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Reassessing the Impact of the "Republican Virago"

Karen Green, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne

Abstract

According to Edmund Burke, Catharine Macaulay was "the greatest champion" among a group of contemporary agitators for a Bill of Rights, whom he deemed to be "a rotten subdivision" of the Whig faction. However he did not deign to answer her criticisms of him, thus initiating a tendency among mainstream, male, political philosophers to refuse to seriously engage with her arguments. This tendency continues to this day, despite the increasingly sophisticated discussion of her ideas by female historians and philosophers, published since the appearance of Lucy Donnelly's pioneering article and Bridget Hill's biography. This paper builds on these discussions, by adding detail to our understanding of her impact on influential American individuals, who were deeply engaged in the political controversies that resulted in the American revolution – exploiting material from letters that were not available when Hill wrote her biography. It argues further, that an accurate understanding of the inter-relationship between the emergence of the discourse on the rights of men and that urging rights of women will not be properly appreciated until the nature and extent of the impact of Macaulay's ideas on Mary Wollstonecraft is more widely and thoroughly acknowledged.

Keywords: republicanism, feminism, Catharine Macaulay, Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft

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1. Introduction

During the period when she was a prominent contributor to contemporary political debates, Catharine Macaulay (1731–91, née Sawbridge) published two responses to Edmund Burke (1729–97). The most famous is her *Observations on his Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which appeared in 1790, but twenty years earlier she had published *Observations* on Burke's *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, which appeared at the height of the controversy over John Wilkes's exclusion from the parliamentary seat of Middlesex (Macaulay 1770, 1790; Claeys 1995, 1: 121–53; Burke 1770, 1868–77, 2: 251–323 , 2004). It was in a comment on this earlier piece that Burke dubbed her, "our Republican Virago" and the passage from the letter to his friend Shackleton, in which he coined the expression, is worth quoting, for it is evidence of the problem that she faced, and continues to face, in being recognised as a serious contributor to political theory. Burke deemed her to be part of "the rotten subdivision of a Faction among ourselves, who have done us infinite mischief by the violence, rashness, and often wickedness of their measures," while nevertheless acknowledging that there were none of this vile set who could do better, and concluding, "the Amazon is the greatest champion amongst them … no heroine in Billingsgate can go beyond the patriotick scolding of our republican Virago." He concludes, "You see I have been afraid to answer her" (Copeland, et al., 1958–70, 2:150).

A gentleman, of course, would never fight a Billingsgate fishwife, even were she to throw a punch. It would be below his dignity. So Macaulay, remained unanswered. Burke's pamphlet has attracted a small amount of attention as an early defence of party politics (Lock 1998, 283–6). Macaulay's response has remained virtually unstudied, despite the fact that it mounts a coherent case for thinking that what was needed to quell the people's discontents was not, as Burke contended, a return to the dominance of parliament by aristocratic faction, but a broader franchise, triennial elections, and the exclusion of "placemen" or public servants, from the parliament. The "rotten subdivision of a Faction" to which she belonged were the Bill of Rights people, advocates of the reforms earlier proposed by the Levellers, who hoped to see an end to aristocratic privilege and a representative democracy grounded in equality before the law. Although Macaulay's pamphlet is just one of the places where she tirelessly promoted these reforms, the prominent part that she played in eighteenth-century radical politics has been almost entirely ignored in mainstream, male-authored accounts of the origins of modern democracy and republicanism, and as a result the influence of a very important strand of thought, connecting the project of enlightenment to radical politics has been neglected. Despite the fact that Horace Walpole deemed her one of the chiefs of the republican par-

ty, during the late 1760s, influential contemporary accounts of republicanism ignore her, or, at best, briefly mention her in passing (Hill 1992, 164; Pettit 1997, 2001; Laborde and Mayor 2008; Van Gelderen and Skinner 2002, 2: 128, 168; Wooton 1994, 4, 29; Dagger 1997; Zuckert 1994). It is true that increasing numbers of female historians, political theorists, and philosophers have published on Macaulay since Donnelly's early article and Bridget Hill's groundbreaking biography (Donnelly 1949; Hill 1992; Gardner 1998, 2000; Gunther-Canada 2012; Wiseman 2001; Davies 2005; Gunther-Canada 1998, 2003; Hutton 2005, 2007, 2009; Reuter 2007; Looser 2003; Titone 2004, 2009; Frazer 2011; O'Brien 2005, 2009, 152–200). However mainstream accounts of the political philosophy of the period continue to ignore Macaulay. One notable exception is Rachel Hammersley, who discusses the influence of her histories as conduits whereby English republican ideas were conveyed to France (Hammersley 2010). She is mentioned as hosting a salon, but does not get an entry in *The Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (Kors 2003). She is not covered in Jonathan Israel's *Democratic Enlightenment* (Israel 2011).

