Holcroft is very optimistic in *Anna St. Ives*. He expresses no doubt that human progress has any visible limits; men are almost infinitely improvable and as they improve, so must their social institutions. Baseness, cruelty, dishonesty, evil of every sort is but a result of the ignorance of good; we have only to educate men to the good, and they will live by it. Thus the duty of those already enlightened is to educate their less fortunate brothers. Holcroft posits, in effect, a kind of reverse Garden of Eden, where it is lack of knowledge that brings evil.

The plot of *Anna St. Ives* is simple. Anna St. Ives is the respectful daughter of the fairly well-off baronet, Sir Arthur. She loves Frank Henley, son of her father’s steward Abimelech, but feels that she cannot give in to her emotional attachment because “the world,” that is, her relations and her peers, would not believe that she loves him only for his outstanding qualities of mind and character; she fears that people would consider that hers is not a rational attachment, since he is so far below her in station, and that she had been carried away by her passions. If these people were to believe that she had been moved by passion rather than reason, she would lose all her power to influence them to rational behavior. Frank disagrees with her and insists that because their love is a product of mutual rational attachment, nothing should stand in the way of their union and of the good that such a union would do society. They discuss this issue from any number of angles; this tension is the main plot. The secondary plot concerns the attempts by the villainous Coke Clifton to seduce the virtuous Anna. He doesn’t succeed; instead, the power of reason triumphs, and in the last
All human virtues are products of our reason. A man who is not virtuous need only be educated to understand the irrationality of his misanthropy, and he will reform and become a contributing member of society. Holcroft discusses a broad range of social issues, from the function of education to the role of women, from the definition of fatherhood to the definition of criminality. Always, he emphasizes the potential for good that society, through its enlightened members, holds out to individuals. It is therefore necessary to the plot that both of Holcroft’s protagonists be exemplars of virtue. Anna never has a mean thought, and Frank—Frank hardly ever has even an inaccurate thought; he almost never makes mistakes. Anna, for example, has some confusion about the proper considerations in choosing a marriage partner, but Frank never vacillates. Thus (except for Anna’s hesitation about marrying Frank), we are assured of being on the right side of an issue if we accept Anna’s or Frank’s judgments.

Holcroft begins in the first pages of the novel to make us aware of the extraordinary virtues of Anna and Frank; at the same time, he introduces a number of significant social issues, so that within perhaps six or seven pages, a reader has already entered the lists on the side of Anna and Frank, of truth and virtue. We have, within these few pages, already begun to doubt the wisdom of traditional conceptions of rank, education, and, even, of fatherhood. The first letter is Anna’s to her friend Louisa. From it, we learn that she and her father are in the midst of setting off on a trip to Paris, where she hopes to meet Louisa’s brother, Coke Clifton. The brother, she is sure, “cannot but resemble his sister. He cannot but be all generosity, love, expansion, mind, soul.” These are the qualities Anna admires. They are to be contrasted, for example, with the qualities of someone like her father’s steward Abimelech Henley, who, she tells Louisa, is “artful, selfish, and honest enough to seek his own profit, were it at the expense of his
employer's ruin" (p. 2). She complains that Abimelech is slowly destroying her father through unlimited expenditures for unnecessary improvements. The "meanness of the father," however, is more than compensated for by "the amiable qualities of the son," Frank, of whom she notes, "he has many good, nay . . . many great, qualities" (p. 3). There is also a line in the letter about the "duty" of marriage and, last but not least, a comment, about her bird, that "the development of mind, even in a bird, has something in it highly delightful" (p. 3).

Thus many of Holcroft's themes are announced at the outset. We are told what the admirable qualities are in a human being (generosity, love, mind) and what the negatives are. We learn that Frank is "great" but somehow not being considered for marriage. And we learn that "the development of mind" is of extraordinary import—even in a bird! The next letter, from Louisa to Anna, tells us that Anna is really admirable and reiterates that Frank is wonderful—indeed (dare she even suggest it?) he might be a perfect mate for Anna. With two letters, Holcroft has set out the most important lines of his plot, given the reader the essentials of Anna's and Frank's characters, and introduced several of his primary themes. These themes all cluster around Holcroft's central concern, the application of reason—or "truth"—to human, to personal, affairs. Education is the means of spreading truth; it is what shapes the human being, and a human being who acts in antisocial ways simply needs to be reeducated so that he understands the import of his actions. As more and more people become enlightened, the problems of society will diminish, even disappear. This re-education is a primary duty of the already good and virtuous people; Anna's fear that by marrying Frank she will lose her power to influence others is a fear that she will no longer be able to fulfill this primary duty. When Frank tells her that he believes their marriage would be socially useful, he means that together they could go about educating others productively.

The first step in the improvement of society is to improve oneself, or to be improved, to the greatest possible degree. Thus we learn in the early letters that Frank feels he must
travel, and Anna insists on his travel because it is his duty "to seize on every opportunity which can tend to enlarge [his] faculties." She continues, "You have no common part to act; and, that you may act it well, you should study the beings with whom you are to associate." Further, he must accompany her to France, for, she tells him, "the journey will be of infinite service to you. A mind like yours cannot visit a kingdom where the manners of the people are so distinct as those of the French must be from the English, without receiving great benefit" (p. 45). If Frank's father won't give him the money, Anna insists that she be allowed to provide it, for that is her duty. Improving the mental faculties enlarges the moral core. Knowing more, Frank would be a better human being and thus a better mentor for others. His father Abimelech, a narrow, selfish, ignorant man, understands nothing of this, and Frank and his father argue over Frank's need to learn by travel. This lack of understanding between them is nothing new, for we are told that Frank owes all his education not to his own father but to the father of his friend Oliver Trenchard. Frank considers Mr. Trenchard his real father, for as Anna says, "a true father feeds the mind" (p. 9).

