

# OpenTheo

## Reclaiming the Lost Vision of Family Life with Erika Bachiochi

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### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

In this episode of LBE, Kevin visits with Erika Bachiochi—a pro-life legal scholar, an author, a wife, and a mother of seven children. After discussing the Dobbs case which, we hope will overturn Roe, Kevin and Erika turn their attention to the Enlightenment writer Mary Wollstonecraft. In this wide-ranging discussion through Erika’s book *The Rights of Women: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2021). Kevin and Erika talk about the staunch anti-abortion views of early women’s rights advocates, how the feminist movement lost its way, and why our culture needs a new (old) vision of motherhood and fatherhood.

Timestamps:

Intro and Sponsor [0:00-1:22]

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Sexual and Reproductive Asymmetry [32:48-41:29]

Pregnancy, A Gift not a Liability [41:30-52:48]

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Summing Up Erika's Book [56:31-59:57]

Books:

*The Rights of Women: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Catholic Ideas for a Secular World)

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*

## Transcript

[Music] Greetings and salutations welcome to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin D. Young and I'm joined by my special guest. Well, say more about in just a moment Erika, you just told me.

Bachiochi? You could say it just like that. That's great. I could say it like that.

Well, you could say it the way it should be. Bachiochi. And I'll say more about her and her book in just a moment.

But I want to thank Crossway as always for sponsoring the program. And today just to mention the ESV scripture journals. Maybe some of you have used those before or you're just looking for a real simple way to journal along with the Bible.

And so they've made these nice Bibles that have blank pages. They just opposite each page of biblical text. So if you like to journal or maybe you just want to draw a picture or you want to copy out the scripture in order to slow down and meditate on it.

Those ESV scripture journals. I have many of them though I can't say my journaling has taken off since I've had children. So if you have time to journal and you like to journal, you should look at those.

All right, my guest today is Erica. And she just said her last name, which is a wonderful last name. And Erica, let me see if I get this straight.

All the things that you do. Ethics and public policy center. You're a fellow there.

You're a legal scholar. You do pro life work. You have degrees from multiple New England institutions.

I'm looking forward to hearing your connection there. A senior fellow at the Abigail Adams Institute. You also work and found and direct the Wollstonecraft project and we'll say much more about Mary Wollstonecraft in a moment.

And the book that we are here to discuss in particular is the rights of women reclaiming a lost vision published by the University of Notre Dame. I guess that came out the end of last year. Or maybe last year.

Yeah, so a year ago I read at the end of last year. So thank you so much for being on here. Erica.

We're just becoming acquainted. We have some mutual friends and I really appreciated the book and I learned a lot from it. But we would love to just hear about yourself.

Where are you from? Tell us about your family. How did you get interested in writing on

these things? Sure. I mean, it's a long story.

I live now outside the Boston area with my husband and actually seven children ages 20 down to three. And my journey though is, you know, as I think many kind of a rocky one and with many twists and turns. I grew up in a family in Maine outside of the Camden Rockport area.

I'm in Maine. Okay. And my parents divorced when I was four.

My mother remarried and right away and then divorced again when I was 13 and then remarried for a third time and divorced for a third time in my upper teens. And so I spent sort of my early teen years reacting as I think many young girls do in all sorts of crazy things, drinking drugs and the things that go with that for a young girl. And it really hit me pretty hard.

And the divorces were then punctuated by two suicides of friends of mine. So I kind of had a really sort of tumultuous, not the worst possible childhood. I, you know, lived in safety and had an education and I was a pretty successful athlete.

But it was, it was, it was tough and there was sort of a lot of, I guess, tumult and especially emotional tumult. So that all sent me reeling into actually 12 step programs and they're really kind of the saving grace in the sense that I really learned to pray there. Before that though, I headed up to college at Middlebury College, very liberal college in Vermont and found myself pretty quickly along with on the soccer field also in the women's center there started studying women's studies sociology.

And so you could say that kind of my spiritual, intellectual, moral, emotional journeys were kind of all, I don't know, like headed in sort of different directions, lots of tensions. But when I was praying, I was praying, you know, as people in 12 step programs do to kind of the Scott as we understand them. And I was very at the same time, anti Christian, because of my feminist leanings.

And so it was really, I mean, you don't need to hear the whole story, but it was just a many different people in my lives. Many different, you know, I went to a couple of different lectures that were really important at different times, read some really important books, but it was just the prayer, I think, that opened me up in a way that maybe those who, you know, had my views wouldn't be opened maybe as much. So I'm just really grateful for having learned to pray and kind of having the facility of the spirit to be open to sort of different perspectives, I guess I would say.

And what's your, your faith look like today? Yeah, so I am a faithful Catholic. I, you know, attend mass daily and do all sorts of other kind of norms of Catholic faith. And I'm just really grateful to, you know, understand myself first and foremost and my identity as a child of God.

And really grateful for my community actually very, very rich community here in Massachusetts, if you can imagine it. A couple of years, probably nine years ago, helped to found a classical school here in Massachusetts that has grown by leaps and bounds. We started with 23 students now up to 250 students.

So it's, it's been really a rich, rich sort of thing. I'm grateful for it. That's great.

My wife and I met in Massachusetts. I went to Gordon Conwell up in South Hamilton and my wife was at Gordon College. And we met there and got married in 2002.

I should remember when we got married. It was 20 years ago. And we have nine kids.

Congratulations. Yeah, congratulations on, on seven. You probably get, well, maybe you don't, we get all the time.

Well, are you done? I, I, I think, but I thought we were done many times. So we have our oldest is 18. He just graduated from high school.

