

Catharine Macaulay

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You are the only female writer who I coincide in opinion with respecting the rank our sex ought to endeavour to attain in the world. I respect Mrs Macaulay Graham because she contends for laurels while most of her sex only seek for flowers.

Letter to Catharine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft (2003), 186

Mary Wollstonecraft was a great admirer of Catharine Macaulay. She considered her to be a bold thinker with a penetrating mind, unafraid of engaging the leading minds of her time on difficult and controversial matters (1790, 241 and 2014, 132, 16). The admiration was reciprocated, as we learn from Macaulay's response to the letter Wollstonecraft had written her. Sadly, the two would never meet. Only six months after these letters had been exchanged, Macaulay died. Nevertheless, Macaulay's work had a profound and lasting effect on Wollstonecraft, and she developed and expanded on many of her predecessor's ideas. While she often took these in a different direction, there remains a great synergy between their work to the extent that we can understand Wollstonecraft's own feminist arguments by approaching them through the frameworks and ideas that Macaulay provided. These included the principles of classical republicanism, particularly in its understanding of the values of freedom, equality and virtue, and an understanding of reason as grounded in immutable principles that apply equally to both sexes.

When Wollstonecraft (1759-97) wrote to Macaulay she was an emerging writer in her early thirties whose most celebrated works were still ahead of her. Macaulay (1731-91) was a generation older. She was already an established author and public intellectual, having achieved fame primarily for her magisterial eight volume *History of England* which was written over a twenty year period (1763-83). This was not only a popular book in its time – outselling at one point David Hume’s own *History of England* (1754–61) (Frazer 2011, 604) – but a milestone in intellectual history. It was the first English history of the seventeenth century to be written from a specifically republican standpoint. The *History* has been described as having a good case to be considered the most significant and influential book by a female intellectual in the period from the civil war to the French Revolution (Staves 2006, 321), and I have suggested elsewhere that it stands as the most sustained and comprehensive works of republican theory that we have (Coffee 2017). Macaulay wrote several other works, including a theological and metaphysical *Treatise on the Immutability of Moral Truth* (1783). She also engaged prominently in public and political debates. She was a noteworthy critic of David Hume (particularly over his understanding of normative concepts as being grounded in convention rather than rational truths) and Edmund Burke (for similar albeit differently grounded reasons), amongst others, and had gained an appreciative following amongst revolutionary and radical audiences in America and France – so much so that Marie-Jeanne Phlipon Roland expressed it as her ambition to become the French Macaulay (Bergès 2016).

Despite her celebrity and her achievements, after her death Macaulay fell into immediate and almost complete obscurity. There were very few mentions of her work until late into the twentieth century (see Brundage 2014 for a brief round-up of references to her in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). There are several possible reasons for this. One

reason might be that the public had lost its appetite for republican ideas and turned against her brand of radical politics in the aftermath of the French Revolution and through into the nineteenth century. Another reason concerns readers' attitudes to the scandal surrounding her second marriage to a man twenty-six years her junior, the twenty-one year old William Graham. A third reason may be related to a wider general problem concerning the recognition of historic women intellectuals. (This is a complex problem reflecting structural and cultural biases that go beyond merely sexist attitudes. See Ree 2002, Hagengruber (2015) and the introduction to Bergès and Coffee 2016). Each of these three problems would apply as much to Wollstonecraft as to Macaulay, of course. That Wollstonecraft's reputation, which has also had peaks and troughs over the last two centuries, was more easily recovered may have something to do with the fact that her work was more easily and obviously connected to feminist issues. While we shall see that Macaulay made a significant contribution to this subject, this was not widely recognised until fairly recently (e.g. Gardner 1998, Boos 1976).

These attitudes are now changing. There is now a concerted and sustained interest amongst many scholars in recovering and restoring the lost and marginalised voices of historical women with Macaulay prominent amongst them. Sadly for reasons of space I can only mention a few writers who are relevant to this chapter. Bridget Hill's biography remains one of the important reference points (1992) while Wendy Gunther-Canada (2018) and Karen Green (2012, 2014) have written widely about Macaulay. This much said, in spite of the revival of interest, Macaulay remains comparatively little known outside of specialist history and literature academic circles. There are still, for example, no standard or widely available scholarly editions of her works, even of the *History*, and neither has she found an audience in the market for popular classics, despite the accessibility, style and insight of her *Letters*. The intellectual relationship between Macaulay and Wollstonecraft has been re-examined in

recent years especially in light of Hill's response to the discovery in the early 1990s of the correspondence quoted at the start of the chapter (1995). Elizabeth Frazer looks at Macaulay's and Wollstonecraft's respective ideas on education (2011), a theme also covered by Gunther-Canada through the concept of virtue (2003), while Martina Reuter discusses their respective concepts of the will (2007).