In this paper I offer a brief account of Macaulay's progressive politics, and her moral and political epistemology, show how congenial her ideas and arguments were to the defenders of the American revolution, and demonstrate how important she is for understanding Wollstonecraft's brand of feminism. Reassessing Macaulay's role in eighteenth-century radical politics does not come without cost, for it exposes certain parochial and religious elements in the origins of our democratic political tradition, which sit rather uncomfortably with the idea that it is simply grounded in reason, or that republicanism is based on the concept of freedom as non-domination. Macaulay's republicanism does not fit neatly into the current orthodoxy, according to which, for republicans, "freedom is a negative concept, and essentially consists in not being dominated by any other person or group" (Skinner 2010, 96). According to her, freedom is positive, ethical, self-realization. Yet I believe that it is necessary to face up to these features of the tradition, if we are to have an accurate account of the shared eighteenth-century roots of republicanism and feminism in Great Britain and America.

2. Macaulay's progressive politics

Macaulay began publishing her *History of England from the accession of James I* in 1763, in the third year of George III's reign, and the third year of her marriage to George Macaulay (Macaulay 1763–83). While Burke promoted the image of Macaulay as a scolding fish-wife, Macaulay and her supporters preferred to represent her as a virtuous Roman matron (Hicks 2005). In the introduction to her history she claims,

> From my early youth I have read with delight those histories which exhibit Liberty in its most exalted state, the annals of the Roman and the Greek republics. Studies like these excite that natural love of Freedom which lies latent in the breast of every rational being. (Macaulay 1763–83, 1:v)

This, "natural love of freedom" latent in all rational beings is expressed in the works of Algernon Sidney and John Milton, which are included in the early portrait of her in Roman dress by Katherine Read. It is found also in the writing of John Goodwin and John Locke who are not visible in the portrait, but who inhabit the footnotes of her justification for the actions of the parliament and the execution of Charles I.[1] There she expounds on what she takes reason to reveal concerning the foundations and purposes of government.

> That government is the ordinance of man; that being the mere creature of human invention, it may be changed or altered according to the dictates of experience, and the better judgment of men; that it was instituted for the protection of the people, for the end of securing, not overthrowing the rights of nature; that it is a trust either formally admitted, or supposed; and that magistracy is consequently accountable; will meet with little contradiction in a country enlightened with the unobstructed ray of rational learning. (Macaulay 1763–83, 4:430–1)

The history of the seventeenth-century English revolution that she offers is intended to remind her countrymen of the principles on which British liberties were founded, and "the merit of the men by whose virtues these privileges were attained" (Macaulay 1763–83, 1:vii). These liberties are grounded in the rights of nature, and what she means by these rights, and the kind of democratic constitution that would secure them, is spelt out in her 1767 pamphlet, *Loose Remarks on certain positions to be found in Mr Hobbes's "Philosophical rudiments of government and society"* (Macaulay 1767; Gunther-Canada 2006; Green 2012b).

The first part of this pamphlet turns Thomas Hobbes's own arguments against him, in order to argue that his claim that we are not sociable by nature is contradicted by his demonstration that it is rational to accept political subjection. We are, in fact, born fit for society in the sense that we are born with the capacity to develop reason. Reason reveals to us that our ends are achieved by obeying the law of nature, and by contracting with a sovereign to uphold it. So, Macaulay concludes that Hobbes's own arguments show that we are sociable by nature, but they fail to show that the sovereign should be absolute. Instead, since government is set up to secure the "rights of nature", which follow from the recognition of the law of nature, the executive should have a limited power to execute laws laid down by a legislature, which is organised so as to frame laws that promote the good of the people. Having refuted Hobbes with

regard to the sociability of our nature, she attacks his arguments in defence of monarchy, and argues that a monarch can hardly be expected to govern well. The second half of the pamphlet provides a sketch of a democratic constitution, offered as a possible model for Corsica, whose leader, Pasquale Paoli would soon be living in exile in England. She develops a plan for a bi-cameral republic, in which corruption would be guarded against by a strict rotation of representatives and by an "agrarian law" designed to prevent the excessive accumulation of property.[2]