Some of the most interesting social commentary in the book is on the liberated child-parent relationship; that is, the child must only respect a parent who deserves respect and need only comply with parental wishes that bear the stamp of reason. Thus the parent who neglects or subverts his child's education has no right to the respect that otherwise might be considered his due. If we consider the attitudes of other eighteenth-century children toward their parents—Clarissa's in Richardson's novel, or Evelina's in Burney's, or even those daughters of devilish daddies in the gothic novels—we see that Holcroft has moved his characters some distance. Frank's rational disapproval as he talks of his father's perspective is interesting for itself as well as for what he says about education. He tells his friend Oliver:

he [Abimelech] has kept me in ignorance, as much as was in his
power. Reading, writing, and arithmetic is his grand system of education; after which man has nothing more to learn, except to get and to hoard money. Had it not been for the few books I bought and the many I borrowed, together with the essential instruction which thy excellent father's learning and philanthropy enabled and induced him to give me, I should probably have been as illiterate as he could have wished. A son after his own heart! One of his most frequent and most passionate reproaches is "the time I waste in reading." (p. 8)

Holcroft in Anna insists that the familial relationship is not more important than the simply human relationship. Anna St. Ives suggests that each man owes his fealty to society first and to his personal relations second. Each has the responsibility to improve society as a whole in whatever way possible. The influence of Godwin rather clearly lies behind Holcroft's thinking in many parts of Anna St. Ives, quite obviously so here if we remember Godwin's famous anecdote about Archbishop Fénélon.  

This social responsibility extends both to the self and to others. Because each person has the duty to improve himself, he must allow others to help him improve. Thus if Anna has the money to allow Frank to travel, she must offer it to him and he must accept it because the final object is the betterment of humanity through the improvement of each of its members (especially members of whom great deeds may be expected). Frank cannot allow his pride to prevent him from accepting offers for his own improvement because that would deprive humanity of some share of the potential social improvement he could contribute. Even Frank does not have a quite perfect vision, and Anna finds it a bit difficult to overcome his foolish hesitation about taking money from her. She does, however, insist—and Frank later saves a whole family from grievous harm with the twenty pounds she had forced on him.

The episode begins when Anna's father tries to reward Frank with twenty pounds for fighting off a highwayman. Frank refuses, annoyed that "a man cannot behave as he ought, and as it would be contemptible not to behave, but he must be paid!" (p. 33). He finally accepts the money only because Anna begs him
to. While walking one day soon after, he sees a commotion in the street and notices “a decent, well looking, and indeed handsome young woman, with a fine child in her arms” (p. 33) who is running after her husband, himself pursued by bailiffs who are trying to arrest him. As Frank relates to Oliver, “Her grief was so moving, so sympathetic, that it excited my compassion, and made me determine to follow her” (p. 34). Frank learns that the bailiffs were trying to arrest the husband for a debt of sixteen pounds, plus costs, for which he was liable because he had cosigned a note for his wife’s brother and the latter had defaulted. These good people (Frank notes that “it seemed they are a young couple, who by their industry have collected a trifling sum, with which they have taken a small shop. . . . She serves her customers, and he follows his trade, as a journeyman carpenter. It did not a little please me to hear the young creature accuse her brother of being false to his friend; while the husband defended him, and affirmed it could be nothing but necessity” [p. 34]) are saved by Frank, who just happens to have with him the twenty pounds he had accepted with such hesitation from Anna’s father. This relatively small sum is the difference between safety and disaster for this deserving young couple. There are several points to be noted here. One is that, although benevolence like Frank’s is part of any man’s duty, nevertheless it is important that recipients be themselves deserving. The worthiness of the couple is emphasized not only by their desire to work hard and live simply but also by their responsible, generous attitude toward each other and towards those in need. The husband apologizes for the brother-in-law, generously excusing the man of any fault; the wife is critical of her brother, thus proving herself unbiased by family ties. Altogether, in Frank’s terms, they are a model couple and helping them clearly contributes to the larger needs of society as well.

The discussion of the woman’s terror of the bailiffs affords Holcroft a brief opportunity to allude to the corruption of the legal and penal system of England, the same sore spot that had been the subject of Fielding’s probing nearly fifty years earlier. The woman’s terror for her husband, Holcroft makes clear, is
well founded. The bailiffs are totally corrupt; when the wife begs to be allowed to sell her family's goods so that her husband will not be taken to jail, Frank is sure that "the bailiffs would have paid no other attention to her panic than to see how it might be turned to profit. The miscreants talked of five guineas, for the pretended risk they should run, in giving him a fortnight to sell his effects to the best advantage. They too could recommend a broker, a very honest fellow . . ." (p. 351). Frank is moved to ask his friend, "By what strange gradations . . . can the heart of man become thus corrupt?" (p. 35). But we know that the heart of man does become so corrupt, for these bailiffs act just like the ones we have seen in *Amelia*. Their corruption is part of the same penal system Fielding had described, and which Godwin so bitterly denounces in *Caleb Williams*. Frank describes the young wife's agonized pleading at the very thought of her husband going to jail:

> The horrors of a jail were so impressed, so rooted in her fancy, that she was willing to sell any thing, every thing; she would give them all she had, so that her Harry might not be dragged to a damp, foul dungeon; to darkness, bread and water, and starving. Thou canst not imagine the volubility with which her passions flowed, and her terrors found utterance, from the hope that it was not possible for Christian hearts to know all this, and not be moved to pity. (pp. 34–35)

We know, from Godwin and from John Howard, that her fears are not at all exaggerated, and this fact lends an element of horror to the scene that Holcroft may not have intended. In fact, it is only chance that this young man was not condemned to slime and starvation; it is only chance that Frank happened to be where he was and that he happened to have the money with him. Although Holcroft does not emphasize it here, such a system seems shaky at best. The fragility of human security is a constant theme in these eighteenth-century novels, as we have seen in Fielding and as will be apparent when we look at Godwin and Inchbald as well. Holcroft suggests this lack of control at several points in *Anna St. Ives*, but a much heavier sense of
helplessness becomes apparent in *Hugh Trevor*. It is as if Holcroft, peripherally aware of the basic problems in his society, attempts in *Anna St. Ives* to suppress them with the sweeping theoretical solution of educating men to benevolence. But individual benevolence is, in the last resort, an uncertain proposition on which to stake personal safety. Although Holcroft does not face this problem openly in *Anna St. Ives*, in his next book, *Hugh Trevor*, he not only recognizes but is overwhelmed by it.