And so all of the bittersweet of sending him off to college. And then our youngest is one years old and everything in between. Where are you? You know, you're right.

I don't think of Massachusetts as, as being a great place to start a classical Christian school. But yet it is because there, if there's anybody looking for something different, it might be there in Massachusetts. Where, where are you husband, where are you and your husband at in Massachusetts? You're still in the Boston area.

Yeah. So we're outside of, we're just in the next town over from Foxboro where the Patriots play, but our school is about a half an hour away in Nadek. And it does.

I mean, it's really just sort of brought together all sorts of people who have either, you know, fled the public schools aren't satisfied with the intellectual rigor or even kind of religious faith of the Catholic schools. And so it's really brought together kind of a really wonderful community of a lot of young people. So it's, it's really fun, young, growing families.

That's great. Did you see the school grow a lot during the pandemic? We are our church here overseas, a Christian school K through 12. It's about, well, it was around under 900 students K through 12 when the pandemic started now it's over 1000 students.

Yeah. And we were afraid that the pandemic was going to do dreadful things, but it sent new families to us in droves. Did you find something similar? Yeah, I think that's right.

That and just sort of the increasing kind of, you know, woke character of public schools and all of that. Yeah, I think it's, it's all the above. I mean, it's, it's an exciting time, I think, to be part of one of these schools where just the, you know, the kind of, some of us sort of feel like, you know, the Western intellectual tradition is being, you know, really

kept, kept up here, really passed on to a new generation.

And so it's a really, I think, exciting thing to be doing. I think some of the most important work that, that, you know, the Christian community is doing. Yeah.

So before we get to the book, which is why I have you on here and thank you for taking time, we were just talking before a hit record that you were on recently with Ezra Klein. So you're doing all of the most important outlets here for the public. But hopefully this is, I don't want to say friendly because I don't think he was unfriendly, but sympathetic conversation to your argument.

But before we get into the book, any day now, maybe it's even today we're recording this on Monday, June six, but sometime very soon, the, the Dobbs decision will be released. And since it's not every day, you're going to talk to a legitimate pro life legal scholar. You have your, your JD, you have a real expertise in this.

Okay, I want to see what you think's going to happen, but let's just assume and prayerfully assume that something like the leaked draft is going to be the final draft. What's your assessment, I'm sure that you read Alito's draft, what do you think that does and what do you think it means for the future of the pro life movement. Yeah, I have to say, I was really thrilled with with the leaders draft.

There were a couple of different small places. I mean, I'm an equal protection scholar. So that section of the brief, I probably would have drafted differently.

I hope sort of there could be maybe some of the imitations there for the for the full draft, but I think the most profound thing that the Alito draft does is correct the history, because I think that's really where I mean, of course, other than overturned row, but that's where row really went astray and really got things very, very wrong was in, it was in the history of abortion law. And so that's, I think, the place where I'm most grateful for how he drafted how they went about drafting that. And so for those who haven't read the draft, don't know the history.

There was an under sort of an assumption in row based on some just a historian who was a very pro-abortion historian, sirel means that there was this sort of liberty right that women had to obtain abortions until, you know, really the late 19th century. And even then, when he sort of talks about the 19th century laws that of course were concurrent with the passage and ratification of the 14th Amendment, which is, of course, the amendment that's an issue in abortion jurisprudence because that's what they're basing, you know, this liberty or privacy right on. And there really was never this liberty to have an abortion, you know, there, with the passage of these 19th Amendment abortion statutes that that recognized and protected fetal life from the very beginnings of life at conception or fertilization.

You know, there, that all happened because of real changes and understanding of the science of embryology that was coming to pass because of the microscope and because of other, other sorts of understandings that, that we just didn't have access to prior to that time. And so we relied on things like quickening. And so, yes, you know, abortion law, you know, there was no way to sort of discern whether an abortion happened prior to quickening.

And so the law didn't have the kind of evidentiary means to do so. But there was never a liberty. And so anyway, the real, the real question is what were, you know, what were the laws, you know, pertaining to abortion at the time of the 14th Amendment.

And it's just, you know, all, and he has this great appendix, you know, it all nearly all of the states had either prohibited abortion throughout the pregnancy, or were doing so and did so in the next couple of decades. So to think that, you know, the 14th Amendment could actually protect an abortion right, you know, the right to take the life of a child is just absurd when the 14th Amendment was written by people, was ratified by populations, was understood by populations to protect, you know, human life. And hopefully we'll see kind of an equal protection at some point as we as we move down after Rose was overturned.

So I think that is, that's where I'm most gratified is the is the real, the real correction of the history there. Yeah, that's good. I think he's sitting there three fourths of the states at the time of the passage of the 14th Amendment three fourths of the states made it a crime abortion, a crime at any point in the pregnancy in the rest of the states were on their way to passing similar statutes.

So to act as if there was any sort of this, this was not only a crime, it would have been, you know, almost unheard of, not that people have always tried to to manage pregnancy. That's right. But the act of abortion would have been considered reprehensible by most people in America.

And I don't know if you saw, I don't, I make a practice of not taking my political cues from Saturday Night Live, but after the League draft, they did this. Sketch, I guess there's, there's something in the draft that at some point, maybe it's in the historical appendix, he references some medieval statute or scholar or somebody talking about abortion. And of course, SNL did that up and thought that was just hilarious.

And, you know, how could we be looking at, are we going to send women back to the old handmaidens tale. How do you respond to people, obviously that's not a very sophisticated critique, but it resonates sometime on a popular level looking at why would 21st century Americans and women in particular. Of course, if we look to the olden days, we're going to find oppressive regimes.