3. Macaulay and the defenders of the American revolution

By the time she published *Loose Remarks*, Macaulay had been widowed, and had established her new home in Berners Street as a meeting place where radical London, and visitors from abroad, came together for weekly "coteries". About this time, Horace Walpole dined at her house with Louis-Alexandre de La Rochefoucault duke d'Enville, commenting that, "She is one of the sights that all foreigners are carried to see" (Lewis 1937–83, 32: 92). There, Benjamin Rush met James Burgh, Sir Adam Ferguson, Capt. Phipps, General Webb, and her brother John Sawbridge, and on a trip to Scotland enthused about her to her friend David Erskine (Rush 1948, 60; David Steuart Erskine (1742–1829), Lord Buchan to Catharine Macaulay, 12 February 1769, Gilder Lehrman Collection, New York, GLC01794.05). Macaulay added to the second edition of *Loose Remarks* a letter from Rush, written soon after his return to America, along with her reply. She concluded the reply by regretting that her commitment to writing the history of England precluded her "from defending the cause of the Americans", and went on to suggest that "the general principles of the rights of mankind inculcated in my great work, is of more advantage to them than the more suspected arguments framed for the service of a particular purpose" (Macaulay 1769, 35).

It was at about this time that she was moved to send sets of her work to certain politically engaged Americans, and began a correspondence with a number of them. Her brother, John Sawbridge had entered parliament in 1768, as a member for Hythe, and he would consistently support the rights of the Americans not to be taxed by the English parliament, as well as fight a long and futile battle for the program of reform that Macaulay had set out in her *Observations* on Burke's *Thoughts*. In the first four volumes of her history, Macaulay had developed, in great detail, the principles followed by the main actors in the seventeenth-century struggles with the Stuarts over taxation, freedom of religion, and the rule of law. These arguments, and the general case for parliamentary reform that Macaulay was pursuing, were highly pertinent to the American

situation. As she wrote to James Otis, the earliest beneficiary of her generosity, "The principles on which I have written the History of the Stewart Monarchs are I flatter myself in some measure correspondent to those of the great Guardian of American Liberty: (Catharine Macaulay Graham to James Otis, 27 April 1769; Adams, et al. 1917, 1:7–8). Otis had defended a case brought in 1761 against the right of the customs commissioner and Massachusetts courts to issue writs of assistance, which permitted the commissioner to search anywhere for illegal goods, and had represented these writs as instruments of arbitrary power and destructive of English liberty. John Adams would later represent his arguments as sowing the seeds of the movement for American Independence (Adams 1850–56, 10:247-8). Soon after this, Otis published *A Vindication of the Conduct of the House of Representatives* (Otis 1762), which asserted the right of the Massachusetts's assembly to reject the proposals of the governor of the colony. His other tracts, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (1764), *Considerations on Behalf of the colonists. In a Letter to a Noble Lord* (1765) and *A Vindication of the British Colonies* (1769), which had first been published soon after the passing of the Stamp Act, had broader implications for the theory of democratic representation than just the American situation (Pencak 2004; Ferguson 1979; Otis 1764, 1765, 1769). For, the position of the colonists *vis a vis* the British parliament was materially little different to that of the residents of great towns such as Manchester, who were taken to be "virtually" represented by the parliament, although they returned no members (Ferguson 1979, 200; Otis 1764, 35–8, 1765, 3). The situation in America, and that in parts of Great Britain, were in some sense parallel, and Macaulay certainly saw them in this light, for, she claims in 1775 that the ministry,

> … by depriving [the Americans] of almost every part of their rights which remained unviolated, have raised a spirit beyond the Atlantic, which may either recover the opportunities we have lost of restoring the breaches which for near a century have been making in our constitution, or of sinking us into the lowest abyss of national misery. (Macaulay 1775, 8)

Either, by rousing themselves to defend the rights of the Americans, the British people would be forced to reform the situation at home, or, by failing to do so, they would acquiesce in their own continued disenfranchisement. Furthermore, she argued, the actions of the ministry, by encouraging the Americans to fight for independence, would result in Britain forgoing all the advantages they had gained from the colonies.

