

*Political Economy and Commercial  
Society in the 1790s*

Question: what links the management of the silky-haired rabbit in Germany; the production of silk in France; the durability and worm resistance of ship timber; and considerations on isolating persons infected with smallpox? These confusingly heterodox topics are all subjects of works reviewed as works of political economy in Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review: Or, History of Literature*, a monthly periodical whose publication, from May 1788 to December 1798, almost exactly corresponds with the span of Wollstonecraft's writing career.<sup>1</sup> Wollstonecraft had close links with Johnson, the *Analytical*, and its associated circle of thinkers.<sup>2</sup> Not only did she write perhaps as many as 400 or more reviews for the *Analytical Review*, she also acted (her biographer has suggested) as an editorial assistant to Johnson, continuing her involvement with the journal between and after her trips to France in 1792–1795, and her Scandinavian travels in 1795.<sup>3</sup> The periodical might therefore appear to be a good place to explore Wollstonecraft's understanding of political economy, but, at least initially, the picture is confusing. Thus, under the subheading of 'Political Economy', the *Analytical Review*'s 'Catalogue of books and pamphlets published in GB and Ireland in first 6 months of 1795' lists only one work that today would be recognised as belonging to that field, namely Turgot's *Reflections on the Formation and Distribution of Wealth*. Other works listed under 'political economy' address aspects of public administration, pertaining to the navy and the admiralty; one (to which we return later), by Samuel Crumpe, is on the employment of the poor; others address Church of England revenues and tithes. Yet a further group do not seem to fit even the broadest interpretation of the category of political economy at all, including Dyer's *Dissertation on Benevolence*, or Moser's *Reflection on Profane and Judicial Swearing*.<sup>4</sup>

One way of considering what 'political economy' might mean in the last decades of the eighteenth century would be to trace how the term was deployed by writers now recognised as key thinkers in the field. James

Steuart's *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Oeconomy* (1767) gave the term some prominence. Steuart's spelling of 'oeconomy' recalls the origins of the word 'economy' in the Greek *oikos*, which referred to the provisioning of the household; Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1755 article on 'Economy' for the *Encyclopédie*, later published as his *Discourse on Political Economy*, similarly begins with the household unit. Adam Smith's definition of political economy, on the other hand, takes as its focus not the social unit of the household but of the nation. For Smith, political economy aims 'to provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, or more properly to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves; and secondly to supply the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for the publick services'.<sup>5</sup> But, whilst Smith contrasted his own system of 'natural liberty' with two other systems of political economy, the mercantile and the agricultural, he in fact used the term very sparingly.<sup>6</sup> Rather than understanding political economy to be a self-contained or formally defined field of inquiry in its own right, or indeed as the sole focus of his work, for Smith political economy was 'a branch of the science of the statesman or legislator', and as only one part of the larger inquiry in which he was engaged, which bridged moral philosophy, jurisprudence, conjectural history, and theories of law, justice, and government.<sup>7</sup>

Smith's sense of political economy as a 'branch of the science of the statesman' was perhaps enacted when he advised government ministers at the time of the War of American Independence, delaying the publication of *The Wealth of Nations* as a consequence. Winch has shown how the debate over America in the 1770s brought political economy into the heart of political discourse: on all sides, 'the medium of political economy [was used] to explore the most basic questions surrounding national identity'.<sup>8</sup> More than a narrow discussion of policy and legislation, it became a '*lingua franca*' for discussing the political dilemmas and possibilities faced by the new nation, encompassing 'more profound issues of a moral kind'.<sup>9</sup> Increasing recognition of the importance of trade and commerce to national prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic, and as fundamental to the emergent nature of what was recognised as modern commercial society, meant that political economic thought became newly influential as the means to understand the contemporary world in all its aspects: economic, but also social, moral, behavioural, and political. Something of this is conveyed in James Thompson's comparison of political economy with another emergent eighteenth-century mode of viewing the world, the novel: if the novel is 'that discourse that describes or imagines and so constructs privacy and domesticity, political economy is the discourse that imagines or

describes civil society and publicity'.<sup>10</sup> It is a formulation that puts political economy at the heart of attempts to understand, and to improve, the political life and identity of the modern commercial nation and its people – and hence, given the range of commentary and viewpoints on such topics, casts it too as the ground for the hotly contested political debates of the time.

Historians of political economy, especially over the past thirty or so years, have taught us much about the growth and emergence of political economic thought at this time, but their enterprise runs the risk of using retrospective vision to render the field more coherent and unified than it may have felt at the time.<sup>11</sup> Reviewing works discussed as political economy in the *Analytical Review* offers a striking different picture of what political economy was understood to encompass at the time of Wollstonecraft's writing career. Political economy emerges as a heterogeneous and mixed discourse: a richly various confluence of political, moral, and economic ideas and writings, as well as emergent technical disciplinary principles, whose implications and possibilities were both evoked and hotly contested within the larger political debates of the time.<sup>12</sup> Far from fixed, technical, strictly defined, and inflexible, political economic thought was significantly 'protean'.<sup>13</sup> How was this new 'lingua franca' exploited by the radical and reformist thinkers associated with Johnson and his circle – and how might that have informed Wollstonecraft's writing?

Not only was political economy itself, as a set of interconnected political, economic, moral, and social concerns, loosely defined at this time. It also participated in a larger context of discursive flux and intellectual and political fights, in a decade in which late Enlightenment thought converged with 'the ideals of a republican and democratic revolution' whose possibilities – from modest reform to utopian social and political restructuring – were eventually vigorously repressed.<sup>14</sup> At one level, this is shown by the fate of Smithian political economy in the 1790s. Following his death in 1790, Smith's work was used by figures as different as Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke to quite divergent ends, whilst its foundation in property was rejected by others.<sup>15</sup> Fears that Smith's work would be linked, to its detriment, with French Revolutionary thought prompted Smith's biographer, Dugald Stewart, to defensively decouple its more technical economic principles and practices from larger political questions; he also emphasised Smith's work as 'speculative'.<sup>16</sup>

By the early years of the nineteenth century, political economy was gaining a foothold in educational institutions: Thomas Malthus was appointed as Professor of History and Political Economy in the East India College in Hertfordshire in 1805, and Stewart gave lectures on political

economy at Edinburgh University in 1800. Yet it was still possible, in 1802, for Samuel Taylor Coleridge to describe political economy as ‘a Science in its Infancy – indeed, Science, it is none’; or to call, a decade later, in 1812, for a ‘genuine philosopher in Political Economy’ to ‘establish a system including the laws and the disturbing force of that miraculous machine of living Creatures, a Body Politic’.<sup>17</sup> Given this larger context of fierce political and intellectual contest, how did the thinkers associated with the *Analytical Review* deploy political economy to analyse and critique modern commercial society? What resources for understanding the moral, social, and political nature of late eighteenth-century commercial modernity did political economy offer radical thinkers of time, including Wollstonecraft? Greg Claeys has observed how the French Revolution debates of the 1790s led to a ‘retreat’ – except by ultra-radical and working-class writers – from a political language of rights, and the adoption of a different political language focused on the relationship of ‘commerce, manners and civilisation’.<sup>18</sup> If for Smith, political economy is part of a ‘science of politics’, how would its ‘lingua franca’ be taken up by Johnson’s circle, and how was Wollstonecraft situated in relation to that? We turn now to *Analytical Review* to explore this further.