How do you respond to that sort of gut level response that people have? Yeah, you know,

so there's sort of this colorable claim that women couldn't vote before, you know, during the time when all these statutes were being passed, and therefore could not vote for the statutes. And so you sort of think, ah, how we've got them, you know, because there were many states that had passed the vote, you know, so that women could vote in state elections, but it wasn't, of course, until the 19th Amendment in 1920, that women were capable of voting. And so, you know, there's this sort of this question about like, well, what about women? What about women? And so what's fascinating about the history? And again, you know, it would have been nice if some of that history had gotten in there too, and sort of some of the equality claims.

And I've written a lot about this, not only in the book, but in a big, um, uh, larv article, actually two big larv articles on equality arguments for abortion rights. And so the last thing about this is if you look back at those, you know, the first wave, called the first wave feminist, I call them 19th century women's rights activists, those who ended up, you know, being the agitators for the vote, and we can talk about why they did that. I hope we do, because a lot of a lot of that is, you know, has Francis Willard of the women's Christian temperance unions to thank for that and hopefully we'll get to that.

What's fascinating is that some of the very, you know, very much non Christian, and in some ways, you know, radical women, um, and real leaders of the women's movement looking for, you know, equal property rights, equal rights to contract, equal rights in marriage. We can talk about what they meant by that. They were all outspokenly against abortion.

So I want to just quote for you one, because the most radical among them, I mean, Elizabeth, Katie Stanton was pretty radical, we can talk about that. But the most outspoken really, you know, Victoria Woodhill was the first woman to run for president, the first woman to testify before Congress outspoken. We can talk about what her radical views were, but on abortion, she was fundamentally opposed.

And she talks about, she championed the rights of children. And she says those rights begin while yet they remain the fetus. So let me just quote kind of a long quote, because I think it's kind of amazing that we, you know, we think, oh, what about these women? Well, all the women were with, you know, they had different views to the doctors who were lobbying for these, um, these kinds of laws and we can talk about kind of the nuances there with regard to punishment.

I'd love to do so. But with regard to the status of the unborn child and that, you know, abortion was the unwarranted destruction of human life as the American Medical Association said at that time, the women's rights activists were in full agreement. So here's Victoria Woodhill.

She says in 1870. Now, this is two years after the ratification of the 14th Amendment. She says many women who would be shocked at the very thought of killing their children

after birth, deliberately destroy them previously.

If there's any difference in the actual crime. So let me just, so if there's any difference in the crime of infanticide or abortion, we should be glad to have those who practice the latter. That is abortion pointed out.

The truth of the matter is that it is just as much a murder to destroy life in its embryonic condition as it is to destroy it after the fully developed form is attained. For it is the self same life that is taken. I mean, there's some really good just pro-life logic, right? Yeah, look at that militant Catholic or fire breathing evangelical culture warrior.

Right. I mean, this is a serious radical woman. And so there were, you know, women's rights advocates were very much, you know, they had all sorts of different views and opposed each other and all sorts of different things.

But on these questions of abortion and what they called voluntary motherhood, which may sound to us like, you know, when the pro-choiceers talk about forced motherhood, but it's not at all that. They understood themselves because of the science. They understood themselves to be mothers when the child was growing inside of them.

Right. And so they understood themselves to have the responsibilities of motherhood at that time that they were caring for, that they had duties of care to that child. And so all the rights they were clamoring for, clamoring for were what they believe to be necessary in order to carry out those duties to their children and to society at large.

But I think it's really important that we see that. So, you know, you can talk about, you know, what women now think. And even if you put to a vote, you'd see that at least half of women are pro-life.

And when you get to the details, even more. So, but I think it's kind of an absurd claim to say, you know, that if you, you know, you would have given the women who devoted, or there would have been, you know, abortion flowing like milk and honey. Yeah.

Right. Yeah. Let's get into the book because it's one of the things that's so effective in the book is you're looking at feminist or first wave or 19th century suffragists and trying to understand how they thought.

And part of what you're doing is it's reclaiming a lost vision. And it's a lost vision, at least in part of this enlightenment author, Mary Wollstonecraft. Now, I have to admit that I saw this book and I was excited.

I started reading it and I saw a lot about Mary Wollstonecraft and I almost put it down and thought, well, I'm not sure if I'm going to get into this. So you can relieve me of, and you did through this book, of probably some unfair prejudice, maybe too strong a word. But I teach an enlightenment elective, I passed her and then I teach at the seminary and



I'm actually teaching it next week.

I've taught it once before. And so just in one of the last lectures, I have a small section on William Godwin, her husband. And so I have just a even smaller section on Mary Wollstonecraft.

But in part because of the, after she died and her husband may be well-intentioned or not, writes the story of her. She's not, I'll say it this way, she's not the person that if someone has heard of her would think, oh, as a conservative Catholic or a conservative evangelical, this is someone that I'm really going to have a lot of affinity for. And yet I think you show in the book why there, it really is a lost vision.

So just a little bit about, and you can fill in the gaps because you're the expert here. Mary Wollstonecraft, 1759 to 1797. So she dies after giving birth.

Her daughter was Mary Shelley, the author of Frankenstein, Mary Percy, this Shelley, so famous family. She died only at 38. I don't know if that's certainly younger than me.

11 days after giving birth to Mary, in 1798, her husband, William Godwin, published an account of his wife's life. Maybe he thought he was doing an honest account of it. But some of what he revealed is she had multiple affairs and illegitimate child.