I do not wish to cover the same ground in this short chapter as these excellent studies. Instead, I shall approach this task through a particular lens, that of their shared commitment to what we would refer to today as civic or neo-Roman republicanism. I use this term in a philosophical sense rather than as an indication of a set of cultural or political ideals (important though those may be). Republicanism in this sense represents a comprehensive social and moral outlook that places all individuals within a community under a rational law that constrains all forms of social, economic and legal power such that they must always conform to an agreed standard that represents common good. The **republican is** built around the central concept of freedom, which is understood as independence and entails a commitment to both equality and virtue. This concept plays a foundational role in both Macaulay's and Wollstonecraft's work, and provides the rationale for many of their arguments on a range of issues such as education, citizenship, marriage, public deliberation, gender equality, and social reform.

I shall start with a brief survey of the ideal of independence. In the following section, I discuss the importance of equality before moving onto virtue, and in particular its relation to the use of reason and immutable moral truth, a move which allows Macaulay to develop a powerful critique of Rousseau's arguments for separate virtues for each sex. In the following section, I **look at** the culmination of Macaulay's arguments about virtue and reason in her

analysis of its devastating effects on women. I do this by **looking at** a famous passage from Macaulay quoted by Wollstonecraft that there is “but one fault which a woman of honour may not commit with impunity”. Finally, I discuss how Wollstonecraft goes on to build on Macaulay’s influence in her own account. Sadly, I must inevitably leave out certain important subjects such as education, which looms large in both of their work, and the significant but often neglected subject of the role of religion in both Macaulay’s and Wollstonecraft’s thought (Hutton 2007, 2017)

FREEDOM AS INDEPENDENCE

In the opening paragraph of her *History of England*, Macaulay establishes the importance that the ideal of freedom has for her, aligning herself with the classical (meaning Roman and republican) histories that portray an exalted ideal of liberty that “the natural love of freedom which lies latent in the breast of every rational being until, that is, it is nipped by the frost of prejudice or blasted by the influence of vice” (1763, vii). There is a lot packed into this formulation. First, freedom is immediately tied to reason and virtue, a link that Macaulay builds on shortly afterwards when she stipulates that that “public liberty” is the “standard by which [she has] endeavoured to measure the virtue of the characters” that she will discuss (ix). Secondly, freedom is not only an individual ideal but also a collective and communal one. Wollstonecraft followed the same basic structure, also setting out her intent early in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, arguing in the opening paragraph of the preface that “independence”, which both writers use synonymously with liberty, is “the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue” (2014, 21).

Articulated this way, freedom is a complex term. It should not be thought of as an ideal of an individual's capacity to do what he or she wants unimpeded, which would be licence rather than freedom. Instead freedom is a moralised conception that entails acting in accordance with the requirements of reason and the moral law (rather than from prejudice and vice). Neither is freedom essentially an individual concept. While individuals are said to be free or not, their liberty is only ever understood socially within relationships and as part of a body politic that must have certain characteristics if it is to secure and enable the freedom of its members. This point is worth emphasising since the historic term 'independence' is often a stumbling block for modern day readers who associate it with an idea of machismo and hardy self-reliance. However, while these associations are a regrettable feature of historic republican attitudes they play no role in the Macaulay's and Wollstonecraft's formal analysis of the principle of freedom as independence, which is an ideal that necessarily embodies our interdependence and the mutuality of the social bonds in which we are inevitably situated (Coffee 2014).

The ideal of freedom as independence that Macaulay and Wollstonecraft use forms part of the neo-Roman republican tradition. Both Macaulay and Wollstonecraft were deeply embedded in radical and dissenting circles for which republican ideas were very prominent, so their use of these concepts is not at all surprising. Neo-Roman republicanism is most closely associated in many people's understanding with the ideas outlined by Quentin Skinner (1998, 2010) and in the contemporary context by Philip Pettit (1997, 2012). It is, I think, right to place Macaulay and Wollstonecraft in this overall framework (Halldenius 2015, Coffee 2012, 2017). But we should do so cautiously. Republicanism is a broad church with a diverse spectrum of ideas included within its parameters. Certainly we should not fully equate the historic position with the contemporary idea of freedom as non-domination, with its emphasis

on a non-moralised, negative liberty concerning the protection of individual option sets. Macaulay and Wollstonecraft both freely mix aspects of positive and negative liberty within a complex ideal that embodies numerous other values including citizenship, political inclusion, arbitrary power, the common good, public reason, and the rule of law. In this chapter I concentrate on three components of independence, freedom as I have outlined it, equality, and virtue. The relationship that these three values have to each other is as important as each individual one. Each part is necessary if a person is to be independent and the absence of any one part is said to have a corrupting effect on each of the other two so that the delicate balance necessary for collective freedom quickly unravels.