### Political Economy in the *Analytical Review*, 1788–1798

Published monthly from May 1788 to December 1798, the *Analytical Review* was a progressive, reformist publication co-founded by Thomas Christie and Johnson. Although Johnson has long been regarded as a ‘radical’ publisher, the elaboration of different strands of oppositionist thought in this period has enabled a more nuanced picture to emerge.<sup>19</sup> The politics of the *Analytical Review* have been characterised as seeking a ‘middle course’ between ‘aristocracy and superstition’ on the one hand and a blind admiration of ‘equality and republicanism’ on the other. It promoted liberty and independence, moderate Parliamentary reform, and a representative government; whilst ‘resolutely middle class’, it was ‘sympathetic to the plight of the poor’ but ‘dryly intellectual’ rather than ‘emotionally populist’.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, many of those associated with Johnson were deeply involved in the political struggles of the day. By the late 1790s, the *Analytical Review* was running persistent criticism of the Pitt government. In 1798, Johnson was prosecuted for seditious libel, with a copy of the *Analytical Review* for September 1798 used as evidence at his trial, and he ceased publishing it that same year (although continuing to work as a publisher and bookseller).<sup>21</sup>

The *Analytical Review* had strong links to rational dissent: Johnson and Christie were both dissenters, and the campaign for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts was part of the context for the establishment of the journal.<sup>22</sup> The *Analytical Review* modelled the free and rational enquiry which was part of a conversational, collaborative, and rational-critical public sphere to which late eighteenth-century middle-class dissenting culture was committed.<sup>23</sup> Dissenters also ‘dominated’ commercial life, and political economy was on the curriculum in many dissenting academies, including some where leading dissenting intellectuals Joseph Priestley and Richard Price had previously taught.<sup>24</sup> Christie suggested that his new journal would be of interest to ‘men engaged in active life and professional business ... who, though they may have an ardent love of knowledge ... are, however, too much involved in the necessary duties of their stations, to find leisure to peruse volumes in quarto and folio’.<sup>25</sup> Despite the ostensibly neutral language of late Enlightenment knowledge dissemination, it is clear that Christie’s anticipated readers are the professional middle classes: readers with interests, in both senses of the term, in commercial and political economic matters.<sup>26</sup> At least some of the ‘men engaged in active life and professional business’ whom Christie envisaged reading his journal were likely to be dissenting merchants, traders, or other businessmen, and the journal might thus be expected to give reasonable space, alongside its other concerns, to commercial and economic topics.

References to commerce in the pages of the journal are indeed plentiful, and it offers much to illuminate how political economy was understood, and what concerns it addressed, for a particular segment of the reading public in the 1790s.<sup>27</sup> Although political economy does not appear in the list of topics covered by journal compiled by Johnson’s biographer, numerous review articles were published under the descriptive section heading of ‘politics and political economy’, suggesting political economy had some recognition as a field or subfield of knowledge; references to ‘commerce’ and ‘trade’, meanwhile, were plentiful in the journal’s indices.<sup>28</sup> Despite the apparent heterogeneity suggested by the works listed as ‘political economy’ at the start of this chapter, some sense of a coherent field of political economy does emerge. Some works, such as Voght’s *Account of the Management of the Poor in Hamburgh (sic)*, explicitly announce themselves to be contributions to a ‘branch’ of political economy.<sup>29</sup> Others, whilst identified by the reviewer as on political economic subjects, present themselves either in more generalist ways (for instance, *Memoirs of the Society for the promotion of General Knowledge among the Citizens*) or with variant terms (such as *Considerations on Public Economy; wherein it’s (sic) benefits*

are exemplified by historical Precedents).<sup>30</sup> Still others, however, eschew the term: Thomas Percival's *Enquiry into the Principles and Limits of Taxation*, described itself as a contribution to a branch of moral and political philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Such evidence suggests that whilst there is an emergent sense of a field of political economic knowledge and practice, its boundaries are yet fluid, and it is not universally recognised, with the term being deployed in, to our eyes, both accurate and inaccurate ways. 'Political economy' clearly means different things for different individuals and is even open to redefinition for political ends. Thus, the *Analytical Review* reports the distinction made by Parliamentarian Henry Dundas, in a defence of the East India Company, between political economy, defined as the running of the polity, and commercial 'oeconomy': 'No writer upon political economy has as yet supposed that an extensive empire can be administered by a commercial association; and no writer on commercial oeconomy has as yet supposed, that trade ought to be shackled by an exclusive privilege'.<sup>32</sup> Such a differentiation of 'political' and 'commercial' economy insists on a separation that the composite term 'political economy' resists; it thus makes more difficult a consideration of the second objective detailed in Smith's definition of political economy: supplying the 'state or commonwealth with a revenue' for 'publick services'.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, a recognisable sense of what we would now identify as the discipline of political economy can be discerned. A review of Crumpe's *Essay on the Best Means of Providing Employment for the People* in the *Analytical Review* for February 1795 hails a 'class of politicians', which 'made its appearance a few years ago in France, the members of which have been since known by the appellation of the "economists"': the physiocrat François Quesnay, as well as Turgot, Necker, and Smith are named in this context.<sup>34</sup> Wollstonecraft characterised the physiocrats in markedly similar terms in her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, published later the same year. This 'class' of thinkers was international: many of the works reviewed as 'political economy' stemmed from France or elsewhere on the Continent, and their work is at times described as a 'science', as in the praise, in a review of a work on the *Government, Manners and Conditions in France anterior to the Revolution*, of Turgot as excelling in the 'science of political economy'.<sup>35</sup> Although at this time 'science' could still refer to knowledge in general, the depiction of political economy as a 'science' here might also acknowledge the occasional presence, in works reviewed under this heading, of mathematical approaches or statistical data, evident, for instance, in statistical tables or references to the work of Price.<sup>36</sup> Importantly, such factual methods do

not preclude political economy from being understood as a form of moral knowledge, or as a way of putting benevolence into practice. Crumpe's reviewer describes the 'economist' 'class of politicians' as 'inspired' by the 'beneficent sentiments' of 'the present age', sentiments manifested in 'the attention now paid to whatever can alleviate the wants, subtract from the miseries, or increase the happiness of mankind'.<sup>37</sup>

