



Economic Equality in Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)

Sylvana Tomaselli
St. John's College, Cambridge

Mary Wollstonecraft believed that, given that nature made men unequal, 'the end of government ought to be, to destroy this inequality'. But governments had done the very opposite, in her view. While she did not argue for the elimination of difference, she thought all citizens should be given the opportunity to flourish and excel. She pleaded for the redistribution of some lands, and thought this could be achieved without encroaching on private property rights. She opposed primogeniture, which led to the accumulation of property in too few hands and maintained that property should be fluctuating and common land should be granted to industrious peasants. She decried idleness and thought people had a right to the fruit of their labour. This led her to denounce iniquitous taxation systems and to praise the efforts of the Physiocrats, such as François Quesnay (1694–1774) and Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (1787–81), to reform the nature and extent of taxes in France. She became a strong critic of the intensification of the division of labour, the luxury economy, commerce, if only for its psychological effects on those engaged in it, and was a passionate opponent of the slave trade. She argued for the education of women and their right to acquire a profession, such that they could maintain themselves independently and never be forced into marriage, especially not, for financial reasons.

Primary Sources:

Todd, Janet; Butler, Marilyn; Rees-Mogg, Emma (eds.) 1989. *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. 7 Vols. London: William Pickering.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. (1792) 1995. *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Hints*. Tomaselli, Sylvana (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press.

Secondary Sources:

Brace, Laura 2016. Wollstonecraft and the Properties of (Anti-)Slavery, in Bergès, Sandrine & Coffee, Alan (eds.): *The Social and Political philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 116–134.

Mackenzie, Catriona 2016. Mary Wollstonecraft: An Early Relational Autonomy Theorist?, in Bergès, Sandrine & Coffee, Alan (eds.): *The Social and Political philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 67–91.

Tomaselli, Sylvana 2016. Reflections on Inequality, respect, and Love in the Political Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, in Bergès, Sandrine & Coffee, Alan (eds.): *The Social and Political philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 14–33.

Keywords:

division of labour, inequality, primogeniture, physiocrats, property, slave trade, François Quesnay, Anne Robert Jacques Turgot