Otis thanked Macaulay warmly for her *History*, observing that it "had been much admired here from its first publication & is every day sought often and read with great avidity" (James Otis to Catharine Macaulay, 27 July 1769, GLC01796). He complained about the colonial government, but was not in

favour of independence, though he hinted to Macaulay that others in America were already agitating in that direction. His hope was that members of the British parliament would come to recognise that, in order to maintain British prosperity and commercial might, it was necessary to treat the colonists equitably. This hope, that the Americans would be treated equitably, and be governed by their own legislators under the king was also the expressed desire of Jefferson as late as 1774 (Jefferson 1774).

Soon after the exchange of letters between Otis and Macaulay, the situation in America became more tense. British troops fired on the citizens of Boston, and in another incident, Otis was rendered an invalid as the result of a savage beating by a customs officer. Like John Wilkes and Thomas Hollis, Macaulay was sent an account of the Boston "massacre" by James Bowdoin, Samuel Pemberton, and Joseph Warren, and in the same post was notified of the sad news relating to Otis by Sarah Prince Gill (Sophronia) who had previously sent her copies of the unfinished *Chronological Annals of New England* by her father, Thomas Prince (1687–1785), in the hope that they might be of use to her in writing a history of the American colonies (James Bowdoin (1726–90), Samuel Pemberton, and Joseph Warren (1741–75) to Catharine Macaulay, 23 March 1770, GLC01789.02; Sarah Prince Gill to Catharine Macaulay, 25 April 1769, GLC01797.01A; Sarah Prince Gill to Catharine Macaulay, 24 March [1770] GLC01797.03; Letzring 1976; Cash 2006, 261). Prince Gill's letter initiated a correspondence between John Adams and Macaulay, who told her, "I have read, not only with Pleasure and Instruction, but with great admiration, Mrs. Macaulay's History of England" (John Adams to Catharine Macaulay, 9 August 1770, GLC01784.01). He would, however, ultimately find her views too radical and complain, that his countrymen had been,

> running wild and into danger, from a too ardent and inconsiderate pursuit of erroneous opinions of government, which had been propagated among them by some of their ill informed favorites, and by various writings which were very popular among them, such as the pamphlet called Common Sense, for one example, among many others; particularly Mrs Macaulay's History, Mr. Burgh's Political Disquisitions, Mr. Turgot's letters. (John Adams to Richard Price, 20 May, 1789, in Adams 1850–56, 9:558–9)

As a result of her desire to be put in touch with American women, Macaulay also briefly exchanged letters with Adam's wife, Abigail, and engaged in a longer correspondence with his friend, Mercy Otis Warren, James Otis's sister (Abigail Adams to Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay, 1774, in Butterfield 1963, 1:177–9; Mercy Otis Warren to Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay, 9 June 1773, in Richards and Harris 2009, 14–17; Davies 2005, 2006).

A few years after these exchanges, Benjamin Church was encouraged by John Hancock, James Otis, Samuel Adams, John Scollay, Joseph Warren, William Dennie, and Thomas Marshall to publish the oration he had delivered on the third anniversary of the "Boston massacre". He begins with an account of the purposes of the institution of government, citing the celebrated Mrs Macaulay as his source for the principle that "the Commonwealth by constituting a head does not deprive itself of the power of its own preservation" and repeating her claim that Government or Magistracy is "a mere human ordinance" and that "a breach of trust in a governor, or attempting to enlarge a limited power; effectually absolves subjects from every bond of covenant and peace" (Church 1773, 7–8). Along with Grotius, it is Macaulay who is recognised by Church to be the established authority on the right of resistance to a government that has ceased to promote the good of the people.

Besides Otis, Macaulay sent copies of her history to William Livingston (1723–90) who, with William Smith jnr. and John Morin Scott had began to publish *The Independent Reflector* in 1752 (William Livingston to Catharine Macaulay, 22 September 1769, GLC01793; Klein 2010). In his letter of thanks he praised her history and "the amiable Spirit of Patriotism which breathes throughout the whole of that excellent Work" adding, "the Americans, Madam, have reason to rejoice that in You they have a Patroness of their Liberties; and that you have a tender feeling for their Sufferings". His assessment of the contemporary situation was that "nothing will satisfy us short of a Constitution similar to that enjoyed by our fellow Subjects at home and established upon such a basis that any infringement of it by the Parliament be deemed so fundamental a Violation as would absolve us from all dependence on the Mother Country."