The authority of their new 'science' enables economists to be distinguished from 'benevolent' but misguided princes, accounts of whose schemes 'of public utility' are also reviewed under the 'political economy' heading. These might include the 'benevolent endeavours of a good prince to promote the weal of his subjects' (review of *Discourses with Enlightened Citizens of the Country of Baden*) or the Bavarian Count of Rumford's various measures on poor relief (and innovations on chimney design).<sup>38</sup> Whilst their benevolence can, at times, have welcome effects, the reviewer of Voght's *An Account of the Management of the Poor in Hamburg* approvingly quotes Voght's admonishment of instances where '[u]nthinking pity' has 'rashly stopped that natural course of things, by which want leads to labour, labour to comfort, the knowledge of comfort to industry, and to all those virtues, by which the toiling multitude so incalculably adds to the strength and happiness of a country'.<sup>39</sup> Evoking a 'natural course of things' which progresses from want to labour, comfort, and national prosperity, Voght uses a Smithian phrase which (as we shall see in Chapter 2) had been deployed too by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published six years earlier. Its recurrence here signals the presence of a particularly Smithian political economic language, although one which, as we shall see, is adapted to different ends by some of its later users. Luckily, in this instance in Hamburg, benevolence is eventually guided into a 'proper channel', ensuring that poor relief is used as a 'spur' to 'industry' rather than 'sloth and profligacy'.<sup>40</sup> Employment schemes for the poor include making 'rope-yarn', an activity on which Wollstonecraft herself commented when visiting Hamburg. As we shall see in Chapter 4, Hamburg is for Wollstonecraft the epicentre of the immoral commercialism she denounces throughout her Scandinavian travels; and her sense that 'to commerce every thing must give way' is exemplified, literally, by her having to turn aside to 'make room for the rope-makers' as she walked by the river Elbe.<sup>41</sup> In what reads as an interpretative misstep by Wollstonecraft, the rope-making which for her exemplifies commerce overstepping its proper bounds, is, for the *Analytical Review's* reviewer, a benevolent political economy attending to the poor through a 'proper channel'.

The sense of political economy – whether as a broad science of political administration, or as a narrower technique of finance, revenue, labour, and capital – as a new form of knowledge which will help to improve the human condition is echoed by Wollstonecraft herself in her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794). The ‘science of politics and finance’ is at once ‘the most important’, as well as the ‘most difficult of all human improvements’: its difficulty stemming from its complex involvement in the ‘passions, tempers, and manners of men and nations’, its estimation of ‘their wants, maladies, comforts, happiness, and misery’, and its computing of ‘the sum of good or evil flowing from social institutions’. Whilst it might ‘advance’ towards securing ‘the sacred rights of every human creature’, the steps by which it progresses are, she warns, bound to be slow.<sup>42</sup> This remarkable – and overlooked – passage sees Wollstonecraft putting a mixed language, combining references to a science of ‘finance’ and a methodology of ‘estimating’ and ‘computing’ human wants and needs, into the service of human happiness and perfection, with a final acknowledgement of ‘sacred’ human rights. Such a hybridised discourse helps us to see how Wollstonecraft herself, usually primarily understood as a political and moral writer, can also be read as a thinker on political economy as it was understood in her time. As her reference to the ‘sum of good and evil flowing from social institutions’ makes clear, virtue was, in Wollstonecraft’s eyes, closely tied to the political, social, and economic organisation of society.

In September 1797 – the month of Wollstonecraft’s death – the *Analytical Review* reviewed cleric and economist Robert Acklom Ingram’s *Inquiry into the Present Condition of the Lower Classes and the Means of Improving It*: a work whose title could be taken to address precisely the ‘wants, maladies, comforts, happiness, and misery’ of the populace, which Wollstonecraft had associated with the new ‘science of politics and finance’. Ingram’s pamphlet, one of the first to make the case for the study of political economy in universities, argued that ‘[p]olitical science is so important to the interests of society, that it seems entitled to a much larger share of attention in education, than has hitherto been allowed it in our public schools’. His reviewer welcomed the work as a ‘promising foretaste of the benefit which might be expected to accrue to society, if this subject were made a principal branch of academical instruction’.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, the *Analytical Review* supported such a programme, for the socially reformist benefits it might bring: Ingram’s *Syllabus or Abstract of a System of Political Philosophy; to Which Is prefixed a Dissertation Recommending That the Study of Political Economy Be Encouraged in the Universities* was reviewed in one of the last issues of



the *Analytical*, for June 1799.<sup>44</sup> When, some twenty years later, Malthus set out to characterise the ‘science of political economy’ at the opening of his *Principles of Political Economy* (1820), he suggested that the subject bore a ‘nearer resemblance to the science of morals and politics than to that of mathematics’.<sup>45</sup> Even as political economy began to gain an institutional foothold, beyond often short-lived dissenting academies, in schools and universities, then, the *Analytical Review* was not alone in regarding it as a field of study not wholly decoupled from either politics on the one hand or morality on the other: one that offered the means – perhaps the best means – to put the benevolent sentiments of the age into practice.

### **Debating Commercial Society in the 1790s: War, Debt, and the Possibility of Peace**

Political economy reviews in the *Analytical Review* offer one picture of how political economy was understood in the 1790s and illuminate the nature of political economic debate among the liberal and progressive circle which produced and read the periodical. This is part of the context within which Wollstonecraft was thinking and writing; the questions and discussions which recur in its pages help us to understand some of the arguments – even some of the asides – which she makes in her work. If not often explicitly the focus of extended discussion, political economy reviews in the *Analytical Review* share in ongoing debates about the nature and shape of commercial society, its moral and social features, its dependence on a system of war and taxation, and its strengths and weaknesses; there is some discussion of alternative socio-economic models, and significant worry about the national debt produced by a commercial nation at almost perpetual war. More particular concerns include arguments about the organisation of property and inheritance, taxation, and related inequalities of wealth; persistent anxieties about moral standards in a supposedly luxurious manufacturing nation; and concerns about the state of the poor and modes of poor relief (a matter for Parliamentary debate in 1796 with Pitt’s Poor Law Bill). As we now turn to give more detailed attention to the content of the *Analytical Review*, it is worth noting that in general, it is not possible to attribute its reviews to particular individuals: not only was anonymous reviewing usual practice in late eighteenth-century publishing, but some of the identifying signatures of contributors to the *Analytical Review* were shared among a number of individuals.<sup>46</sup> Rather than attempting to read these entries as the attributable opinions of individuals, or indeed following Cox and Galperin’s suggestion of the *Analytical Review* ‘communal’

and ‘jointly-created editorial voice’, which may suggest more agreement and cohesion than actually existed, I read them as a collection of diverse voices contributing to on-going debate and national conversation.<sup>47</sup> In line with what Bugg has identified as Johnson’s commitment to independent thought and ‘open debate’, the journal and the network behind it was a site of contest, divergent opinion, and lively difference.<sup>48</sup> For our purposes, tracing these debates not only helps contextualise Wollstonecraft’s thinking but also illuminates important instances where her political economic thought, if it can be so termed, is striking different from the variegated progressivist consensus evidenced in the *Analytical Review*.