They had pretended to be married twice. She had tried to commit suicide. They had only agreed to be married when she was pregnant.

She had pretty much ruined her reputation and didn't help Godwin's reputation either. And perhaps Godwin was even more of a radical. He wrote things more dismissive of marriage than I think Wollstonecraft did.

But her most famous book, "Vindication of the Rights of Women, 1792." So before we get into the specifics, just give us a pracy on why Mary Wollstonecraft, why should we give her a hearing when she's not the person, at least in my circles, that if people have heard of, they would think, "This is going to really help me think through today's issues from a good conservative or Christian perspective?" Yeah, so I think you're right to bring up Godwin's biography first and foremost. Because I think you're also right. I mean, he sort of gives this kind of inferences and from past experiences and therefore then implies to everybody else that she's had these affairs.

And that's just not true. So she, I mean, to get sort of into her biography a little bit, she writes the rights of women after she had written the "Vindication of the Rights of Men" as this kind of virginal theorist. So she had met a man and that she was involved with, emotionally or physically, all that stuff.

And so she has this very high regard for marriage, but not as it was practiced at that time. And that's a really important thing is I think sometimes we sort of forget the way in

which women were shuffled into marriage by their fathers or left to kind of prostitute themselves. I mean, there wasn't really a means for them to go about their life in any other way.

And so the way she was living in a very, very different time. But she did then fall in love after she wrote this book and we'll talk about sort of why I think she's so important in terms of her thinking. But she went on to report on the French Revolution in Paris and met and fell in love with an American entrepreneur, who she then married, but you're right.

I mean, only in name. And so she, they held himself her out as his American wife in part to protect her as an English citizen in France. But she also very much lived as his wife.

She wanted commitment. She just didn't want to be under the really unjust marital laws at that time. And so she relies on his provision for a year after their first child who, you know, she brings into the marriage with God when later after inlay leaves her in pretty much the same way that she had warned her readers and the rights of women.

And so she left her philandering with other women. And she writes all these really beautiful love letters about the beauty of domestic life of calling him to fatherhood, which is very much thematic with what she does in the rights of women. So, you know, one of her main themes in the rights of women is that, you know, women's emasculation is caused by many things, but very much caused by what he she caused the want of chastity in men.

And she wasn't at all interested in, you know, pushing aside chastity for women. She believed chastity and modesty and as she says the whole train of virtues was important for both sexes, but that there was a real focus on chastity that women were sort of responsible for chastity. And so she was right out of Rousseau, who was her main interlocutors.

And so she really thinks, you know, men have these greater libidos and they should be responsible for chastity too. And so she's really calling men to fatherhood calling men to treat women with dignity as rational creatures, as she says. That's her real bugaboo, I would say, is, you know, seeing that the only virtue women were sort of called to was chastity when she wanted to call women to all to live out all the virtues because she thought that that's the way to happiness was to use one's freedom to virtuously fulfill one's duties.

And, you know, so the, you know, her biography, her kind of tragic biography after Emily leaves her, she then yes does try to commit suicide twice. I mean, imagine having again, since you know you got to read the book, just sort of see her very high kind of understanding really beautiful, I think, understanding of marriage, of relationship between men and women, of the responsibilities of fathers and mothers, and then to

have all of that torn away from her, you know, it's sort of but for the grace of God go I, you know, I think without without kind of grace without being, you know, she was raised as an Anglican but had a really difficult childhood with an alcoholic father, so sort of strayed from that though I think that that really remains the undercurrent of a lot of her natural theology becomes a Unitarian, but again Unitarians at that time actually believed something unlike Unitarians today, but they didn't believe in kind of the real sanctifying grace that I think she would have really needed to, to, I don't know, be saved from that kind of sorrow experience so again, but for the grace of God who I don't think it takes away. I think a lot of people both left and right throughout history, throughout time since her that since her time have really seen her as kind of one in the same as William Godwin and that's very much not true.

The last thing I'll say so we can get to her natural theology is that when he first read the rights of women when he first met her, which was written in 1792, he really didn't like that book. And so she really, and you can see it and I kind of trace it a bit but she changes her views on some things and become and is closer to Godwin at the end of her life as more of a romantic, but at the time of the rights of women, he is an art and atheist and so he does not understand the natural theology that undergirds her views about virtue and about reason and about what it is to be a rational creature and what we're called to as rational creatures to, you know, to inform our lives to kind of the un, she says the unerring reason of God. So it makes perfect sense that she's going to write a biography of hers that is very much dismissive of that natural theology and just her faith at all.

She very much had a very, very strong faith in God. So it's, I think that to understand her through the lens of William Godwin is very much unfair to her. Yeah, that's really helpful.

You help me reading through the book. See just that, that there's lots to glean from what she's written and I have a hard time being sympathetic to much of, or anything that William Godwin has to say. But there's a lot that you draw out that, like you said there but by the grace of God go I, a tragic life in many ways, tragic upbringing, tragic ending, and yet in the midst of it, whatever you call a natural law, natural theology, God's common grace, a lot of important insights, whereas Godwin goes on, as you know to, I'm just, you know, find this quote here.

Certainly no ties ought to be imposed upon either party preventing them from quitting the attachment of marriage whenever their judgment directs them to quit. The abolition of the present system of marriage involves no evils. Yeah.

Yeah, I mean, and that's a thing. Right, right, but then you read her on marriage. So, so this is what's fascinating.

She says that the corrupt. So she says for his marriage has been termed the parent of those endearing charities which draw men from the brutal herd, the corrupting

intercourse that wealth, idleness and folly produced between the size, sexism. So that's what she is trying to get at the corruption.

