Of Slavery

22. The Natural Liberty of Man is to be free from any Superior Power on Earth, and not to be under the Will or Legislative Authority of Man, but to have only the Law of Nature for his Rule. The Liberty of Man, in Society, is to be under no other Legislative Power, but that established by consent, in the Common-wealth, nor but what the Dominion of any Will, or Restraint of any Law, but what the Legislative shall enact, according to the Trust put in it. Freedom then is not what Sir R. F. tells us, O.A. 55 [224]. A Liberty for every one to do what he lists, to live as he pleases, and not to be tied by any Laws: But Freedom of Men under Government, is, to have a standing Rule to live by, common to every one of that Society, and made by the Legislative Power erected in it; A Liberty to follow my own Will in all things, where the Rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another Man. As Freedom of Nature is to be under no other restraint but the Law of Nature.

23. This Freedom from Absolute, Arbitrary Power, is so necessary to, and closely joined with a Man’s Preservation, that he cannot part with it, but by what forfeits his Preservation and Life together. For a Man, not having the Power of his own Life, cannot, by Compact, or his own Consent, enslave himself to any one, nor put himself under the Absolute, Arbitrary Power of another, to take away his Life, when he pleases. No body can give more Power than he has himself; and he that cannot take away his own Life, cannot give another power over it. Indeed having, by his fault, forfeited his own Life, by some Act that deserves Death; he, to whom he has forfeited it, may (when he has him in his Power) delay to take it, and make use of him to his own Service, and he does him no injury by it. For, whenever he finds the hardship of his Slavery out-weigh the value of his Life, 'tis in his Power, by resisting the Will of his Master, to draw on himself the Death he desires.

24. This is the perfect condition of Slavery, which is nothing else, but the State of War continued, between a lawful Conquerour, and a Captive. For, if once Compact enter between them, and make an agreement for a limited Power on the one side, and Obedience on the other, the State of War and Slavery ceases, as long as the Compact endures. For, as has been said, no Man can, by agreement, pass over to another that which he hath not in himself, a Power over his own Life.

Activity Options

1. Summarizing Paraphrase Locke’s definition of liberty in your own words. Then share your definition with classmates.

2. Recognizing Point of View In this excerpt, Locke refers to Sir Robert Filmer, an author who promoted the royal view of the basis of governmental power. With a partner, role-play a conversation between Locke and Sir Robert Filmer about freedom and the role of government.
I have sighed when obliged to confess that either
nature has made a great difference between man
and man or that the civilization which has hitherto
taken place in the world has been very partial. I
have turned over various books written on the sub-
ject of education, and patiently observed the conduct
of parents and the management of schools; but
what has been the result?—a profound conviction
that the neglected education of my fellow creatures
is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and
that women, in particular, are rendered weak and
wretched by a variety of concurring causes, origin-
ating from one hasty conclusion. The conduct and
manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that
their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the
flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength
and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the
flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious
eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the
season when they ought to have arrived at maturity.
One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a
false system of education, gathered from the books
written on this subject by men who, considering
females rather as women than human creatures,
have been more anxious to make them alluring mist-
resses than affectionate wives and rational moth-
ers; the civilized women of the present century,
with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire
love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition,
and by their abilities and virtues exact respect. . . .

Yet, because I am a woman, I would not lead
my readers to suppose that I mean violently to agi-
tate the contested question respecting the equality
or inferiority of the sex; but . . . I shall stop a
moment to deliver, in a few words, my opinion. In
the government of the physical world it is observ-
able that the female in point of strength is, in gen-
eral, inferior to the male. This is the law of nature;
and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogat-
ed [abolished] in favor of woman. A degree of
physical superiority cannot, therefore, be denied—
and it is a noble prerogative [right]! But not con-
tent with this natural preeminence, men endeavor
to sink us still lower, merely to render us alluring
objects for a moment; and women, . . . do not seek
to obtain a durable interest in [men’s] hearts, or to
become the friends of the fellow creatures who find
amusement in their society.

I am aware of an obvious inference: from every
quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine
women; but where are they to be found? If by this
appellation [name] men mean to inveigh [protest]
against their ardor in hunting, shooting, and gam-
ing, I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it
he against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more
properly speaking, the attainment of those talents
and virtues, the exercise of which endows the
human character, and which raise females in the
scale of animal being, when they are comprehen-
sively termed mankind; all those who view them
with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish
with me that they may every day grow more and
more masculine.

from Barbara H. Solomon and Paula S. Berggren, eds.,
A Mary Wollstonecraft Reader (New York: New American

Discussion Questions
1. Analyzing Causes and Recognizing Effects
According to Wollstonecraft, what happens when
women are not properly educated?
2. Clarifying What is Wollstonecraft’s opinion of
the equality of men and women?
3. Making Inferences Jean-Jacques Rousseau
believed that a woman’s education should pri-
marily teach her to become a better wife and
mother. How do you think Wollstonecraft would
have reacted to his views?