

**Looking Back to Go Forward:
How to Decouple the Women's Movement from the Sexual Revolution**

Erika Bachiochi, JD
Visiting Scholar, Harvard Law School
Fellow, EPPC

During the past half century, the underlying rationale for women's rights—for civil and political freedom and equality as such—has shifted profoundly. But this shift has occurred subtly and over time, such that many now falsely assume that an unbroken line can be traced from those who today agitate for women's rights to those who argued that women had the natural right to do so in the first place.

Mining the intellectual history of the cause for women's rights, as I do in *First Affection: Restoring the Lost Vision of the Cause for Women's Rights* (the working title of the book I'm currently writing), can shed light on how a philosophical and political principle—equal citizenship for women—has morphed into something that nearly contradicts its original moral vision, a vision first fully articulated by British philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* more than two centuries ago. Wollstonecraft's vision of sexual integrity for both sexes poses an especially striking challenge to a women's movement shaped, since the 1970s, by a very different kind of sexual revolution.

It is my view that Wollstonecraft's moral vision can offer a course correction to the modern-day women's movement. Emboldened by her insights on virtue, rights, work, marriage, and children—and brought into the present day with the help of Mary Ann Glendon's kindred thought—I believe a renewed women's movement might make itself a catalyst for the regeneration of marriages and families, the revaluing of caregiving and reshaping of work, and the reconstituting of a morally embattled nation.