She says this corruption is of marriage is more universally injurious to morality than all the other vices of mankind collectively considered. She talks about, you know, the kind of the real benefits of a rich domestic life. And here's something on fatherhood, which I just think so many of your listeners.

I mean, I reading it was just so compelled by she says from the lax morals and depraved affections of the liberty, what results a finical man of taste to his only anxious to secure his own private gratifications and to maintain his rank in society. And so the character of a husband and a father forms the citizen imperceptibly, producing a sober manliness of thought and orderly behavior. And what's fascinating is that when you go back, I actually taught a class at LSU recently and so I was using their text of a vindication of the rights of women.

So many kind of modern feminists just following Godwin literally excerpt from the text, all of the theology, all of the, you know, sort of underpinnings theological underpinnings that she lays her rights claims on. They're all gone from the text. And so all you have is this kind of Godwin like reading, which is just totally unfair to her.

And so it's gone on for centuries here. So for me, it's like, yeah, it's kind of bringing back. And why do I do it? Like, why do I bother with Wilsoncraft? Is that because I think it's important to understand, I mean, I was fascinated by these early women's rights advocates in our country, both their understanding.

First of all, they're, you know, as I mentioned, because I'm a pro-life scholar, their views about abortion, but I kind of wanted to get it. Like, what was there a few of rights? Because rights theory has always been a really interesting thing for me. And Ruth Bader Ginsburg is kind of the leading, you know, sort of, even though she's not a theorist herself, she's the one who kind of helped us all understand rights.

I think very much wrongly in, you know, the way of sort of rights is kind of for self-definition, for kind of self. And so I wanted to get back, like, who are these people relying on that understood rights as grounded in responsibilities? That's what you see in Seneca Falls. Not all of Seneca Falls is something I would want to applaud, but a lot of it is relying on this kind of natural law understanding of rights.

And so you go back, you see that they really rely a lot for Wilsoncraft. So I want to go back to her and understand that's what she's relying on, this understanding of that we have this common nature as rational creatures, as created by God, and that we are responsible to God for living well, for our moral life, for growing intellectual and moral excellence. Like, that's the purpose of life.

And she sees the end of life. The highest thing is benevolence is kind of a moral maturity that helps one to seek the good of the other in all they do, and not to be sort of narrowly focused on self. And that is a radically different view.

And so the whole point of the book really is to show, like, we could have gone another way with women's rights that would be much more in keeping with, I think, a much more coherent view of what is going on in the world. And so that's why I'm trying to reclaim it, because the 1970s really really took us very much astray. So that's really good.

So many things there. I want to come back to, especially talking about fatherhood, talking about lack of chastity. So you have this, this line in the book, one of the slogans of the, what we call them women's rights, suffragists, votes for women, chastity for men.

And there's one of the themes throughout your book, drawing from these earlier thinkers, is how sex affects men and women differently. And if I were to summarize it very colloquially, I think one of the arguments that that Wollstonecraft is making, you're making through her, is just observational. People saying, hey, look what men get away with.

See what they do. See the double standard. I mean, if one of her interlocutors is Rousseau, who famously has five children, leaves them basically for dead at the orphanage with mistress.

And if that's going to affect, and if that's seen as, yeah, men can do that in a way that women couldn't. So women look, and someone like Wollstonecraft looks, okay, the question is, you can ask two different questions. One is, well, why shouldn't we be able to live like men? You talk in the book about the unencumbered male, the, especially the post industrial revolution, the male who seems to be unencumbered and unattached and is able to pursue whatever he wants from his life of career, and doesn't have to be bound by rules of chastity.

One way to look at all of that is to say, wow, women are getting a raw deal. They are. And if only women could be more like those men, and the pill and abortion gives more ability for women to be like that.

And actually, it leads to this presumption that you talk about the presumption that then men have is, oh, wow, the sexual act can be even more consequence free. This is even better for the way that a fallen man wants to live. But the other way to look at this observational double standard is, I think what you're saying, Wollstonecraft did is to say, this double standard is not correct.

This is not right. But there's a way to call both men and women to a life of virtue, and for women to pursue the calling of motherhood is honorable. But it's just as honorable and just as important for the man to pursue this fatherhood.

So I just read this is really, really powerfully stated here toward the end of your book. For us, Wollstonecraft for saw in the late 18th century, the single best response to the sexual asymmetries and both human reproduction and caregiving is an emotionally engaged and deeply attentive fatherhood. Such a fatherhood is most essentially one in which men who's sire children recognize the distinctive and irreplaceable bonds they enjoy with them.

But even more than that, it is the embrace of fatherhood as a core, constitutive primary identity for men with children when that prioritizes the collaborative character shaping solidarity building work of the home deeply respects the distinctive burdens women experience and child bearing and child bearing just as good men and generations past and present have always done here here. So just say more about that, that insight, whether it's yours or yours through Wollstonecraft and what went wrong is these early women's rights or first way feminists were seeing something truly a double standard. But then so many went in a direction that has led to the predicament and the suffering that is so much of our modern age.

Yeah, that's right. No, that's a great, great thread to pick up on that I think is really fundamental is I read women's rights and the cause of women's rights through the lens of reproductive and sexually symmetry. I think, you know, there's a way in which so many people are sort of focused on, you know, later how men and women are just so much the same and, you know, Mary Woostercraft does think we're the same but how are we the same we're just the same in being these rational creatures and being responsible to God, as I said, for lives living trying to live lives of moral and intellectual excellence that's the way we're the same.