In *Anna St. Ives*, however, individual benevolence is still presented as adequate social insurance. That is why Frank is wrong to resent having Anna or her father give him money. A good man like Frank must always have money with him because he never knows when he may need to do a benevolent deed. Frank is wrong when, as Anna says, “he is desirous to confer, but not to accept obligations; he is ready enough to give, but not to receive” (p. 39). And she knows the argument that can overcome his hesitation. When she learns where the twenty pounds has been spent, she determines to reimburse him, noting that “there is one thought which will make him submit . . . quietly. I have but to remind him that the good of others requires that men, who so well know the use of it, should never be without money” (p. 41). Philosophically, this opens rather a can of worms—the same can that Godwin opens in *Political Justice*. Frank asks “what is the thing called property? What are meum and tuum? Under what circumstances may a man take money from another?” (p. 36). Godwin says and acts on the notion that each man must do what he does best for society; for example, the philosopher should philosophize. That is why, of course, the philosopher has the right to be supported by others while he does his thinking; even further, the others have a duty to support him. In practice, we remember the rather notorious image of Godwin sponging off, most notably, poor Shelley.5

Acting with benevolence is merely reasonable and deserves no special praise, or so Frank protests repeatedly when he is thanked by the various recipients of his goodness. Holcroft insists throughout *Anna St. Ives* that benevolence consists not
only of the giving of charity, as with the poor family Frank saved, but of the saving of mistaken minds. In fact, he emphasizes the latter. Much of the book analyzes the flaws and the reformation of the misguided Coke Clifton, and one of the earliest detailed episodes of Frank's benevolence concerns his own reformation of a highwayman who had attacked Anna's party and wounded him. The story of the highwayman seems intended by Holcroft as a paradigm of how the enlightened man of good will (in Holcroft's terms a redundancy—for to be enlightened is to be of good will) can change the course of another's life for the better and so can improve society. Frank, who "abhor[s] the taking away the life of man, instead of seeking his reformation" (p. 17), does not identify the highwayman to the authorities and convinces Anna's father to do the same. Holcroft's morality is a little muddled here, for Frank claims that it was impossible for him to identify the man but that he "luckily prevail[ed] on Sir Arthur to do the same" (p. 17). Presumably, he would not have identified him even if he could, but it is less awkward, or more fortunate, if he needn't lie. After refusing to identify the assailant, Frank then visits him. Frank describes the interview:

I paid the poor wretch a visit, privately, and gave him such a lecture as, I should hope, he would not easily forget. It was not all censure: soothing, reasoning, and menace were mingled. My greatest effort was to convince him of the folly of such crimes; he had received some proof of the danger. He was in great pain, and did not think his life quite secure. He promised reformation with all the apparent fervour of sincerity. . . .

I found he was poor, and, except a few shillings, left him the trifle of money which I had; endeavoring by every means to restore a lost wretch to virtue and society. (p. 17).

Frank even arranges for the highwayman to change lodgings so that neither the law nor the man's cronies can find him. As Frank sees it,

I visited a man whose vices, that is whose errors and passions were so violent as to be dangerous to society, and still more dangerous to
himself. Was is not my duty? I thought myself certain of convincing him of his folly, and of bringing back a lost individual to the paths of utility and good sense. What should I have been, had I neglected such an opportunity? I have really no patience to think that a thing, which it would have been a crime to have left undone, should possibly be supposed a work of supererogation! (p. 42)

These are rather remarkable passages. One is, perhaps, tempted to notice first Frank’s hubris—which of course is not at all Holcroft’s intention; the distance between Frank’s, or Holcroft’s, perspective and our own is itself suggested by the degree to which Frank’s assurance of his own hold on right seems overblown. Frank is certain that he knows what the paths of utility and good sense are; further, he is sure that he can bring back a man who has strayed from those paths and change him from a menace to a contributor to society. He is absolutely certain that it is his duty to make these efforts. Frank notices, for example, that the highwayman “was in great pain, and did not think his life quite secure,” but that does not cause Frank to temper his zeal to lecture, for pain or no pain, Frank has his duty. We may smile at Holcroft’s assurance here, but the tone remains constant throughout the book. Holcroft loses this assurance completely within the following years. As obvious as the paths of utility and good sense seem in Anna St. Ives, in Hugh Trevor they seem just as uncertain.

The path of good sense, of course, is the path of reason. As I suggested earlier, no relation is exempt from this rule of reason; all human relations must be based on it. Thus as Anna explains to her father when they disagree, she must “plainly . . . tell [him] the truth, because I believe it to be my duty” (p. 24). The dialogue between them is amusing:

Upon my word! A very dutiful daughter! I thought the duty of children was to obey the wills of their parents.

Obedience—(Pardon my sincerity, sir.)—Obedience must have limits. Children should love and honour their parents for their virtues, and should cheerfully and zealously do whatever they require of them, which is not in itself wrong.

Of which children are to judge?
Yes, sir: of which children are to judge.
A fine system of obedience truly!

They cannot act without judging, more or less, be they obedient or disobedient: and the better they judge the better will they perform their duty. There may be and there have been mistaken parents, who have commanded their children to be guilty even of crimes.

And what is that to me? Upon my word, you are a very polite young lady....

God forbid, my dear papa, that you should imagine I think you one of those parents.

I really don't know nor don't care, madam, what you think me.
—My plans, indeed!—Disapproved by you!

If I saw any person under a dangerous mistake, misled, wronged, preyed upon by the self-interested, should I not be indolent or cowardly, nay should I not be criminal, if I did not endeavour to convince such a person of his error? And what should I be if this person were my father? (pp. 24-25)

As I noted in discussing Frank’s attitude toward his own father, Holcroft strongly challenges the traditional ideal of the parent-child relationship and insists that the relationship must be based on reason rather than any form of blind trust. Anna has the same duty to point out error in her father as she does for any other human being. If Holcroft redefines even the usually sacred parent-child relationship, we may surely expect him to challenge other established relationships as well. He does.

Holcroft, like so many of these novelists of protest, finds the artificial distinctions that society imposes on men to be not only unreasonable but actively pernicious. Holcroft refuses to assign any validity to the conception of rank, insisting that if any distinctions must be made among men, they should be made on the basis of virtue and intelligence. The hero of his book is lowborn; the villain is an aristocrat. The heroine is an aristocrat, which poses an interesting question in terms of the hero and the heroine getting together; the question, obviously, is whether an aristocratic lady can marry a man of lesser rank without losing any of her social and moral influence? Holcroft’s answer is yes, but even he considers that the “yes” indeed takes some explaining, hence, all those soul searchings in which
Anna indulges. Frank is sure that his rank is irrelevant to the potential social usefulness of their union, and he is sure that because Anna is always open to reasoned argument, he will be able to convince her that their marriage is not only personally appropriate but socially beneficial.