By far the most recurrent theme in the political economy reviews is concern about war, and the national debt and taxes which funded it. This is manifested both in the topics of the publications reviewed and in the commentary they receive from reviewers; it is present both where such issues are the main concern (such as an *Essay on the English National Credit*), and where they are contributory factors (the review of Sir Frederic Morton Eden’s *State of the Poor*, for instance, claims poverty is caused by war and taxation).<sup>49</sup> Such debates go to the very heart of the nature of the modern British commercial nation, which defended and extended its commercial interests overseas through a ‘funding system’ of loans to the state from the public creditor first established in the 1690s. The innovative financial arrangements of the British ‘fiscal-military state’ led not only to the establishment of Britain as the pre-eminent global power, following defeat of its nearest rival, France, in the Seven Years War in 1763, but also to spiralling national debt, which, now larger than Britain had any likely means of paying off, was presented in the *Analytical Review* as a crippling and unsustainable burden.<sup>50</sup> Wollstonecraft’s attack, in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, on the ‘present system of war’, thus references and shares in a well-established critique of Britain’s seemingly unsustainable cycle of debt, war, commerce, and empire, which many feared might end with the collapse of the nation state in its current form.<sup>51</sup> Rousseau’s educational novel, *Emile* (1762), which of course Wollstonecraft knew, had predicted the collapse of Europe’s commercial monarchies; Montesquieu, an early theorist of commercial society, also thought that Britain was on an unsustainable path; and David Hume had famously asserted that ‘either the nation must destroy public credit, or public credit will destroy the nation’.<sup>52</sup> Two of dissent’s foremost writers on political economy, Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, also warned of the precariousness of the British system. By the century’s final decade, financial pressures of the war with France and intensified agitation for political reform reinvigorated such arguments: for

Tom Paine's *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* (1796), the inherent instability of the British finance system suggested the imminent collapse of Pitt's government.

Such concerns are readily evident in the pages of the *Analytical Review*: as, for instance, in the wide-ranging critique of the 'ruinous Consequences of the popular System of Taxation, War and Conquest', as the subtitle of one publication describes it.<sup>53</sup> Whilst a review of the report on the national debt, from the select committee on finance in March 1798, frames the topic as a relatively contained problem of finance, it is noted that the issue should concern the public due to both implications for taxation and the public nature of the debt, when 'half the nation' are 'venturing their all in the public funds'.<sup>54</sup> A more wide-ranging and polemical intervention is offered by William Morgan, nephew of Price, who aims to wake his readers from the 'delirium of unavailing conquests' by examining the effects of war on the nation's finances, vowing to address the self-interest of its audience, rather than its humanity, as the 'only means of awakening an effectual opposition to the present system'.<sup>55</sup> Morgan, an actuary, deployed financial data to strengthen his case, comparing debts contracted during the American war with those incurred in the ongoing war with France (including the infamous Imperial loans) to demonstrate 'the danger arising from a perpetual accumulation of new debts and taxes'.<sup>56</sup> Morgan's reviewer reports that, whilst we are told that the current war is being fought to defend 'all that is most important to property, social order and the religion of mankind', its huge expense, added to that of all the wars of the preceding century, threatens 'bankruptcy and ruin'. Wars, it is claimed, destroy, rather than improve, 'the property of the nation'.<sup>57</sup>

For the author of *Considerations on Public Economy*, reviewed in March 1796, Britain's 'enormous debts' were 'the only difficulty of serious magnitude this nation has at present to encounter'.<sup>58</sup> Opinion varied on how that 'difficulty' might be remedied. Patje's *Essay on the English National Credit*, discussed in the *Analytical Review* the following year, asserted that Britain would be saved by exploiting the 'untouched wealth' of England's 'waste lands': a comment that recalls Wollstonecraft's reference, in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, to the 'brown waste' of land lying unexploited.<sup>59</sup> Patje's confidence is not shared by his reviewer, however, who asks whether British 'precedency in manufactures and commerce' is 'equal to the excess of her public burdens'; Patje's assurance that British taxes are 'no heavy burden' is also strongly questioned: 'Every country where heavy taxes are collected is remarkable for an extreme inequality of wealth in it's (sic) inhabitants'.<sup>60</sup> Discussion of national debt quickly opens into

a larger critique of the political economic system. One strident example is a pamphlet by the American Joel Barlow, with whom Wollstonecraft had significant links: she was close to his wife Ruth, and Barlow was in France, as she was, in the mid-1790s, where (as we see in Chapter 4) he was involved in the same import activities as her lover Gilbert Imlay. Part I of Barlow's *Advice to the Privileged Orders in the Several States of Europe, Resulting from the Necessity and Propriety of a General Revolution in the Principles of Government*, published in 1792, was, like Wollstonecraft's first *Vindication*, one of many replies to Burke's *Reflections on Revolution*.<sup>61</sup> Part II, reviewed in the *Analytical Review* in September 1795, strongly links national debt, unfair taxes, and inequality in an attack on the funding system and the 'fraud' of taxation. Claiming that 'perpetual warfare' exists between governments, whose aim is only to increase revenue, and 'the great body of the people who labour', Barlow asserts that 'the art of administering ... governments has been so to vary the means of seizing upon private property, as to bring the greatest possible quantity into the public coffers without exciting insurrections'.<sup>62</sup> Barlow approves of the French revolutionary state's seizing of church and emigrant property, anticipating that France's debts will thereby be 'nearly extinguished'.<sup>63</sup> The review's final sentence quotes Barlow's assertion that the nation's debts 'ought not' and 'will not, impede the progress of liberty', linking economic conditions with political freedom: a link explored too, as we shall see in Chapter 4, in Wollstonecraft's own history of the French Revolution, which had been published the previous year.

Property, and its rightful or wrongful ownership (by individuals, whose labour gives them property in its fruits, or by governments who wrongly 'seize upon private property'), figures large in Barlow's argument, as it does in a different way in both Wollstonecraft's *Vindications*. Attitudes to property, indeed, focus political differences in this period: Barlow's praise for revolutionary France's confiscation of ecclesiastical and aristocratic property directly opposes Burke's berating of the same act in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): as we shall see in the next chapter, for Burke, this overturned the established, proper relationships of property, law, and government. As Barlow's pamphlet shows, an attack on governmental financial practices (debt, taxes, revenue, and expenditure) readily opens into, or is founded on, a larger attack on the basis or principles of government itself, and the forms of social and political order sustained by existing property organisations. Against Barlow's call for 'a general revolution in the Principles of Government', the *Analytical Review* elsewhere sets out the importance of property as the keystone of the British political

and financial system, given commercial society's foundation on security of property ownership. This is the 'doctrine' offered by the 'Retrospect of the active World' published in the *Analytical Review* for July 1798, one of a periodic series of longer, anonymous, pieces that combined a survey of political events with analytical commentary.<sup>64</sup> Here the familiar pieces of an argument about war, debt, and property are cast in a new direction, to combine a long historical retrospect of Europe with a claim about the current revolutionary war and predictions about a global future in which 'an order of property and freedom' will secure the 'rights of men'. Here, as only occasionally in the pages of the *Analytical Review*, claims about political economic structures, orders and principles – including the funding system, and the public credit on which it relies – are strongly folded into an optimistic political narrative foretelling the global emergence on liberty.