Yet another beneficiary of her desire to disseminate her history, appears to have been John Dickinson (1732–1808) whose *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (1767–8) had been recommended to her by Prince Gill (Sarah Prince Gill to Catharine Macaulay, 8 December 1769, GLC01797.02; Newcomb 2004). In December 1770, he thanked her for a favour of 24 May, adding, "your generous Labors, Madam, in rendering Justice to deceased worthies will I doubt not, facilitate the Endeavors of future Patriots throughout the British Dominion in every age" (John Dickinson to Catharine Macaulay, 31 October 1770, GLC01790.01). In return for her valuable present, he later sent her a piece of silk of American manufacture (John Dickinson to Catharine Macaulay, 17 December 1770, GLC01790.03).

Other Americans contacted her on their own initiative. Richard Henry Lee (1733–94) excused his impertinence in writing to her, although he was a stranger, with the compliment, "a Lady of your singular merit, may expect to be troubled with the admiration, and the gratitude, of every friend to worth and freedom, in every part of the world" (Richard Henry Lee to Catharine Ma-

caulay, 30 March 1770, GLC01792). Samuel Stockton, travelling to London from his home in Princeton, in order to study law, was furnished with letters of introduction to her and her brother, by Benjamin Rush (Houghton Library, Harvard University, Arthur Lee papers, MS Am 811-811.7, 57–8). She had also befriended Henry Marchant of Rhode Island, while he was in London, and through him initiated a correspondence with Ezra Stiles, who wrote in 1775, thanking her for her *Address to the people*, and pointing out that the colonists were ready for war, though he prayed that the "Union between Great Britain and these Colonies may never be dissolved" (Catharine Macaulay to Henry Marchant, Litchfield St, June 1773, Rhode Island Historical Society, Marchant Papers, MS 552; Ezra Stiles to Catharine Macaulay, 15 April 1775, GLC01798). There is no evidence, that I know of, of direct contact between her and Jefferson, other than the fact of her being entrusted, by James Monroe in 1785, to deliver letters to Jefferson while he was in Paris. Nevertheless, her history was one of his favourite accounts of the period of the Stuarts and the parliament, which "he repeatedly urged on his friends" (Colbourn 1958, 64, n. 41; Boyd and Cullen 1950–83, 8:296, 381, 9:236). It may be also that she never met Tom Paine, but it is worth noting that it was Benjamin Rush who encouraged him to write Common Sense (Philp 2004; Paine 1776). This is a work which echoes Macaulay's critique of monarchy, and her understanding of the purposes of government, but which draws the conclusion that, by 1775, there is no longer any realistic prospect of reconciliation with Great Britain, so that it is time for America to assert its independence, a goal accepted in 1776 by the signatories to the Declaration of Independence, when they affirmed their intention to form their own government, in order to secure the rights of nature.

4. The equal rights of men and the rights of women

Throughout her history, Macaulay challenges Hume's interpretation of events, and in her later *Treatise on the Immutability of Moral truth* she attacks head on his conventionalism and utilitarianism in ethics, arguing for the capacity of reason to discover universal moral principles grounded in, "an abstract fitness of things perceived by the mind of God, and so interwoven in the nature of contemplative objects, as to be traced like other abstract truths, by those faculties of the mind which enable us to compare and perceive the agreement and disagreement of our sensitive and reflex ideas" (Macaulay 1783, 30–2). The reference to comparing "our sensitive and reflex ideas" points back to Locke, and Macaulay's moral epistemology owes a great deal to him, for, like Catharine Trotter Cockburn, who had defended Locke against Thomas Burnett's

charge that his empiricism committed him to at best an "epicurean" or utilitarian morality, Macaulay was convinced that Locke accepts the view that there is a law of nature and that reason is capable of coming to understand its principles (Cockburn 1702, 1751; Sund 2013; Sheridan 2007; Green and Weekes 2013; Green 2014, 175–81; O'Brien 2009, 166). Locke's interpreters have associated his political philosophy with that of Grotius, and have tended to argue that he is both a hedonist and a voluntarist, so it may seem odd to claim that Macaulay is both a follower of Locke and one whose theism tends towards the intellectualism found in writers such as Samuel Clarke (Schneewind 1998, 141–54; Darwall 1995). However, whatever the validity of her understanding of Locke's moral philosophy, it was one that she shared with Cockburn, whose defence of his ideas against Burnett's objections Locke had endorsed (Cockburn 1751, 1:xix–xx; Sund 2013, 6–7).

