing.” With better oversight, administration and behavior of the staff, the plan might have worked and been an example to the country as a better solution than violence.

The theory underlying the abolishment of slavery was Wright’s ethical principle of “human improvement.” That freedom and equality are necessary for “human improvement” is based on reason. This principle cannot be put into practice without liberty and equality, which require also equal distribution of education. Unequal distribution of education leads to “mental bondage” experienced not only by slaves but also by many women and by the poor. In summary, Wright’s argument is that abolition of slavery must include the free and equal education necessary to improve reason and therefore necessary for “human improvement.”

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