As Burke had, the anonymous author of this piece deprecates the French revolutionary currency of the assignats: a 'sign of property' founded on the 'confiscation of the whole wealth of the ancient proprietors of France' as well as a 'fraud' on France's 'foreign creditors'.<sup>65</sup> The parallel with Burke, however, ends there, as the 'Retrospect' looks optimistically forward to a point beyond the French war, where European and other countries recognise their common need for liberty of government and security of finance. Property (and public credit as one form of property) and liberty are yoked together with the claim that the only way to achieve liberty for individuals and nations is through secure finance and property systems, backed by representative government. France's funding of its war, through the fraud of stolen property and purloining assets from conquered countries, is considered essentially unsustainable: France will not be free until 'her finance fall under ... the protection of public credit'.<sup>66</sup> Property, this historical moment has made it possible to see, is what binds human society, its 'influence ... on the great bond of civilisation' which earlier could not be understood, is now writ large, and in this way, the 'rights of men are to be protected only by protecting the rights of nations': only if the 'order of property, and the laws of public credit' are 'made sacred to all', can individuals and nations have 'any permanent prosperity'.<sup>67</sup> This is an argument that turns the political language of liberty and the rights of men in a new direction, folding it into a political economic discourse that subsumes liberty by making it dependent on security of property. In turn, 'an elective representation' is urged, not because this equates to a liberty in itself, but rather because it is only through 'solid government ... fair representation, and legal taxation' that security of property and person can be found.<sup>68</sup> As we will see in Chapter 2, Wollstonecraft had offered a markedly different

account of the relation of property and liberty in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, published eight years earlier: a mark of her distance from some of the political sentiments articulated in the *Analytical Review*.

The question of who wrote the 'Retrospect' is a tantalising one, but its faith in a peaceful and commercial future was not without precedent: Paine's *Rights of Man* had presented commerce as 'a pacific system' which could eliminate war.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, a circle of thinkers around Lord Shelburne (who was briefly Prime Minister from 1782 to 1783) had found in *The Wealth of Nations* the possibility of a cosmopolitan and peaceable free trade which might replace empire and the mercantilist system; the Eden Treaty of 1786, which sought to liberalise commercial relations between Britain and France, was the most substantive policy manifestation of such an approach.<sup>70</sup> Both Price and Priestley were part of Shelburne's circle, although the former retained significant reservations about the moral corruptions of trade and the extent to which it should be carried out. Earlier in the century too, the potential of commerce to secure peace between European countries otherwise caught in a seeming perpetual cycle of wars, whether over territorial conquest or disputed successions, had been mooted by Montesquieu; others, including Rousseau, contended on the contrary that commerce was a source of war. Whilst *The Wealth of Nations* offered a severe attack on British mercantilism (trade and foreign policy influenced by mercantile interests), Smith himself judged the full liberalisation of trade to be unachievable.<sup>71</sup> It was against a background of such bifurcated opinion on commerce, which carried, on the one side, the possibility of ushering in a new era of peace and prosperity, and, on the other, accusations of corruption and moral and social decay, that Wollstonecraft was writing. As we shall see when we turn in Chapter 4 to Wollstonecraft's history of her own historical moment, the possibility of human progress, understood as the advance of liberty and enlightenment, was in her eyes to be closely and complexly tied to that of economic freedom too – whilst progress on any of these fronts would not, she warned, be easy to achieve.

### **Problems in Political Economy: Property, Inequality, Luxury, and Poverty**

In addition to reflecting – and contributing to – wide-ranging debate on the nature of commercial society, the *Analytical Review* also addressed a number of more particular issues under the heading of political economy. These included the problem of wealth inequality, understood to stem in part from current practices of property ownership and inheritance; anxieties

about luxury and social and moral decline, attributed to the development of a manufacturing and commercial economy; and, as we have already seen, concerns about poverty and the administration of poor relief. Whilst self-contained to some extent, discussion in each area often bled into others, illustrating how political economic writing at this time combined elements of economic, moral, social, and political thought. Such discussions help us to understand both Wollstonecraft's political and intellectual context, and the ways in which her engagement with such issues differed from many of her peers.

In both her *Vindications*, Wollstonecraft offered wide-ranging criticism of the established system of property ownership, tracing many of the ills and inequities of late eighteenth-century society to that cause. Similar concerns with property distribution, though less extensively traced, are present in the *Analytical Review*. The 'present state of property', as one reviewer puts it, is upheld by laws which 'preserve property in large masses and prevent its (sic) distribution among all the members of wealthy families'.<sup>72</sup> This, along with the assertion that 'monopolists and capitalists' are 'exclusively favoured by the legislature' whilst labourers do not receive fair wage for industry, causes the reviewer to assert that entails (a privileged figure in Burke's *Reflections*), as well as monopolies, should be abolished. These claims are made by the reviewer of Sir Frederic Morton Eden's *State of the Poor*, reviewed across three issues of the *Analytical Review* from March to June 1797.<sup>73</sup> Discussion of the pressing current issue of poverty is thus readily linked to larger structuring causes in inequitable property organisation and the laws which preserve them. Describing the current poor laws as incompetent to their original purpose, the reviewer asserts that 'in a better constituted society, nothing of the kind would be at all necessary'. If, as we saw in the previous section, the so-called 'order of property' could be used to evoke a future defined by peaceable commerce, the 'present state of property' nevertheless evidenced many of the failings of existing property society, as currently organised. If *The Wealth of Nations* inspired some to imagine a 'polity based upon moderate gradations of wealth', property laws are clearly identified as interfering with its establishment.<sup>74</sup>

Robert Acklom Ingram, whose *Inquiry into the present condition of the lower classes and the means of improving it* prompted its reviewer to welcome the teaching of political economy in universities, similarly identifies a change in the laws of inheritance, as well as placing the burden of tax on landed property, as measures to address the 'unequal distribution of wealth'.<sup>75</sup> The perhaps somewhat abstract question of 'the condition of the lower classes' is given strikingly materialised form, and connected to a

particular property form, in its association with cottages and their inhabitants, as it is for example by both Eden and Thomas Ruggles, in his *History of the Poor* (1793–1794).<sup>76</sup> For Ruggles, ‘the crowded cottage’, and for Eden, ‘[h]ovel[s] on the road-side’ are poverty’s visible signs. As we will see in Chapter 5, Wollstonecraft deploys the image of the cottage to condense questions of the viability and desirability of commercial modernity: it is for her an ambivalent sign both of commercial society’s problems and limitations, and also of the possibility of an alternative to it. Eden and Ruggles both recommend enclosure of land to ensure efficient use and to prevent poverty’s ‘disfiguring’ appearances. Wollstonecraft too, in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, asked why ‘huge forests’ were ‘still allowed to stretch out with idle pomp’ and why ‘the industrious peasant’ might not ‘steal a farm from the heath’, and she sketches a picture of a ‘hut ... far from the diseases and vices of cities’ where ‘chubby babes’ and ‘cheerful poultry’ flourish.<sup>77</sup> A more abstract take on property and poverty is given in William Godwin’s *Political Justice*, reviewed at length in August 1793, where the established system of property, and its unequal distribution, is denounced as leading to ‘the spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud’, all enemies of ‘intellectual and moral improvement’.<sup>78</sup> Property, the very security of which was for Smith and Hume the foundation and precondition of commercial society, becomes, in Godwin’s hands, the root source of the ‘chief distributive injustices of commercial society’.<sup>79</sup> Property, it seems from the pages of the *Analytical Review*, attracted as wide and bifurcated a range of opinion, as commerce itself did.