Holcroft's attack on the institution of rank continues throughout the book. Coke Clifton, a man so vile that he kidnaps Anna with the express intention of seducing her, has the effrontery to presume himself a better man than Frank just because of his rank. Frank realizes that rank forms but "ridiculous distinctions" (p. 7) and considers himself inferior to neither Clifton nor Anna. On the contrary, Frank finds it "absurd" to "suppos[e] there could be any superiority, of man over man, except that which genius and virtue g[i]ve" (p. 73). As Anna explains to her father when he notes that Frank "is a very extraordinary young gentleman," "Ah, sir! The word gentleman shews the bent of your thoughts. Can you not perceive it is a word without a meaning? Or, if it have a meaning, that he who is the best man is the most a gentleman?" (p. 344). Clifton, on the other hand, is impressed by rank, especially his own. He complains that "these fellows of obscure birth labour to pull down rank, and reduce all to their own level" (p. 178), Yet even he is forced to recognize "that a title is no sufficient passport for so much as common sense" (p. 178). His description of both his and Anna's family members suggests that some of the absurdities of rank are striking even to those who believe in the institution.

I sincerely think there is not so foolish a fellow in the three kingdoms, as the noble blockhead to whom I have the honour to be related, Lord Evelyn: and, while I have tickled my fancy with the recollection of my own high descent, curse me if I have not blushed to acknowledge him, who is the head and representative of the race, as my kinsman! . . . by his medium I have been introduced to the uncle of [Anna], Lord Fitz-Allen, who has considerable influence in the family, and the very essence of whose character is pride. He is proud of himself, proud of his family, proud of his titles, proud of his gout, proud of his cat, proud of whatever can be called his; by which appellation in his opinion his very coach-horses are
dignified. I happen to please him, not by any qualities of mind or person, of which he is tolerably insensible, but because there is a possibility that I may one day be a peer of the realm, if my booby relations will but be so indulgent as to die fast enough.” (pp. 178–79).

Clifton’s ability to recognize absurdities such as these does not diminish his own pride in rank, and this pride is one of the faults Anna sets out to reform. The worship of rank is intimately connected with other social ills, and as we look at these passages in which Anna attempts to make Clifton understand why his belief in rank as a legitimate divider of men is wrong, we also begin to see an outline of Holcroft’s vision of the ideal.

When Clifton importunes Anna with his love, she will have none of it—unless he can measure up to her ideal of what a husband must be. It may provide some humor, as well as perspective, if we keep in mind that Frank is the paragon who can satisfy all her conditions. She asks Clifton:

Dare you receive a blow, or suffer yourself falsely to be called liar, or coward, without seeking revenge, or what honour calls satisfaction? Dare you think the servant that cleans your shoes is your equal, unless not so wise or good a man; and your superior, if wiser and better? Dare you suppose mind has no sex, and that woman is not by nature the inferior of man?

When poor Clifton tries to answer, she cuts him off:

Nay, nay, no compliments; I will not be interrupted—Dare you think that riches, rank, and power, are usurpations; and that wisdom and virtue only can claim distinction? Dare you make it the business of your whole life to overturn these prejudices, and to promote among mankind that spirit of universal benevolence which shall render them all equals, all brothers, all stripped of their artificial and false wants, all participating the labour requisite to produce the necessaries of life, and all combining in one universal effort of mind, for the progress of knowledge, the destruction of error, and the spreading of eternal truth? (p. 172)

There are many things to notice in this most interesting lover’s lecture, but what must gall Clifton most would be the remarks
on rank and equality. "The servant that cleans your shoes is your equal," unless he's a worse man? He's your superior, if he's a better man! All "riches, rank, and power are usurpations?" This is revolutionary stuff—and not just to Clifton. Holcroft is making very strong statements here which would have been much less than comfortable for many Englishmen only three years after the shock of the French Revolution.6

Anna St. Ives presents a utopian vision, much the same vision of a society based on mutual cooperation and goodwill that Godwin would present in Political Justice.7 Moreover, the very excesses of Political Justice (Godwin’s system so irritated some of his contemporaries that they satirized it and him in novels that played out Godwin’s premises to their logical—and unworkable—conclusions)8 make Anna St. Ives also seem out of touch with reality. Anna and Frank believe that there are no limits to their ability to change the world for the better and that, in fact, their own actions are only part of a larger social movement toward a benevolent, classless, and humanly sustaining society. "I live in an age when light begins to appear even in regions that have hitherto been thick darkness" (p. 383) Frank exclaims, and in Anna St. Ives Holcroft presents no evidence to contradict him.

Anna’s lecture to Clifton about her requirements in a husband, then, is not the idle posturing of an inexperienced girl. These requirements are the catalog of the traits that any person must be expected to show; it is not the person with these attributes who is superior, but the person who lacks them who is not yet a fully functioning contributor to society. People like Anna and Frank, who have already reached this awareness, must help others to develop to the same level. Anna tries to explain her belief to Clifton, whose consciousness, to borrow a modern term, has not yet been raised. She tells him,

You expect one kind of happiness, I another.... You imagine you have a right to attend to your appetites, and pursue your pleasures. I hope to see my husband forgetting himself, or rather placing self-gratification in the pursuit of universal good, deaf to the calls of
passion, willing to encounter adversity, reproof, nay death, the champion of truth, and the determined, the unrelenting enemy of error. (p. 171)

This requirement to be “the unrelenting enemy of error” demands that one know what error is. Anna and Frank would be more sympathetic as characters if they occasionally exhibited more humility along these lines; our sympathies, clearly against Holcroft’s intention, begin to wear toward Clifton, who with some justification eventually grows tired of the constant pressure to reform. (But that is when he is still a villain. At the end of the book, he understands that it was all for his own good and the good of society; Holcroft leaves his reader no choice but to go along.)

Holcroft maps a number of likely areas for social improvement. Some of them I have already discussed, such as parent-child relations (the parent and the child must treat each other with precisely the same respect that they would have for any other person), rank as a social distinction (it is an absurd means of judging men), and the reform of the felon (the errant man must be firmly but kindly reeducated). Other areas for improvement, which Anna outlines here to Clifton, are the popular conceptions of honor, the “place” and potential of women, the proper social uses of wealth and power, and the social ideal of universal progress. Holcroft in one way or another manages to deal with most major social areas, and always does so within the context of the individual’s responsibility and ability to change people and events.

Anna’s requirements for a husband are precisely her requirements for any human being: integrity and benevolence. The sense of self must be secondary if a man, or woman, is to be socially useful; the opposite, self-absorption, leads not to social betterment but to social absurdity. Holcroft’s examples abound: Anna’s father’s “improvement” mania; Clifton’s obsession with rank and its supposed perquisites; the silly French count’s ridiculous notions of honor, including his rather comic attempt to make a suicidal leap from a cliff because he’d seen it
done by his contender in honor, Clifton. The placing of society's needs before one's own, on the other hand, creates harmony in society as well as contentment in the individual. If traditional conceptions of honor, class, and rank are no longer to provide distinctions among men, how are men to be separated? Holcroft's answer is that men are not to be arbitrarily classified at all. The only distinctions to be recognized are those of virtue and genius. All other distinctions are merely prejudices that need to be changed. Among the barriers that Holcroft attacks are prejudices about women; Anna St. Ives surely must rank among the earliest of the women's liberation tracts.