But we have that she says different duties to fulfill she's especially talking about the duties in the family. Obviously mothers and fathers have different duties to fulfill. And you know, we can talk about and I do and I sort of trace sort of the kind of economic transitions that happen where women do end up being, you know, pushed into the workplace and the Industrial Revolution and then with anti discrimination laws, you know, why some of that happened due to industrialization and sort of the movement of a lot of productive work out of the home and what, you know, and I, and I talk a lot about that.

But really, you know, apart from work and the question of work, the things that you've picked up on are really key. And I think it's, you know, to say, to say what the book is about in really simple terms and just to reiterate what you've said is that the 1970s feminist really sought equality for men and women on the basis of sort of this male normative, right? Yeah. Looked as kind of the male body and the male capacity to insects so men and women and, you know, engage in the same sexual act but it is women is women who end up pregnant and men can literally walk away.

I mean, a lot of men don't walk away, but they can literally walk into the next room and women then have the consequences of the sexual act, not always, but often, or sometimes at least, inside of them, right? And so to kind of reach this, you know, this unencumbered male, you know, vision of life in which autonomy, I mean, this is what we hear about all the time, this like this like vaunted autonomy and it really comes out of and this is another thing. I don't go too deeply into the political theory, but I do mention, you know, do talk about how Wilson craft is at a very much a distinctive kind of enlightenment thinker. She very much rejects these state of nature theories that come out of Hobbes and Locke and really kind of Rousseau and Miller are, you know, basing stuff on where there's this idea of the individual, the kind of, you know, independent individual is the basis of this liberalism and, you know, the family is kind of in the background and she rejects that.

She says, we're all both men and women are deeply interdependent. I mean, look at the agrarian homestead, you know, deeply, deeply interdependent on one another. And so that's right.

There's this way in which what is it about the double standard that is unjust and how would you make it just? And so I just want to read one of the resolutions from Seneca Falls. So this is 1848, the very first women's rights convention in our country. Again, there's pushback on things like women and the ministry, you know, women and these were Quaker women.

So, you know, we could talk about this as religious people and all of that. But those are theological questions on the kind of natural law stuff. One of the things they'd say is this is a resolution that the same amount of virtue delicacy and refinement of behavior that is required of women in the social state should also be required of man.

And the same transgression should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman. So they really are trying to, you know, shape kind of, you know, understand women and men as equal by bringing men up to kind of the, the, you know, the responsibilities that women have of necessity biologically in reproduction, just as you said, and how do they see, how do you see to do that, but in really an invested fatherhood. And so that's really why I call upon Wilson craft to really, to really get us to think about, you know, because there is kind of generationally speaking this move.

I think good men have always desired to be good fathers, but there's, generally speaking, this kind of move for me. I see it in the Catholic community, certain in the evangelical community, but also among kind of, you know, some liberal men of wanting to be really deeply invested as fathers and emotionally invested in their children. And I think that's a really good thing that should be built on, but we should see that that's the way to handle these asymmetries, not to kind of say, here's this choice to, you know, take out your child in the womb and then have no response.

For anyone of responsibilities to children is what matures us, what makes us, you know, capable of looking outward. And so I think really working on that is would be better for all of us. Yeah, that's so good.

And one of the things I know you bring out in the book is, and you've already talked about it, how these early women's rights advocates were usually maybe always staunchly against abortion. They called it child murder. And one of the things, not only because it was murder of the child, but they saw it as deeply anti women.

They saw pregnancy as one of the things that was most enabled and emboldened and allowed women to pursue excellence in virtue. And one of the things you hit on when you come to the 60s and 70s and even earlier than that with Margaret Sanger is just how you view, not you, but how one views pregnancy. Is it a, is it a gift? Of course it's a it's a burden.

And because of the fall Genesis three, it comes with attendant pain and suffering. But is it something to be celebrated and welcomed. So you have this line of just summarizing, Wollstonecraft saw the problem and men's lack of chastity.

Margaret Sanger saw the problem in women's fertility. Well, that's going to send you down to very different roads, depending on how you view the problem. And oftentimes, I think when we talk about the differences of men and women, it's sort of as if men get all the, get all the good things and they get all the, well, of course, there's a lot of things.

And of course, there's all sorts of ways in which being a man throughout history has been easier and better and more rights than women. And we can be thankful for the ways in which much of that has been ameliorated. And yet we often overlook this incredible gift.

Now, now my wife isn't convinced yet that my, you know, sympathetic pains for her labor are as much as her real labor pains. I will sometimes, Jo-Killing say, you don't know the pain I have that I will never know a child growing in me. So it's right.

It's easy for me to say as a husband. And yet there's something very, I mean, deeply profound. And my wife would totally agree and you probably would as well.

A human being nurtured developing in you. I mean, that is something. It's just absolutely shocking.

We've come to the point where the question, what is a woman is now a gotcha question. What is a woman? People don't know how to answer. I don't know if you saw this over the weekend, but there was some bicycle race and they had the three people on the podium.

And the first two were men racing as women. And these two transgender, what their



men racing as women were there. They got first and second.

They clearly have male physiques. They won this cycling race. And they're kissing two men who are presenting themselves as two women.

And then the scene that was just like the apotheosis of everything that's going on in our culture. The third place was a woman standing there slightly for Lauren holding her newborn baby. Oh my gosh.

Wow. I mean, you can go see this picture that was kind of going around in the last day or two. And it just pictured right there.

She was the first place woman in this race. These two men and their embrace. And here's an action, a woman holding a baby.