Wollstonecraft’s idealised image of the farm on the heath may be read as the flipside of a preoccupation with signs of luxury, or changes in behaviour and manners wrought by the speedy development of commercial society, which is periodically evident in the *Analytical Review*. A review of Sir John Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland* evidences ‘the progress of luxury’ in commercially prosperous society through later dining times, wine drinking, and card playing.<sup>80</sup> Ruggles is more ambivalent: ‘manufactures’ are ‘the boast, but destruction of the country’, the cause of both ‘national revenue’, and ‘general immorality and corruption’.<sup>81</sup> By contrast, part of Ingram’s case for changing inheritance laws to address unequal distribution of wealth is that this would not simply alleviate poverty in itself, but ‘excite’ in ‘the common people a desire of accumulation’; but he also attacks the ‘increasing opulence in the higher classes’, which he sees (as Rousseau did) as ‘the result of continual subtraction from the comforts of the lower orders’.<sup>82</sup> His antipathy to ‘opulence’ recalls an older tradition of opposition to luxury, even whilst his concern to stoke ‘a desire of



accumulation' in the lower orders suggests Smith, commercial society's pre-eminent theorist. Anxiety about a society organised around commerce, and the production and consumption of manufactured goods, evidently persisted even as orthodox political economy gradually took root.<sup>83</sup>

Reviews in the *Analytical Review* also illuminate how political economic problems, such as those associated with poverty, were represented, framed, and perceived, including in affective and aesthetic terms. Even whilst Ruggles attributes the 'wretchedness of the labourer' to 'excessive civilization', he suggests that it is sensibility – often itself seen as a sign of civilised refinement – which both registers such misery and suffers by it. Those who retreat from business to the country, he laments, so often have their sensibility wounded by seeing and hearing the 'misery of their fellow-creatures', that it is no wonder they 'desert their country mansions'. A conversation with the poor 'too often distresses humanity, and sends the hearer home dejected and dissatisfied'.<sup>84</sup> Ruggles operates a circular logic here: itself a marker of 'civilization', sensibility is wounded by the labourer's attempts to participate in the very refinements by which it is itself produced. Although a potential source of corruption, commercial civilisation nevertheless produces a sensibility which has at least some worth in its ability to register that very corruption. Its value, however, is undercut by an effete delicacy manifested in its tendency to depart poverty's scene: 'desert their country mansions'. This double-edged, self-wounding, sensibility is present at times in Wollstonecraft too, who famously hesitated to 'cultivate sensibility' in her daughter Fanny, 'lest, whilst I lend fresh blushes to the rose, I sharpen the thorns that will sound the breast I would fain guard'.<sup>85</sup> In Wollstonecraft's formulation, however, the potential 'thorns' to which sensibility might expose Fanny are due to the 'dependent and oppressed state of her sex'; the figure of vulnerable sensibility operates to critique an unjust world much more strongly than in Ruggles. Sensibility, indeed, is central to Wollstonecraft's periodic response to the problem of poverty, and more broadly is part of the armoury which she deploys to engage and counter the emergent discourse of political economy, and the way it approaches and frames its concerns. Both in her *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* and in her final work, *The Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft mobilises sensibility as a form of social feeling capable of registering and responding to the suffering of others, and as manifesting an account of human nature to challenge that which political economy would construct. Rather than, as in Ruggles, connoting the vulnerability of excessive, self-wounding feeling, sensibility in Wollstonecraft often manifests a capacity for benevolent, humane, and philanthropic feeling for others,

which operates at critical odds with a world where such affects, and the values they assert, are seemingly little regarded.

Aesthetic response offers another means for Wollstonecraft to register and evaluate the modern world which political economy is building, whilst also transmuting its terms. Daniel White has shown the importance of the image of the canal in dissenting writing where, in works such as Anna Letitia Barbauld's 'The Canal and the Brook' or her brother John Aikin's *Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles round Manchester* (1795), it is a topographical mark of progress, showing how the advances of science, commerce, and utility might be combined with taste.<sup>86</sup> In the *Analytical*, the canal (or at times 'channel') is deployed as a metaphor to convey the effectiveness or otherwise of schemes to address problems in political economy: in the context of Hamburg poor relief, the legislator who attempts to improve the conditions of the poor without addressing poverty's fundamental causes is described as like 'one who diverts a stream from its original course, and now seeks to cut small canals to irrigate the original land which the diversion has now devastated'.<sup>87</sup> Here the irrigative figure of the canal is no longer celebrated as a sign of progress, but serves as a warning against legislative meddling uninformed by political economic knowledge. Wollstonecraft's account, in her *Letters from Sweden*, of visiting canal workings at Trolhaettae near Gothenburg, further transposes these terms, so that the 'grand proof of human industry' – the bustle and noise of workmen, the blowing up of rocks – is displaced by what are, for her, the more compelling 'wild scenes' and 'solitary sublimity' of the cascades and sterile crags at the same site. In such a context, the canal workings, 'great as they are termed, and little as they appear ... only resembled the insignificant sport of children'.<sup>88</sup>

The *Analytical Review*'s discussion of the condition of the poor – a pressing political topic in the mid-1790s, with Parliamentary debates over rising food prices, the cost of wages, and possible poor law reforms – reveals how more retrograde attitudes (moral anxiety about the corruption of luxury; a tendency to attribute poverty to character failings) come up against political economic discourse in its 'hardest' form: in particular, tables of statistical data comparing wages of labour to prices of provisions and population size.<sup>89</sup> The review of Ruggles' *History of the Poor* ends by quoting his disagreement with Smith's observations on the sufficiency of the wages of the labourer for his subsistence, asserting rising prices in relation to wages: '[h]ouse-rent, candles, shoes, butter, milk, and all sorts of butcher's meat have greatly increased in price, above the proportionable increase of labourer's wages; and even Dr. Adam Smith does not suppose all these luxuries'.<sup>90</sup>

The same crucial proportion between the price of labour and the cost of necessities is the foundation for Voght's *Account of the Management of the Poor in Hamburg*; the review of Eden's *State of the Poor* also includes tables of prices of labour and provisions, as well as noting Richard Price's 'invaluable book on reversionary payments', and his observation that poor are more dependent on bread (hence corn) than in previous times. Such data are used to refute Eden's claim that the condition of the poor is improved; refuted too is the argument that the state of the poor is due to their improvidence, or that of their wives.<sup>91</sup> Such financial analysis enables a turn from moral condemnation of the poor to a political economic analysis of their motivation and behaviour: instead of poor relief and benevolence, labour should be enabled and stimulated, along with the 'desire of accumulation'.<sup>92</sup>