The individual must employ whatever means are available to him to promote human progress. Wealth and its power may be used to better the human condition, and this is their only legitimate purpose. Wealth and power not used in this cause are, to use Anna's word, "usurpations." Government, as we might expect, is one of the great usurpers, and Holcroft takes special delight in commenting on the French government. When Anna and her party arrive in France, for example, they are surprised to find that "the French innkeepers should not yet have discovered it to be their interest to keep carriages for travellers, as in England" (p. 68). Frank explains that in France the government "was in reality every where the innkeeper; and reserved to itself the profits of posting." Then comes the point. "The deepest thinkers," Frank notes, "inform us that everything in which governments interfere is spoiled." Holcroft has introduced the comment within the relatively safe context of a slap at the French, but the remark is clearly a jibe at English government as well. Frank, whose mind was "early turned . . . to the consideration of forms of government, and their effects upon the manners and morals of men" (p. 74), is to be taken as a serious critic of government, and he comments at length in several different contexts about the role of government and its (present) corollaries, wealth and power. He begins here, for example, by talking about the state of France, but quickly moves to a broader discussion; in 1792 it must have seemed safer at least to seem to talk of tyrannies abroad rather than
those at home. This is Frank’s analysis, in a letter to his friend Oliver, of some of the attributes of government:

How often has it been said of France, by various English philosophers, and by many of its own sages, What a happy country would this be, were it well governed! But, with equal truth, the same may be said of every country under heaven; England itself... in spite of our partialities, not excepted.

How false, how futile, how absurd is the remark that a despotic government, under a perfect monarch, would be the state of highest felicity! First an impossible thing is asked; and next impossible consequences deduced. One tyrant generates a nation of tyrants. His own mistakes communicate themselves east, west, north, and south; and what appeared to be but a spark becomes a conflagration.

How inconsistent are the demands and complaints of ignorance! It wishes to tyrannize, yet exclaims against tyranny! It grasps at wealth, and pants after power; yet clamours aloud, against the powerful and the wealthy! It hourly starts out into all the insolence of pride; yet hates and endeavors to spurn at the proud!

Among the many who have a vague kind of suspicion that things might be better, are mingled a few, who seem very desirous they should remain as they are. These are the rich; who, having by extortion and rapine plundered the defenceless, and heaped up choice of viands and the fat of the land, some sufficient to feed ten, some twenty, some a hundred, some a thousand, and others whole armies, and being themselves each only able to eat for one, say to the hungry, who have no food—‘Come! Dance for my sport, and I will give you bread. Lick the dust off my shoes, and you shall be indulged with a morsel of meat. Flatter me, and you shall wear my livery. Labour for me, and I will return you a tenth of your gain. Shed your blood in my behalf, and, while you are young and robust, I will allow you just as much as will keep life and soul together; when you are old, and worn out, you may rob, hang, rot, or starve.’

Would not any one imagine, Oliver, that this were poetry? Alas! It is mere, literal, matter of fact.

Yet let us not complain. Men begin to reason, and to think aloud; and these things cannot always endure. (pp. 74-75)

Holcroft ends the letter by calling our attention to the fact that Frank indeed has broadened the target of his examination; he leaves it perhaps purposely ambiguous as to how much of the
foregoing discussion applied to France and how much to other nations—that is England—as well:

I intended to have made some observations on the people, the aspect of the country, and other trifles; I scarcely now know what: but I have wandered into a subject so vast, so interesting, so sublime, that all petty individual remarks sink before it. Nor will I for the present blur the majesty of the picture, by ill-placed, mean, and discordant objects. Therefore, farewell. (p. 75)

These are stinging indictments. We have met these complaints, stark as they are, in the work of Thomas Day, for example. A recurring theme in these novels is the injustice of the rich hoarding huge amounts of food and goods while the poor lack the most basic necessities, and the further, almost ludicrous injustice of the rich handing out a pittance to those same poor who have produced the wealth in the first place. As we shall see when we turn to Inchbald’s *Nature and Art*, this problem is one of her primary concerns as well. Holcroft in *Anna St. Ives* presents the problem within an optimistic context. The disparities in society can be redressed: “men begin to reason and to think aloud; and these things cannot always endure.” It is a firm vision in *Anna St. Ives*, but in his next novel, Holcroft is no longer convinced that reason can prevail; Godwin and Inchbald, writing within these same few years, similarly see their faith in improvement fail so rapidly that the process is more like explosion than erosion.

In *Anna St. Ives*, though, improvement is possible, even likely: it seems inevitable that reason will triumph and that men will learn to live benevolently with each other. Admittedly, the progress may be slow but the ends, at least, are in clear focus, as Anna explains:

we do not perhaps make quite so swift a progress as we could wish: but we must be satisfied. The march of knowledge is slow, impeded as it is by the almost impenetrable forests and morasses of error. Ages have passed away, in labours to bring some of the most simple of moral truths to light, which still remain overclouded and obscure. How far is the world, at present, from being convinced that
It seems obvious to Anna that it is "perfectly practicable, and highly natural" for men to live together without distinctions of rank or wealth, pooling their resources and devoting their abundant free time to the study of truth; only lack of clear-sightedness, remediable by further education in the ways of men and morals, prevents the mass of mankind from enjoying such a state. It is the job of people like Frank and herself, then, to spread the light. Anna realizes that her vision seems for the moment to be utopian, but she insists that because hers is essentially the reasonable way of life, the progress of humanity must be in this direction. Almost chiding herself, she adds:

Is it not lamentable to be obliged to doubt whether there be a hundred people in all England, who, were they to read such a letter as this, would not immediately laugh, at the absurd reveries of the writer?—But let them look round, and deny, if they can, that the present wretched system, of each providing for himself instead of the whole for the whole, does not inspire suspicion, fear, disputes, quarrels, mutual contempt, and hatred. Instead of nations, or rather of the whole world, uniting to produce one great effect, the perfection and good of all, each family is itself a state; bound to the rest by interest and cunning, but separated by the very same passions, and a thousand others; living together under a kind of truce, but continually ready to break out into open war; continually jealous of each other; continually on the defensive, because continually dreading an attack; ever ready to usurp on the rights of others, and perpetually entangled in the most wretched contentions, concerning what all would neglect, if not despise, did not the errors of this selfish system give value to what is in itself worthless.