Because although we know for all sorts of reasons, women often aren't able to have babies or the Lord doesn't give them marriage or they choose not to be married, but yet a woman is fundamentally that person for whom, if all of the plumbing works and all of the opportunities are there, gives birth to human life and the degree to which that's honored and celebrated. And so it's one of the really powerful themes in your book is whether or not the life of the family as Wollstonecraft saw it with all of the asymmetries and many of the duplicities is that life of the family to be embraced or later Betty Friedan, etc. Is it to be escaped? And that really is in a very simple terms where the feminist movement went off in such a powerful way.

Do you have any hope that that's correctable? Yeah, I mean, so I guess the way that I would think about in terms of this kind of framework of asymmetry is that these, you know, Wollstonecraft and these early women's rights advocates, they saw asymmetry and as you say, they celebrated it. They saw, you know, the way in which it caused, you know, as you say, you know, women to be more burdened, but they also see women as more privileged. And that was kind of what nature had dealt women and they were good with that.

They just wanted to see that, you know, as I kind of put it, that culture and law to both burden and privilege men with those, that responsibility as well. And so what they try to do is they have their move is both social and moral, right? So they're trying to make sure that culture is hospitable to women who bear children. And so they want to change laws to ensure that women are protected in that way, especially from, frankly, you know, desolate men.

I mean, that's a lot of what their work is. I mean, that's why, you know, the temperance movement was very much part of the first early women's rights movement. You know, as I mentioned, Frances Willard earlier, but she's, you know, the longstanding president of the Christian temperance movement.

And she's actually the one we always think of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Katie Stanton as the ones that pushed through, you know, suffrage for women. But it's actually Frances Willard who has far more people following her in all state after state hundreds of thousands of women who are following her. And she calls the ballot, the home protection ballot, you know, that we need to protect the home.

She says the commandments are voted up or down in every election. And we need more women to be out there voting the commandments up in order to protect women in order to get men to carry out their responsibilities and get them out of bars and brothels. You know, that's her effort.

So it's a real social and moral cause in that early stage. And what saying or does Margaret saying or does in the early 20th century, is she insane? Is she instead of offering a social and moral response to these asymmetries? She wants to offer a technological response. And it's very much in keeping.

It's in keeping with kind of the modern project writ large, right, that technology can solve all of our problems. We no longer need to. We only need science technology and STEM.

We don't need philosophy. We don't need theology anymore. Right.

So what she does is basically says like technology can solve the problem. What's the problem? She actually says all of these social and moral, you know, kind of agitating that her contemporaries were going after. They're just mere palliative.

She says they're like band-aids. We have to get to the real problem, which is female fertility. It's the female body.

And so of course, when a whole movement is built upon basically understanding women as well, you know, the way some, you know, degenerate, you know, misformed, miss begotten men that they really should just be like men if they could just be able to not bear children. And so it's very much in keeping. And I've written something sort of about this hoping it'll be published soon about sort of, you know, Plato and Aristotle, who I love in so many ways, but on this question of asymmetry, if you put them together, they kind of come up with like the saying area and approach, which is, you know, to get rid of this, this, the female, you know, the, the, the, the, miss begotten male, the female man who didn't quite come out right.

Yeah, that's right. You've got to cure it with technology. And so that's what we're trying to do, you know, and so no wonder we don't have no wonder we've become, you know, a country that was so pro natalist that had children aplenty, you know, I mean, this was a, you know, with a religious founding and all that has become this incredibly anti natalist place.

And, you know, you know, we want to solve it all with policy. And I think that's great.

Let's solve it with some policy.

Let's make family much more, you know, let's make it easier to raise families in our country. We absolutely need to because we're up and against this massive anti natalism in this country. These women and men, I think, but mainly women who are deciding, you know, when they're like 19 to sterilize themselves because they can't imagine.

It's like this fear of this fear of welcoming another person caring for another person. It shatters this understanding of ourselves as these autonomous individuals to the core. And, and we all want to be like these, you know, these very lonely, you know, people who are all by themselves.

And it's just astonishing. Yeah. And was it Paul Vitz and others have pointed out that so many of our most influential Enlightenment thinkers, you have Rousseau, who abandoned children.

Lock was single didn't have any children, Kant didn't have any children. There's somebody else and, you know, lots of other people on the list. And it's not that you can't have good insights and I'm appreciate many lucky and things.

But it just is a fact that your way of seeing the world and how the world exists is going to be very different if that's been your experience. You talk about the end of the book. We tend to see the world and maybe this is some of the classic liberalism, which has strengths and weaknesses to it.

But you see, we inhabit a world as individuals and then there's a state and maybe there's a market. But what about the family? I mean, the classic example of this is the, you know, the famous infamous life of Julia ad campaign from a number of years ago that just shows during the Obama administration, Julia growing up in her only relationship is with the various government programs that are nurturing her along the way. There's none of the, to use, you know, the Burke for Berkeley and phrase little platoons or institutions or churches or religious communities, or even just a family.

And it was helpful. You pointed out because I, it's easy to think of Wollstonecraft as being, because she was writing to critique Edmund Burke and to think, well, she's obviously then, you know, Burke is the load star of conservatism, then you have Wollstonecraft. And you point out, she's critiquing essentially his understanding of aristocracy and monarchy as the way to achieve what they want, but shared with him this fundamental, you could say conservative instinct that we come into the world inhabiting tradition and inhabiting a culture and inhabiting a family.