Detailed reflections on wages, and a comparison of the price of labour in Britain and France, also inform Arthur Young's *Travels During the Years 1787, 8 and 9*, which also expounds on the Smithian principle of the division of labour in relation to farming: larger farms for this reason will generate more profit for the farmer, and more wealth for the nation.<sup>93</sup> Such is Young's faith in agriculture, in fact, that his chapter on Manufacture concludes by asserting that agriculture alone, when thoroughly improved, 'is equal to the establishment and support of great national wealth, power, and felicity'.<sup>94</sup> There is no trace here either of the association of agricultural society with indolence, as mooted in Hume's essay 'Of Refinement in the Arts' (1741), or of the idealisation of agrarian virtue as a bulwark against mercantile corruption, to be found in Price's warning to the new American republic in his *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (1785): rather, Young's defence of agriculture folds it almost entirely into the analytical terms of Smithian political economic discourse. Smith's own account of what he termed the 'unnatural and retrograde order' of European economic development had argued that the development of commerce had leap-frogged the capitalist development of agriculture which would more naturally have preceded it in the conjectural model of the four stages of economic development favoured by Scottish thinkers.<sup>95</sup> But Smith would not have agreed with Young (or indeed with the French physiocrats, who had theorised the primacy of agriculture) that agriculture had the strongest claim to become the basis of national wealth: for Smith, manufacturing offered better opportunities for division of labour, and hence growth, than agriculture.

A quite different vision of agriculture was implicit in the virtuous agrarianism which for some thinkers offered an appealing alternative to the perceivedly corrupt commercial order of war, tax, and empire. Price, for one,

warning against the corruptions of trade, hoped that the new American republic would be populated by 'plain and honest farmers' rather than 'opulent and splendid merchants'.<sup>96</sup> This would be the best way to protect its 'simplicity of character' and 'manliness of spirit'; to prevent 'liberty and virtue' being 'swallowed up in the gulf of corruption'. His *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (1784) had hailed

the state of society in Connecticut and some others of the American provinces where the inhabitants consist ... of an independent and hardy yeomanry, nearly all on a level, trained to arms, instructed in their rights, clothed in homespun, of simple manners, strangers to luxury, drawing plenty from the ground ... protected by laws which (being their own will) cannot oppress, and by an equal government which, wanting lucrative places, cannot create corrupt canvassings and ambitious intrigue.<sup>97</sup>

The vision was of a principled, virtuous, agrarian existence, in a republic like those of ancient Greece and Rome, defined by simplicity, hard work, and plenty, and uncorrupted by commerce and war. Wollstonecraft, who planned at one point to retire with Gilbert Imlay to an American farm (albeit one purchased with the profits of his shady business activities), and who also sought to settle her brother on a farm in America, was not immune from its seductions. The figure of Darnford in *The Wrongs of Woman*, meanwhile, whose venality and moral failings come to a head during a short stay in America, embodied Wollstonecraft's later sense of how quickly the promise of America pursuing an alternative path from that of European commercialism had faded.

### Conclusion

The picture of political economic thought in the period between 1788 and 1798 as represented in the *Analytical Review* is undoubtedly particular, in some ways eccentric and idiosyncratic, but it nevertheless has value. Most surveys of thought in this period tend to focus on voices which historical retrospect allows us to identify as major ones. The synchronic view offered by this chapter's exploration of political economy in Johnson's periodical allows such voices to jostle alongside more transient ones: both in the publications reviewed and in their anonymous reviewers. These have been worth attending to because of what they reveal about the nature of political economic thought at the time, which appears markedly diverse on at least two fronts: both in terms of the range of voices and opinions, which contribute to these debates, and in terms of the breadth of what political economy was understood to encompass at the time.

Political economy emerges from the pages of Johnson's periodical as a flexible and capacious area of inquiry, conscious of its relations with moral, social, philosophical, and even religious thought. It is equally capable of a more narrowly focused investigation of particular topics, perhaps pursued through relatively new forms of statistical or financial methods, or by marshalling various forms of data, such as on prices or wages, or war expenses. As a relatively undefined, or multiply defined knowledge practice, it was loose, open, and porous: capable of absorbing concerns from contiguous areas. Its inclusion in the *Analytical Review* attests to the editors' perception that it had a valuable contribution to make to the journal's founding aims: to 'advance the interests of science, of virtue and morality', as part of the 'genuine information in every department of Literature and Science' which the publication offered its readers.<sup>98</sup>

Jon Mee's assertion that conversation offers an important model for understanding Romantic discursivity is a suggestive way to think about the textual practice of the *Analytical*, which enabled its readers to participate in a conversation about political economic matters which was ongoing, fluid, and heterodox, and where thoughts on a topic in hand might just as easily be challenged and countered as confirmed and reiterated.<sup>99</sup> This is modelled through the format of the reviews themselves, which, by often giving generous space to quotation from the publication itself, interspersed with commentary or response from the reviewer, could become dialogic spaces (even without considering the responses of the reader, or any further conversations which the review itself might prompt). If Christie's initial plans for the journal anticipated its readers participating in 'diffusing' knowledge, the design of the periodical points to the potentially conversational basis for such diffusion.<sup>100</sup> As with any conversation, the intersecting debates in the political economy pages of the *Analytical Review* could span quite diametrically opposed positions (as we have seen in relation to both commerce and property); at the same time, the repetition of certain positions does suggest opinion settling around certain lines. Thus, Godwin's take on property, or Barlow's on taxation as 'fraud', each represent something of an outlier, although worth attending to as a marker of opinion in some quarters, or as demonstrating the destination of certain lines of argument, if taken to their full extent. At the same time, as with any conversation, the *Analytical Review* had a particular and recognisable tone. The journal's broadly positive attitude to commerce nevertheless harboured at times significant anxieties about some of its effects, whether on the national's moral or social fabric or on its labouring poor. Recognition of, at best, the potential of free trade to perhaps bring about a future era

of peace and prosperity was balanced with at times stringent critique of existing forms of taxation, wealth inequality, and property laws. Political economy in the eyes of the *Analytical Review* offered both the prospect of enacting useful and benevolent reforms which might increase the happiness of ordinary people, and a means of critiquing perceived injustices or existing oppressions. Whilst, in one perspective, it might seek to mobilise a potentially problematic 'desire for accumulation' as a means for addressing social ills, on the other, its concern with the distribution of wealth, and the promotion of national prosperity, offered a potentially powerful means to ameliorate the living conditions of many.