In her *Treatise* Macaulay attempts to solve the problem of evil by arguing that God has given us improvable faculties and that we have been placed on earth in order that we might progress towards true liberty, which she identifies with virtue, which consists in a full knowledge of the law of nature, and the capacity to control our passions so that the will is determined by our rational understanding of that law (Macaulay 1783, 219). Her perfectionism and theism underpin her optimism that society can progress towards a more perfect state in which individuals will be able to exercise their rationally grounded virtue, and in which people will be governed by positive laws that conform to the law of nature.

The essence of this philosophy is reproduced in her *Letters on Education* which was reviewed by Mary Wollstonecraft in the autumn of 1790 (Wollstonecraft 1989, 7:309–22). She moved directly from reviewing Macaulay's *Letters on Education* to writing her response to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (Wollstonecraft 1989, 5:1–60; Frazer 2011; Green 2014, 352–63; O'Brien 2009, 173–83). In this work, she reproduces Macaulay's understanding of the foundation of the rights of nature in immutable moral truth, asking rhetorically, "who that pretends to rationality will presume to deny" that liberty "results from the eternal foundation of right – from immutable truth … if reason has led them to build their morality and religion on an everlasting foundation – the attributes of God?" (Wollstonecraft 1989, 5:9). We cannot prove that Wollstonecraft had also read Macaulay's histories, but she was certainly well aware of them, for their author was famous, and she concluded her review with the comment that "this work … adds new lustre to Mrs M.'s character as an historian and a moralist" (Wollstonecraft 1989, 7:321).[3] Wollstonecraft had moved to Bath in 1779 and lived in Milson St, one block away from Alfred Place, where the celebrated historian had resided with Thomas Wilson. This was shortly after Macaulay's scandalous departure to marry her second husband, so Wollstonecraft would no doubt

have heard and read the gossip circulating as a result of this notorious event. Some years later, she was befriended by James Burgh's widow Sarah, who provided support and finance during the period in which she ran a small school in Newington Green (Todd 2003, 50). Burgh had not only been one of Macaulay's guests during the period of her residence at Berners St, he had been a great admirer of hers, citing the authority of "the incomparable Mrs Macaulay's history" as proof of Charles I's tyranny in his P*olitical Disquisitions*, in which he defended the rights of the Americans at length (Burgh 1774, 1:185). Wollstonecraft would have had access to Macaulay's histories in his considerable library.

Approximately one year after completing her review of *Letters on Education*, Wollstonecraft commenced her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* with a succinct statement of the progressive philosophy found in Macaulay,

> In what does man's pre-eminence over brute creation consist? The answer is as clear as that half is less than the whole; in Reason.
>
> What acquirement exalts one being over another? Virtue we spontaneously reply.
>
> For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied the brutes; whispers Experience. (Wollstonecraft 1989, 5:81)

The rights that Wollstonecraft claims for women are grounded in their nature as rational and morally perfectible beings. In this her feminism is closer to that found in Astell's earlier advocacy for women's education than is usually recognised (Broad 2007; Broad and Green 2009, 265–87, 2012a, b). Similarly the faith in humanity's progress towards the recognition of political rights, which Macaulay believed would follow in a period "enlightened with the unobstructed ray of rational learning" was grounded in a belief in human nature as rational and morally perfectible. Her appeal to the "sacred rights of humanity", to "native rights", to "the common right of men of all persuasions", "the equal rights of men", and "the fundamental rights of the people", in various places throughout her history, is grounded in a distinctive reading of natural law, according to which the rational understanding of the purposes of government, towards which humanity is progressing, enables us to recognise the existence of certain natural rights (Macaulay 1763–83, 1:283, 2:253–4, 3:21–2, 60–1, 77–8n, 165, 263n, 332, 345). God has supplied us with reason, which shows some truths to be self-evident, among which is that the purpose of government is to uphold the equal rights of men.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider Macaulay's use of the phrase, "the equal rights of men". In a recent book Peter de Bolla has argued, on the