And we can't jettison that even if we wanted to, and why would we want to, the real one of the most essential ways that we live out who God wants us to be, and you say pursue excellence, you know, I say as a preacher, pursue Christ likeness, pursue holiness is to

embrace this life of the family that God has given us. Do you find, you know, the book is subtitle is reclaiming a lost vision. Do you find in talking to college students or younger people.

Is there a resonance for this lost vision are people sensing in the world around them. The vision that we have here it, I may tell a pollster one thing, because I know I have to pretend like I don't know what a woman is, but deep down. That's ridiculous.

Are you finding resonance with this vision as you try to explain it to people. Yeah, you know, I think our country is just really divided right now. But I think, you know, one of the reasons for writing the book is really to speak to the left on this stuff where, you know, as I did it as a client, you know, there's sort of this understanding of, you know, that they want to speak out for the entire franchise, they want to, you know, talk about the poor and all that.

And I just think the vision that that I think, you know, as you said, as you mentioned Burke, but that Wilson craft has a real, really the givenness that we're born into family that we did not choose, you know, just want to note too that that John Adams reads Wilson craft and Abigail Adams calls herself Wilson craft people they really see her as an American thinker. And I think that's right. I think that she does critique aristocracy and monarchy from the basis of enduring principles, you know, that she says traditions are important, but we need to make sure that we're, you know, reasoning through things on the basis of these enduring principles of who we are as these rational creatures.

But I think there is a way in which people, as you know, you pointed out to the Julia that we can't help but if we really are pushed to see it, we can't help us see that we're human beings who are raised in families for good or ill, you know, but that really that that nurturance that happens in a family or should happen in a family is really the most important thing. I mean, I think a lot of whether it's progressives or, you know, non-Christians and whatever they when they have children. And again, a lot of people aren't having children.

So they aren't getting to experience this. But they begin to see that the work they do as parents as mothers and fathers is really their most important work. They don't see that as someone they when they look at other children and they find them annoying or whatever.

But when they actually have their own children, they see that. And so they don't want to be, you know, beholden to their job as though it's the most important thing or they don't want to, you know, have, you know, but it's like an understanding. I think this is another theme that really is important is the in the book is that that the market and the state exist fundamentally for the family and for the flourishing of human beings and that and that nurture takes place in the family.

And so we need to be sort of organizing things with the family in mind. You know, it's one of the one of the examples I give is that environmentalists often want to look at, you know, kind of our, you know, the ecology around us, which they should, we should look at our natural ecology and ask, you know, how is it that policies that the state or in the market impact our natural ecology. Great.

Do it. Well, we should also be looking at how, you know, market policy, mark things that happen in the market or the state policies are impacting the family that we kind of should have impact statements because there's been a lot of people. Kind of as things have deregulated both in the market, but then as the state has gotten more encroaching and sort of woke kind of ways.

It's a real disintegration of the family. How can we get back to the time in which not so much going back to like the 1950s when there's all sorts of problems, but an understanding of really the family is doing the most important work. And so that's where sort of the community should be focusing on.

And I think, I think there is a resonance with with that kind of message for sure. Yeah. Well, I'm really glad you've written the book glad you're saying that and there's so much more I wanted to get into.

I was going to ask you about, you mentioned Ruth Bader Ginsburg and then maybe sort of her counterpart Mary Ann Glendon who figures prominently at the end of the book and people should definitely look her up and really remarkable figure in her own right. But we can, I mean, we can even, we can bring this back to Genesis that God created a man and a woman. And when he saw that it was not good for the man to be alone, that's not, we often read that just as companionship, he was alone.

Well, if it was just a loneliness, he could have made a fleet of golden retrievers. He could have, you know, just made a bunch of buddies and they could have literally had a man cave there and could have done, you know, guy things. But it's the fittedness of man and woman in particular to fulfill what the man could not do alone and that was to be fruitful in multiply.

And that's why God creates the help meet from his side and the Puritans, you know, this great line that she was from his side not to rule over him, not to be trampled underneath him, but from his heart to be loved and embraced and protected. And it's a fundamentally Judeo-Christian vision that counter Aristotle or Plato that the creation of woman is not a deformed man who needs to be emboldened to really be a man and then she can really have full equality. But God really unique in world religions creates man and woman equally in the image of God and creates them each for each other fitted for each other.

So I love this lost vision that you're reclaiming. I'm going to give you the last word I'm

going to just read and you can respond to this or let this paragraph be your final word Erica, but this was really good. I take this to be a really good summary of the book, this is toward the beginning you say the trouble with the women's movement today lies rather in its near abandonment of Wollstonecraft's original moral vision, one that champion women's rights so that women with men could be fortuously fulfilled or familial and social duties, nowhere is such an abandonment clearer than in the revolutionary assault on the mutual responsibilities that in here in sex, childbearing and marriage that began in the 60s and 70s.

The modern day fusion of the women's movement with the sexual revolution is one that most regard for good or ill as intrinsic to the cause of women's rights, but it is not. Rather, it is a great departure from Wollstonecraft's original moral vision and that of the early women's rights advocates in the United States it has cheap and sex, objectified women, belittled the essential contribution of both mothers and fathers, and has contributed to upending the American promise of equal opportunity for the most disadvantaged men, women and children today. I take it that's what the book is about I love the book and that's such a great word any last final words.

I'll let that be the last word. Well you work so hard to write that paragraph you just let it stand on it's right. Thank you so much for having me Kevin.

Thank you Erica again the book *The Rights of Women Reclaiming a Lost Vision* published last year by University of Notre Dame press. Thank you for being with us Erica and to all our listeners, life books and everything. Until next time glorify God enjoy him forever and read a good book.

[Music]

(dramatic music)