Well, well!—Another century, and then—!

In the meantime, let us live in hope; and, like our worthy hero,
Frank, not be silent when truth requires us to speak. We have but to arm ourselves with patience, fortitude, and universal benevolence. (pp. 209–10)

Although this perfect state of man where each works only to supply the needs of nature and then spends the remainder of his time contemplating truth (Godwin's *Political Justice* draws much the same ideal) is not to be immediately created, Anna and Frank both feel that they are actively working toward that end. Anna and Frank seem never to tire of intellectually exploring the potential within man for increasing his own social usefulness, and it seems to them that these explorations themselves are a step toward improvement or, indeed, are part of the improvement process. Anna, for example, recounts to her friend Louisa some inspiring moments with her wonderful Frank:

The course of our enquiries has several times forced us upon that great question, "the progress of mind toward perfection, and the different order of things which must inevitably be the result." Yesterday this theme again occurred. Frank was present; and his imagination, warm with the sublimity of his subject, drew a bold and splendid picture of the felicity of that state of society when personal property no longer shall exist, when the whole torrent of mind shall unite in enquiry after the beautiful and the true, when it shall no longer be directed by those insignificant pursuits to which the absurd follies that originate in our false wants give birth, when individual selfishness shall be unknown, and when all shall labour for the good of all! (p. 278)

It makes a lovely picture, this Godwinian ideal of a society in which everyone rushes for the beautiful and the true, and each unselfishly labors for the good of all. Not only labor, but relationships will be released from the onus of ownership. Not only will there be no more servants, there will be no more children in the sense of saying, "This is my child." As Frank explains, "They will be the children of the state" (p. 279). It follows, as well, that the institution of marriage will not exist in its present form either, for "it is at least certain that in the sense in which we understand marriage and the affirmation—*This is my wife*—
neither the institution nor the claim can in such a state, or indeed in justice exist” (p. 279).

What comes next is one of the most interesting passages in the book, Holcroft’s analysis of marriage. Like his friend Godwin, he does not find much to recommend the institution in its current state, but unlike Godwin, he still finds that, in some form, marriage is necessary in society. Ideally, the commitment would be spiritual (doing away with marriage would not be the same as countenancing promiscuity) rather than legal. But the current state is far from any ideal:

Of all the regulations which were ever suggested to the mistaken tyranny of selfishness, none perhaps to this day have surpassed the despotism of those which undertake to bind not only body to body but soul to soul, to all futurity, in despite of every possible change which our vices and our virtues might effect, or however numerous the secret corporal or mental imperfections might prove which a more intimate acquaintance should bring to light! (p. 279)

Marriage should not be a matter of any bargain being struck, and in fact

in the most virtuous ages the word bargain, like the word promise, will be unintelligible—We cannot bargain to do what is wrong, nor can we, though there should be no bargain, forbear to do what is just, without being unjust. . . . [Marriage] ought not to be a civil institution. It is the concern of the individuals who consent to this mutual association, and they ought not to be prevented from beginning, suspending, or terminating it as they please. (pp. 279–80)

Coke Clifton, who in the discussion of marriage is the foil to Frank, notes that there are few men indeed who are “fit to be trusted with so much power” (p. 280), to which Frank replies,

You are imagining a society as perverse and vitiated as the present: I am supposing one wholly the contrary. I know too well that there are men who, because unjust laws and customs worthy of barbarians have condemned helpless women to infamy, for the loss of that which under better regulations and in ages of more wisdom has been and will again be guilt to keep, I know, sir, I say that the present world is infested by men, who make it the business and the
glory of their lives to bring this infamy upon the very beings for whom they feign the deepest affection!—If ever patience can forsake me it will be at the recollection of these demons in the human form, who come tricked out in all the smiles of love, the protestations of loyalty, and the arts of hell, unrelentingly and causelessly to prey upon confiding innocence! Nothing but the malverse selfishness of man could give being or countenance to such a monster! Whatever is good, exquisite, or precious, we are individually taught to grasp at, and if possible to secure; but we have each a latent sense that this principle has rendered us a society of detestable misers, and therefore to rob each other seems almost like the sports of justice. (pp. 280-81)

But just to be sure he has not been misunderstood, Frank earnestly cautions his listeners,

> I would not teach any man's daughters so mad a doctrine as to indulge in sensual appetites, or foster a licentious imagination. I am not the apostle of depravity. While men shall be mad, foolish, and dishonest enough to be vain of bad principles, women may be allowed to seek such protection as bad laws can afford..." (p. 281)

(It is hard not to be reminded of Godwin's fuming when his daughter ran off with Shelley.)

This was probably more shocking to the contemporary reader than anything we have seen so far. When Fielding criticized the legal and penal systems, a reader could nod in agreement without too much discomfort unless he happened personally to belong to one or the other of these professions. When Brooke and Day criticized the social irresponsibility of the rich, all their middle-class readers could applaud in recognition. But when Holcroft attacks the central institution of society—marriage—he attacks the cherished belief of every class and every sector of society; he attacks the foundation of society as it is constructed. His caveat, that the elimination of marriage will come only in the perfected state of society, reinforces his suggestion that then men will be so enlightened that they will no longer need legal restraints such as marriage to keep their institutions running smoothly.

The caveat serves another purpose as well, for it reminds us
that Holcroft is presenting a reasoned vision; he is not suggest­
ing an unprepared revolution in the relationships of men but a
gradual education into enlightenment. The program that
Frank and Anna are proposing for the improvement of man-
kind will not be implemented in a moment but shall be the
product of the gradual reeducation of the mass of men by
those, such as Anna and Frank, who already see the truth. Until
the mass of men are so enlightened, the standing institutions of
society do indeed have a function.

One of the most stimulating implications of the book, howev­
er, is that because those institutions are highly imperfect, the
enlightened man must use his own judgment in deciding
whether or not to conform to the requirements of society. I
have discussed the rents Holcroft proposes in the fabric of filial
obedience; similarly, the legal restrictions of society need be
complied with only to the same limited extent. It should be
Frank’s duty to hand over the highwayman to the authorities,
but Frank instead is instrumental in helping the man to avoid
those authorities and, in fact, to avoid legal punishment for his
crime. All those involved in the affair conspire to reform rather
than punish the man: he is to be helped to move to the conti­
nent where he can work at his trade. Anna delightedly notes
that “he is more than reconciled to labour, he is eager to be­
gin. . . (p. 50). Neither she nor Frank even considers the idea of
giving the man up to the authorities; for them society’s punish­
ment lies so far from their concept of reform that they do not
even need to justify helping the man to evade the law.

