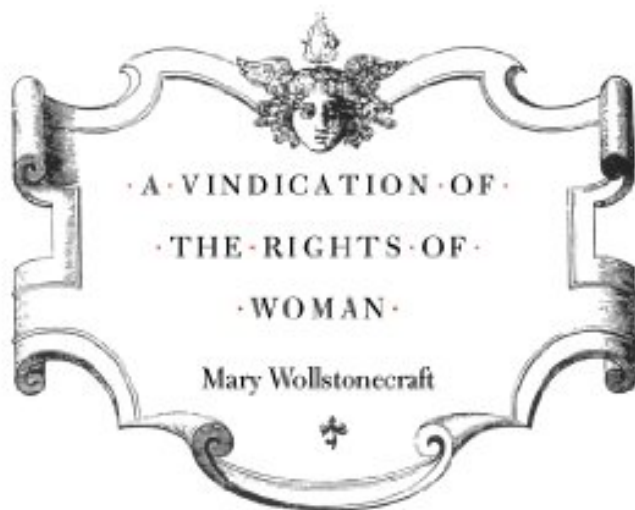


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# A Vindication of the Rights of Woman



*Par Mary Wollstonecraft*  
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**Description :** Description du produit This classic work of early feminism remains as relevant and passionate today as it was for Wollstonecraft's contemporaries. This edition includes new explanatory notes.

Prsentation de l'diteur Throughout history, some books have changed the world. They have transformed the way we see ourselves - and each other. They have inspired debate, dissent, war and revolution. They have enlightened, outraged, provoked and comforted. They have enriched lives - and destroyed them. Now Penguin brings you the works of the great thinkers, pioneers, radicals and visionaries whose ideas shook civilization, and helped make us who we are. Extrait Chapter I The Rights and Involved Duties of Mankind

Considered In the present state of society 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. To clear my way, I must be allowed to ask some plain questions, and the answers will probably appear as unequivocal as the axioms on which reasoning is built; though, when entangled with various motives of action, they are formally contradicted, either by the words or conduct of men. In what does mans pre-eminence over the brute creation consist? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than the whole, in Reason. What acquirement exalts one being above another? Virtue, we spontaneously reply. For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes, whispers Experience. Consequently 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 be viewed collectively. The rights and duties of man thus simplified, it seems almost impertinent to attempt to illustrate truths that appear so incontrovertible; yet such deeply rooted prejudices have clouded reason, and such spurious qualities have assumed the name of virtues, that it is necessary to pursue the course of reason as it has been perplexed and involved in error, by various adventitious circumstances, comparing the simple axiom with casual deviations. Men, in general, seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they have imbibed, they can scarcely trace how, rather than to root them out. The mind must be strong that resolutely forms its own principles; for a kind of intellectual cowardice prevails which makes many men shrink from the task, or only do it by halves. Yet the imperfect conclusions thus drawn, are frequently very plausible, because they are built on partial experience, on just, though narrow, views. Going back to first principles, vice skulks, with all its native deformity, from close investigation; but a set of shallow reasoners are always exclaiming that these arguments prove too much, and that a measure rotten at the core may be expedient. Thus expediency is continually contrasted with simple principles, till truth is lost in a mist of words, virtue, in forms, and knowledge rendered a sounding nothing, by the specious prejudices that assume its name. That the society is formed in the wisest manner, whose constitution is founded on the nature of man, strikes, in the abstract, every thinking being so forcibly, that it looks like presumption to endeavour to bring forward proofs; though proof must be brought, or the strong hold of prescription will never be forced by reason; yet to urge prescription as an argument to justify the depriving men (or women) of their natural rights, is one of the absurd sophisms which daily insult common sense. The civilization of the bulk of the people of Europe is very partial; nay, it may be made a question, whether they have acquired any virtues in exchange for innocence, equivalent to the misery produced by the vices that have been plastered over unsightly ignorance, and the freedom which has been bartered for splendid slavery. The desire of dazzling by riches, the most certain pre-eminence that man can obtain, the pleasure of commanding flattering sycophants, and many other complicated low calculations of doting self-love, have all contributed to overwhelm the mass of mankind, and make liberty a convenient handle for mock patriotism. For whilst rank and titles are held of the utmost importance, before which Genius must hide its diminished head, it is, with a few exceptions, very unfortunate for a nation when a man of abilities, without rank or property, pushes himself forward to notice. Alas! what unheard-of misery have thousands suffered to purchase a cardinals hat for an intriguing obscure adventurer, who longed to be ranked with princes, or lord it over them by seizing the triple crown!

From 500 Great Books by Women; review by Erica Bauermeister

A Vindication of the Rights of Women was written during a time of revolutionary fervor, when the principle of inalienable rights for all men had and was causing political turmoil in the United States, France, and Britain. What Mary Wollstonecraft did was relatively simple in premise but complicated in reality: she applied the concept of inalienable rights to women as well as men. Her attack on those who perpetuate a sexual double-standard is direct and pointed: "I must declare what I firmly believe, that all writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners, from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters than they would otherwise have been; and consequently, more useless members of society." Mary Wollstonecraft blasts the imbalance of power between the sexes, pointing out that, as with governments, an imbalance of power corrupts both the oppressed and the oppressor. She seeks instead an education for women and men that will lead to individuals with reason, knowledge, and virtue. An eloquent, self-educated, and self-supporting woman, for her efforts in A Vindication of the Rights of Women she was labeled "a hyena in petticoats." Her writing, like most of the prose of her time, tends to be verbose by today's standards, yet her arguments have passion and insight that speak across more than two centuries. -- For great reviews of books for girls, check out Let's Hear It for

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