How are we to understand Wollstonecraft in relation to this conversation about political economy? It seems unlikely, from the list drawn up by Todd and Marilyn Butler, and to the extent that authorship can be attributed, that Wollstonecraft herself authored any of the political economy reviews which have been discussed in this chapter.<sup>101</sup> She did review a biography of Paine, in which she commended his 'good sense' and the 'force' of his arguments; she also reviewed travel writings on America by the future Girondin leader, Jean-Pierre Brissot, although without commenting on the final volume devoted to commerce.<sup>102</sup> According to Todd and Butler, Wollstonecraft was also the author of a review giving fulsome praise to a proposal for a poll tax on the 'middling or trading class of people' to be used to relieve those who fall into 'penury and distress' due to failure in business; and of a further review condemning the employment of children in cotton factories in Manchester. 'Mistaken, indeed ... must be principles of that commercial system, whose wheels are oiled by infant sweat, and supine the government that allows any body of men to enrich themselves by preying on the vitals, physical and moral, of the rising generation!', she concludes.<sup>103</sup> As a contributor to the journal, even at times its editorial assistant, Wollstonecraft would have been familiar with the debates represented in its pages, and biography also speaks to her immersion in the radical and progressive circle around Johnson. Traces of certain well-trodden arguments from the *Analytical Review* recur in Wollstonecraft's writing: on occasion she appears to share with Price and Priestley a moral critique of commerce, or a distaste for luxury; her concern for the state of manners in commercial society, and the social consequences of the existing property order, is fundamental to her *Vindications*, as we see in the next chapters. But locating Wollstonecraft wholly within, or in relation to, certain traditions of political economic thought present us with a puzzle: her writing does not conform to the shape or contours of most, or all, political economic writing, but rather engages, but escapes and exceeds it. Whilst

marked by many of the debates which characterise late eighteenth-century political economy, her thinking rarely seeks to be confined by them, or to serve or answer them on their terms, but rather looks beyond their limits, often working cohesively to combine what we might class as political economic concerns with others.

Here it is worth considering the role of Wollstonecraft's gender, both in relation to her role at the *Analytical* and her perspective on emergent political economic thought. In terms of the former, scholars who have mapped Wollstonecraft's likely contributions to the journal suggest that her reviews focused on literary and educational publications, alongside the occasional scientific treatise. She reviewed novels, including by Charlotte Smith, as well as poetry, drama, travel writings, and sermons; she reviewed Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*.<sup>104</sup> Although we cannot be certain, given the anonymity of its reviews, we may speculate that this division of labour in effect enacted a division of knowledge along gender lines: the 'soft' realm of literature, education, and culture, including the novels which Wollstonecraft so disparaged, assigned to a woman, with 'harder' political, commercial, and economic publications given to others. Considered from this perspective, even if it is a speculative one, the emergent field of political economic thought as presented in the *Analytical Review* appears as one in which a deeply political division of knowledge by gender has already taken place.

There are other ways of approaching the division of knowledge, however. Earlier in this chapter, we saw Coleridge assert that political economy should provide a means of elucidating the 'disturbing force of that miraculous machine of living Creatures, a Body Politic'. In a poet's eyes, the causal springs of action are just as much part of political economy as an analysis of labour, capital, and production; human motivation and emotion, and the behaviours, social customs, and moral codes connected to and consequent on them, should fall firmly within political economy's purview. This same realm of human passions and behaviour is precisely the concern of the literary and cultural publications assigned, as far as we can reconstruct from the *Analytical Review's* anonymous pages, to Wollstonecraft for review. Here we have a way of approaching the 'puzzle', mentioned above, of Wollstonecraft's relation to the emergent field of political economic thought, by understanding it as a deep engagement which does not conform to the field's usual patterns and shape, but which refuses to disaggregate questions of human motivation and passions, of morals and manners, of customs and social codes, from practices of wealth, and organisations of labour and property. This is a refusal which runs counter

to the gendered divisions of knowledge of her time, and which ensures that Wollstonecraft's engagement with political economy exceeds and transcends that emergent field.

Nor was this commitment to the world of human passion and behaviour simply for Wollstonecraft to be addressed by the literary and fictional writing, the 'trash' about which she was so often disparaging.<sup>105</sup> Miranda Burgess has argued that romance writing at this time was 'uniquely but diversely imbricated with political economy', and that it 'alternately competes with, supplements, and works with its readers to displace the contemporary philosophical and social debates of political economy', whilst remaining 'thoroughly invested in the questions political economy addresses'.<sup>106</sup> William Godwin, writing in the year of his marriage to Wollstonecraft, similarly offered 'romance' as the means to understand the 'machine of society'.<sup>107</sup> Wollstonecraft's final work, *The Wrongs of Woman*, drafted in the same year as Godwin's essay, suggests that she would agree, but whilst she wrote fiction at both ends of her writing career, she also described herself as a philosopher, and published works of history, politics, education, and travel writings. Her engagement with political economy, as a means of approaching and analysing the condition and problems of late eighteenth-century commercial society, would not be limited to fictional writing, but would extend its concern with the 'miraculous machine of living Creatures' to other writerly forms too. In so doing, she would resist the separation of human passions and experience, and their 'disturbing force', from an increasingly abstracted political economy. The generic range of her writing across her career, meanwhile, resists too a separation of writing into different genres or disciplines, whose distinct objects would address, in disconnected ways, abstracted and separated areas of human life and endeavour.

This book argues that approaching Wollstonecraft from the direction of the political economy of her time offers new insights to her writing and thinking, both in illuminating how her work has been informed by areas of thought whose relationship to Wollstonecraft is previously unconsidered, and in showing how she contributes, in ways not previously noted, to the debates of her time. Political economy in Wollstonecraft's time, as this chapter has shown, was very different from the subject delineated, for instance, in John Ramsay McCulloch's *The Literature of Political Economy*, published in 1845, some fifty years after her death. With its clear listing of the branches and subdivisions of political economy, McCulloch's work depicts a discipline whose field of expertise has been thoroughly organised – even flattened – in a way which contrasts dramatically with the joyfully heterodox,



confused prolixity of the political economy reviews of the *Analytical Review*. Yet, as the remaining chapters of this book show, Wollstonecraft engages repeatedly with concerns later to be folded into McCulloch's taxonomy of political economic topics.<sup>108</sup> At times, that engagement is explicit and overt, even whilst little commented on by critics and historians; at others, it takes an awareness of the nature of late eighteenth-century political economy to understand that this is one of the fields to which she is responding. Thus, as we shall see in Chapter 4, Wollstonecraft's history of the French Revolution gives particular prominence to the fate of the grain trade in the early phases of the revolution, and links the freeing of the grain trade to the progress of liberty. Within Wollstonecraft's relatively small oeuvre, this frequently overlooked text has received little attention, and where it has been examined, critics tend to read it for a story about political revolution, not economic reform. The same is true for a far from overlooked text, Burke's *Reflections of the Revolution in France*, which prompted Wollstonecraft's first major work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. As Chapter 2 shows, Burke deliberately disguises his fundamental preoccupation with a revolution in political economy by foregrounding a distracting theatrics for his reader's affective and sentimental entertainment, including the famous attack on Marie Antoinette's bedchamber. It is to Wollstonecraft's refusal to be distracted by the gothic 'romance' offered by Burke, and her disinterring instead, of Burke's defence of the existing political economic order of things, that we now turn.