Reform, for Anna and Frank, is accomplished by bringing
the offender to an understanding of his behavior. There is no
doubt that once a man understands the destructive nature of
his actions, he will cease from the commission of any type of
crime. The legal and penal systems make no provision for such
reeducation, however, and seek to punish a man for crimes of
which he has long since repented. Anna passionately insists that
“whatever rooted prejudices or unjust laws may assert to the
contrary, we are accountable only for what we do, not for what
we have done” (p. 422). The inflexibility of the law in not mak-
ing allowance for reform is a major complaint not only for Holcroft but for Godwin as well, as we shall see in Caleb Williams. If the law makes no provision for human error and repentence, the individual must. It is Frank’s duty to help the highwayman see his error, but once that error is recognized, it is criminal of the state to require retribution. Coke Clifton’s actions against Anna and Frank, heinous as they were in fact and, even more, in intention, must not be punished after he has seen his error, for such punishment would be socially wasteful. Anna and Frank, having foiled Clifton’s plot to rape Anna, are ecstatic not that she has been saved but that Clifton has been saved. Clifton, Frank says when it is all over, is “a treasure, by which [society] is to be enriched” (p. 481). Frank and Anna set themselves a goal—there is “a mind of the first order to be retrieved” (p. 118)—and only the good for society that such retrieval implies is to be considered. Each person must be encouraged to develop to his greatest potential, for his own sake but, still more, for the sake of that whole of which he is a part.

The whole is composed of both men and women, of course, and Holcroft insists that the part women have to play is quite equal to that of men. Not least among the fundamental ideas of society that Holcroft challenges is the view of women that gives them some special feminine character and on that basis assigns them a special, and subservient, place in society. Holcroft stridently insists that the responsibility for good in society is as much woman’s as man’s and that essentially the same means of promoting the advancement of truth are open to both sexes. Holcroft is aware of the limitations that society places on the activities of women. Anna disapprovingly notes that “few opportunities present themselves to a woman, educated and restrained as women unfortunately are, of performing any thing eminently good” (p. 37). Holcroft emphasizes not any limitation inherent in the female herself, but rather the limitations that society imposes by its attitudes and by its education of women. As we have seen, whenever Anna has the opportunity to do good, whether by giving Frank Henley the means of assisting his fellows or by reeducating and reforming a Coke
Clifton, she is indeed up to the mark. In fact, she herself notes that "restoring a . . . mind" is one of the "most . . . obvious tasks" (p. 37) society allows women. And as Clifton’s constant self-conflicts and eventual reformation indicate, she is a powerful force when she focuses her efforts toward such a goal. Always against his will, Clifton is repeatedly forced to reassess his own actions in the light of Anna’s arguments. But although moral reeducation is a task allowed women by society, it is not specifically a female task; Frank is just as active in such reclamation projects as Anna.

Holcroft repeatedly makes the point that such characteristics as intelligence, courage, benevolence, and even physical strength are not the province of one or the other sex. As Anna points out early in the book with regard to courage, for example, "it is a great mistake to suppose courage has any connection with sex; if we except, as we ought, the influence of education and habit. My dear mother had not the bodily strength of Sir Arthur; but, with respect to cool courage and active presence of mind . . . there was no comparison" (p. 12). And we may say the same of the daughter, Anna, who maintains a heroic composure during the kidnapping and the repeated threats of rape. Anna even manages to escape her captors by scaling a wall that her maid had assured her could only be climbed by a man. As she points out in looking back at the incident, she had often noted "the excellence of active courage, and the much greater efforts of which both sexes are capable than either of them imagine" (p. 465). She is convinced—and is an example to the reader that—"there is no such mighty difference [between the sexes] as prejudice supposes. Courage has neither sex nor form: it is an energy of mind . . ." (p. 423). Anna and Frank are to be considered equal in the energy of mind with which they meet their challenges. Anna learns from Frank, it is true, but Frank learns from Anna as well. Theirs is to be a partnership of idealism, which shall be focused to the great end of spreading the truth of benevolence and reason.

The limitations that society places on women are essentially learned limitations; in the new world that Anna and Frank
foresee, these artificial restraints will no longer be operative, just as other barriers of rank and of personal relationships will fall. It is a human being who can say, "Shall I listen only to my fears; shrink into self; and shun that which duty bids me encounter? No. Though the prejudices of mankind were to overwhelm me with sorrows, for seeking to do good, I will still go on: I will persevere, will accomplish or die" (p. 146). The thoughts are not specifically male or female (although in this instance the speaker is Anna). Anna does not limit herself because she is a woman, and she never hides behind a feminine weakness. Perhaps too inflexibly, she refuses to submit to any emotion that she cannot rationally justify: "I could be a very woman—But I will not!—No, no!—It is passed—I have put my handkerchief to my eyes and it is gone—I have repressed an obstinate heaving of the heart..." (p. 122).

Anna is not perfect, but she is nearly so. She is a bit too insistent on following her reason to its logical conclusions, without adequately questioning her initial premises. But she is open to being disabused of any faults in her thinking and allows Frank to correct her few errors. Frank is not much more perfect than Anna—doesn’t he need to be reasoned out of his reluctance to accept money from her so that he can improve himself and therefore add to his contribution to society? We are to see two excellent human beings who are actively engaged in the progress of mankind toward a better society. In Anna St. Ives, that progress is presented as a very real movement. The reader sees the proof in the reform of Coke Clifton, who at the end of the book waits to recover from his wounds in the hope that he "may now and then effect some trifling, pitiful good" (p. 479). In the last scene, Clifton is overcome by his own vileness, an evil that Anna and Frank assure him no longer exists, and by his vision of the incredibly good nature of these two he has tried to destroy. The repentence obliterates the crime; Clifton is ready to take his place as a contributor to humankind. He fears that he cannot live up to this new image of himself—"You would realize the fable of Pygmalion, and would infuse soul into marble," he cries to Frank, to which Frank replies,
“There is no need; you have a soul already; inventive, capacious, munificent, sublime” (p. 480). The scene builds to an ecstatic celebratory note, as Frank sums up:

Ours is no common task! We are acting in behalf of society; we have found a treasure, by which it is to be enriched. Few indeed are those puissant and heavenly endowed spirits, that are capable of guiding, enlightening, and leading the human race onward to felicity! What is there precious but mind? And when mind, like a diamond of uncommon growth, exceeds a certain magnitude, calculation cannot find its value! (p. 481)

He leaves the room, he says, with a “glowing and hoping heart.”