basis of searches conducted on the corpus collected in Eighteenth Century Collections online, that the concept of the rights of man only emerges at the end of the eighteenth century, and that "rights" and "men" or "man" appear far more often in close proximity at the end of the century than at the beginning (Bolla 2013). In fact, while the phrase "rights of man" occurs relatively frequently before 1767, a search in this data base for the exact phrase, "equal rights of men" for the period 1763–75 delivers only ten hits, all of which are either to the third volume of Macaulay's history, or quotes from, or references to it. A search of the British Periodicals data base also throws up no instances of this exact phrase until February 1767, when the relevant passages from the history were reprinted in *The Royal Magazine*. In her third volume, Macaulay uses the phrase in three places, two of which are passages directed against the doctrine of passive obedience (Macaulay 1763–83, 3:77–8n, 332, 345). One she directs towards Catholics, who she claims, because of their commitment to passive obedience, should be looked on with contempt by "a people who profess the blessings of Liberty, who know its value, who are acquainted with the equal rights of men, and understand the rational principles of government and subjection" (Macaulay 1763–83, 3, 77–8n). The other is a passage in which she disputes the usual interpretation of the "render unto Caesar" passage beloved of those who preach passive obedience, and in which she claims instead that,

> The doctrine of Christ asserted the equal rights of men; he not only recommended, but commanded his disciples to preserve that equality in their civil and religious institutions. The matchless Milton has observed that no government comes nearer to this precept of Christ than a free Commonwealth, wherein they who are greatest are perpetual servants and drudges to the public at their own cost and charges, neglecting their own affairs, yet are not elevated above their brethren. (Macaulay 1763–83, 3:345)

What is perhaps just as noteworthy is that in the period from 1700–63, there are no hits for this exact phrase, whereas for the period from 1776–99 there are 134, most from the 1790s. De Bolla credits Tom Paine with popularising a new concept of the rights of man, but that phrase was quite often used, even early in the century, in the sense specified by Blackstone, to capture the "natural liberty" which "consists properly in a power of acting as one thinks fit, without any constraint or control, unless by the law of nature" (Blackstone 1765–69, 1:121). Macaulay in these widely copied passages, associated "the equal rights of men" with the rejection of passive obedience and defense of a right to resistance. As with discussions of republicanism, contemporary discussions of the origins of Thomas Paine's thought completely neglect to mention Macaulay (Burchell 2009; Fruchtman Jr. 2009, 2013; Kates 1989; Kaye

2005; Keane 1995; Lamb 2015). Yet she was a celebrated republican during his formative years in London, she was a close friend of the Quakers, into whose sect he was born, and as mentioned above, she was praised by Benjamin Rush, who encouraged Paine to pen his most influential work, *Common Sense*.[4]

Recent accounts of Wollstonecraft's republicanism have been heavily influenced by the characterization of the tradition developed by Philip Pettit and endorsed by Quentin Skinner, according to which for republicans, "freedom is a negative concept, and essentially consists in not being dominated by any other person or group" (Skinner 2010, 96; Pettit 1993, 1997, 2001). Lena Halldenius, for instance, reads Wollstonecraft as primarily interested in independence and non-domination, and fails to mention Macaulay's influence on her (Halldenius 2015). Sandrine Berges, while she does acknowledge that Wollstonecraft read Macaulay, and points out that Wollstonecraft's republicanism "is not simply a denunciation of domination", nevertheless also claims that Wollstonecraft accepts, "liberty as non-domination" (Berges 2013, 33). However, both Halldenius' and Berges' subsequent discussion of the importance that Wollstonecraft attaches to the development of reason for the attainment of virtue, involves an implicit recognition that, for Wollstonecraft, as for Macaulay, liberty involves the positive development of the self as a virtuous, rational, and ethical individual (Berges 2013, 44–7; Green 2014, 178–90; Halldenius 2015, 75–90). Arguably, the total effacement of Macaulay from the standard accounts of eighteenth-century republicanism has helped foster a distortion of the historical record, and an over-emphasis on the importance of liberty as "non-domination" within historical republicanism, at the expense of the recognition that, for many republicans, liberty was far closer to the positive ideal derided by Isaiah Berlin (Berlin 1969, 131–4). Independence was valued by Macaulay, as a means to moral maturity, not as an end in itself, as neo-republicans claim.