It is on this extraordinarily upbeat note that the novel ends. With Clifton’s reformation, we seem to have proof that the society Anna and Frank envision is capable of realization. When earlier we read Anna’s joyful vision of her future with Frank, we might have been skeptical of the good the two of them actually could do. The picture, although lovely, seemed perhaps a bit naive:

[Frank] is anxiously studious to discover how he may apply the wealth that may revert to him most to benefit that society from which it first sprang. The best application of riches is one of our frequent themes; because it will be one of our first duties. The diffusion of knowledge, or more properly of truth, is the one great good to which wealth, genius, and existence ought all to be applied. This noble purpose gives birth to felicity which is in itself grand, inexhaustible, and eternal.

How ineffable is the bliss of having discovered a friend like Frank Henley, who will not only pursue this best of purposes himself, but will through life conduct me in the same path. . . . (pp. 381–82)

Frank’s vision in the next letter is even more enthusiastic:

Oh, Oliver, how fair is the prospect before me! How fruitful of felicity, how abundant in bliss! Yes, my friend, jointly will we labour, your most worthy father, you, I, Anna, her friend, and all the converts we can make to truth, to promote the great end we seek!
We will form a little band which will daily increase, will swell to a multitude, ay till it embrace the whole human species!

Surely, Oliver, to be furnished with so many of the means of promulgating universal happiness is no small blessing. My feelings are all rapture! And yet if I know my heart, it is not because I have gained a selfish solitary good; but because I live in an age when light begins to appear even in regions that have hitherto been thick darkness; and that I myself am so highly fortunate as to be able to contribute to the great the universal cause; the progress of truth, the extirpation of error, and the general perfection of mind! (p. 383)

Clifton's reform shows us that these visions of Anna and Frank are indeed to be turned into realities, or rather, that such a perspective and the actions it implies is itself the foundation of an improved world. "Light," or the "spreading of truth," is the debunking of the traditional institutions of society. Anna and Frank challenge everything from the structure of the parent-child relationship to the structure of society itself. They see their time as an age of light because it seems to them that it is possible, through reason, to change society drastically. We have seen in their vision of an ideal society that "all distinctions of rank and riches" would be abolished and that all would labor "equally," in fact "that individual property is a general evil" (p. 284). Thus the complaint Holcroft is making against society in Anna St. Ives is across the board: all the relationships, individual and societal, are wrong because they are based on exclusivity. In giving us so detailed a vision of a better foundation for society, Holcroft is clearly criticizing the institutions as they exist. The changes he advocates are, indeed, revolutionary. And yet he would have us believe that because these changes are reasonable, they can come about through the spreading of truth from benevolent, rational human being to human being. The changes Holcroft sees as necessary in society, cataclysmic as they are, can be—should and will be—brought about peacefully through the influence of reason. It is all a matter, merely, of education. Indeed it is a lovely vision Holcroft presents in Anna St. Ives; the hopefulness collapses entirely in Hugh Trevor. In its place comes an all-pervasive disgust. In Hugh Trevor, the
The institutions of society are seen as so totally corrupt that reform seems impossible, and the only room left for applying reason is as a counsel to retreat.


2. The improvement mania is of course a frequent subject of amused comment in the literature of this period; Holcroft's detailed explanation of how Abimelech nearly ruins Anna's father is, however, among the most biting of these references. The Baron St. Ives is totally engrossed by his hobby, and his wily steward cleverly feeds that passion. The baron not only has sunk a large proportion of his fortune into the rearranging and perfecting of his estates but has come near to destroying the beauty and utility of his lands. He is always ready to add another feature, another lake or hill. Meanwhile, the grasping Abimelech pockets large sums of the appropriated money, only to urge further improvements upon the improvements.

3. Evelina is raised without contact with her father, who totally neglects her; her entire upbringing and welfare depend on others. Yet when as a grown woman she finally meets her natural father, she is overcome with happiness and, far from feeling any antagonism, lovingly accepts him. (See my discussion in chapter three.) Evelina does not analyze her relationship with her father. His claim to her affection is assured, no matter what he does, by the fact that he is her parent.

4. The anecdote is used by Godwin to exemplify the primacy of reason over emotion in decision making: briefly, he says that if two people were drowning, and only one of them could be saved, it is the more socially valuable person who should be saved. Thus, if the two people were the Archbishop Fenelon and one's own mother, one would be obliged to save the Archbishop since he presumably is of more value to society as a whole. This is precisely the line of reasoning Anna pursues. If Anna's choice is between making a marriage that will bring her personal happiness and a marriage that will be socially useful, she must choose the latter. Although this particular anecdote appears in Political Justice (1793), published the year after Anna St. Ives, Godwin and Holcroft presumably would have been discussing such issues for some time. See note seven below.

5. Kenneth Neill Cameron in his sensitive essay on William Godwin in Romantic Rebels: Essays on Shelley and his Circle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) rather gently puts Godwin's borrowing into a somewhat kinder light than it usually finds. He reminds us that although Godwin and his second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont, "earn [ed] a good deal of money by his books," the expenses of maintaining a household of five children, and their own "inexperience in business finally drove them to the wall." Nevertheless, as even the sympathetic critic must note, Godwin "did borrow; he did not always
pay back what he borrowed; he became both insistent and . . . not always completely frank in his borrowing” (pp. 25–26).

6. The years between the French Revolution and 1794, the year of the “Treason Trials,” were years of both promise and fear. Dissenting societies flourished, and news from France was greeted by many with hope and enthusiasm. At the same time, of course, events in France were making many Englishmen very nervous, and the forces of repression were growing stronger—a reaction that would intimately affect Holcroft and his friends as they themselves were put on trial.

7. Anna St. Ives was published in 1792; Political Justice was published in 1793. But Godwin had been working on and presumably discussing Political Justice for at least a year and a half before its publication, so that the community of ideas between the two books is not surprising given the close intellectual relationship between Holcroft and Godwin.

8. For example, The Vagabond, or Whatever is Just is Equal, but Equality is not always just (1799) by George Walker portrays a country that is run on the principles of Political Justice, where men starve while trying to determine how best to apportion that half day's work which Godwin had said would be sufficient in a society run according to reason.