The cost involved in recognising the important influence of Macaulay, in both the history of feminism and the history of republicanism, is that it highlights the religious elements that were fundamental to that history, and casts some doubt, both on the centrality of liberty as non-domination, and on the early existence of a "political liberalism" that has rational grounds independently of any comprehensive doctrine of the good (Rawls 1993).[5] Both Macaulay and Wollstonecraft believe that our good consists in our self-development as virtuous individuals. They were deeply influenced by a tradition that one might loosely call "Christian eudemonism" (Taylor 2002, 2003, 95–115; Green 2015). This adds to Aristotle's claim that the good of humanity is the perfection of its rational and sociable nature, the optimism that a good God has given us the capacity to understand that nature, and the faith that humanity is progressing towards a greater collective understanding of, and obedience to, the rational moral law. This optimism was shattered by the unfolding of the

French Revolution and is difficult for anyone who looks back on the events of the twentieth century to share. Even before the revolution, more thorough naturalists, and theological sceptics, such as Hume, challenged the belief in a rationally accessible, immutable moral truth, and as a consequence were politically conservative conventionalists (Green 2011).

There has been a tendency to represent Wollstonecraft as the first advocate of a contemporary feminism that was an offshoot of a new discourse asserting the rights of man, which emerged at the end of the eighteenth century (King 1991, 237; Pocock 1998, 251, 257–8; Fauré 2002, 126). Despite Virginia Sapiro's early acknowledgement that Wollstonecraft borrowed from Macaulay, in general Macaulay's influential advocacy of both republican and feminist ideas, and the common origins of these two strands of her thought in "enlightened" Christianity, has been suppressed (Sapiro 1992, 260). Although Macaulay was both celebrated and execrated during her lifetime men "have been afraid to answer her". To do so would have been to acknowledge her equal right to speak for the humanity in whose progress she so ardently believed. That he thought she had no such right is clear from a later letter by Burke, which he wrote to Mrs John Crewe, and in which he lamented the baneful influence of even quite conservative female writers,

> I hope and supplicate, that all provident and virtuous Wives and Mothers of families will employ all the just influence they possess over their Husbands and Children, to save themselves and their families from the ruin that the Mesdames de Staals and the Mesdames Rolands, and the Mesdames de Sillery, and the Mrs Helen Maria Williams, and the Mrs Woolstencrofts (sic) &c &c &c &c &c and all that Clan of desperate, Wicked, and mischievously ingenious Women, who have brought, or are likely to bring Ruin and shame upon all that listen to them. You ought to make their names odious to your Children. The Sex has much influence. Let the honest and prudent save us from the Evils with which we are menaced by the daring, the restless, and the unprincipled. (Copeland, et al. 1958–70, 8:304)

This piece of invective demonstrates the impossibility of the position that Macaulay had attempted to occupy. The virtuous matron does not speak or attempt to have an influence on public affairs. In the very act of so doing she shows herself daring, restless, and a virago. Yet, I hope to have demonstrated, that despite the contradictions in her position and neglect by subsequent political theorists, Macaulay did have an impact, and a reassessment of that impact is important in order to provide an accurate understanding of the intertwined histories of republicanism and feminism.

Endnotes

1 Putting the case for the execution of Charles, she cites John Goodwin's *Defence of the honourable sentence*, Algernon Sidney's *Discourses on Government*, John Milton's *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* and *Defence against Salmasius*, and John Locke's *On Civil Government* (Macaulay 1763–83, 4: 428–31)

2 For further elaboration of Macaulay's political philosophy see (Green 2012a, b, 2014, 172–87).

3 It was not until 1822 that we have evidence of William Godwin reading Macaulay's History, http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/diary/1822-04-04.html. Nevertheless, the fact that later Wollstonecraft herself turned to writing history strongly suggests that she was emulating the woman whose works she knew and admired.

4 Macaulay's close association with the Friends is particularly evident from Mrs. Knowles to Catharine Macaulay, London 27 December 1774, GLC01794.37. She also used the Quaker, Edmund Rack, as her agent when she travelled to America.

5 For earlier discussion of the religious grounds of these women's ideas, (Hutton 2005, 2007; Frazer 2011)

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