A key feature of the republican ideal is that freedom was contrasted with slavery. Freedom, like slavery was a status. It indicated, first, a person's standing within a political community. A freeman was a citizen, represented under law, and recognised as being capable of making his own decisions subject to the limitations of that law. This is what independence meant. Slaves, by contrast, remained on the outside of the republic, subject to it but without voice or representation. They were wholly dependent on their masters in particular and the community more generally. Freedom also indicated a person's moral standing, indicating one who was able, and willing, to take responsible, or virtuous, decisions, putting aside emotion and personal interests to do what is right under the moral law. These capacities were considered to be incompatible with slavery. This was in part because slaves were not permitted to stand for what they believe in but had simply to be obedient. And in part it was because slaves were considered incapable of possessing the requisite rational and moral character. This second argument came in two forms. First, the capacity for rational and moral behaviour was said to be learned and slaves did not have the opportunity to do this. Secondly, slaves were often considered to be innately incapable of independent behaviour and so required the paternalistic

and protective guidance that the master was able to provide. As we shall see, both of these last two arguments are picked up by Macaulay and Wollstonecraft in relation to women's independence, but it is Wollstonecraft who develops them much further.

EQUALITY

The ideal of equality entailed by republican freedom is of status rather than of income or property. Citizens are equal before the law. No one is to be above the law (such as the monarch or nobles) and no one is to fall below its protection. The law must reflect the interests of all the citizens, each of whom should have a voice in making those interests known. Macaulay makes clear that she has equality of status in mind when she refers to a conversation with Samuel Johnson in which she reiterated that she was not “arguing against that inequality of property which must more or less take place in all societies”, going on to explain that it is one thing for a servant to wait on her because he needs the money, and quite another to be forced to serve another because of a difference in political rank or privilege (1790, 167-8). Nevertheless, the standard of equality required by the logic of independence is very high and clearly prohibits large-scale inequalities in wealth, property or income. In order to be independent, a person must be protected from any form of arbitrary controlling power. The very rich are seen as a considerable threat to collective freedom since they have it in their power to keep us all dependent. While Macaulay is aware of this, Wollstonecraft is far more animated in her warnings of the dangers of relative and absolute poverty.

Most straightforwardly, Wollstonecraft is concerned with the ability of the rich to bypass the law by exploiting the poor. “You must have seen” she tells Burke, “the clogged wheels of corruption continually oiled by the sweat of the laborious poor, squeezed out of them by

unceasing taxation. You must have discovered that the majority in the House of Commons was often purchased by the crown, and that the people were oppressed by the influence of their own money” (1995, 20). Here Wollstonecraft has a deeper concern, namely that inequality and extreme wealth are corrupting of virtue. “Security of property!” she declares, “to this selfish principle every nobler one is sacrificed” adding that it is, of course, “only the property of the rich that is secure” (13). “Virtue”, she concludes, “is out of the question when you worship only a shadow, and worship it to secure your property” (21). This principle a significant strand of Wollstonecraft’s account of the French Revolution (“inequality of conditions, which makes wealth more desirable than either talents or virtue, has... weakened all the organs of the body-politic”, 1795, 71). Although Wollstonecraft’s analysis here is tied up with her attitudes towards property itself (see Halldenius 2015), inequality in holdings plays a fundamental role in driving out virtue.

Insecurity in income and property is also a significant factor in keeping women in a condition of dependence on men. In the novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft notes that a woman’s husband “can rob her with impunity”, assuming ownership of any wages she might earn or any inheritance she might have (2005, 81). However, the financial loss was only part of Wollstonecraft’s concern here. The only means of protection available for a woman was that of a man. To lose his protection was to lose not only one’s financial security (which was bad enough. “How writers, professing to be friends to freedom, and the improvement of morals, can assert that poverty is no evil, I cannot imagine”, the character Jemima laments, 39) but also to lose the only reliable basis of one’s social standing for there was very little prospect for a woman to remain respectable outside of marriage. Jemima tells us that “honesty, and a regard for her reputation, had been the only principles inculcated by her mother; and they had been so forcibly impressed, that she feared shame, more than the

poverty to which it would lead” (28). I shall return to this point below. I only remark here that Wollstonecraft’s analysis of equality entails social standing as well as legal protections and financial security. Without a robust social equality, women the value of the other aspects is greatly diminished.

VIRTUE

Virtue is integral to Macaulay's and Wollstonecraft's concept of freedom. To live freely a person must live virtuously. Virtue in this sense should not be confused with either the ‘manly’ and patriotic virtues that we find in the historical republican texts that look back to classical Rome, such as Machiavelli, Harrington, or Trenchard and Gordon (although Macaulay was certainly familiar with these writers) nor with sentimental and prudish ‘feminine’ virtues that we find in eighteenth-century conduct books (“I mean to use a word that comprehends more than chastity the sexual virtue” Wollstonecraft tells us, 2014, 129). Instead, to behave with virtue is to govern oneself by reason, ensuring that one lives under the moral law, regulating one’s conduct in accordance with principled rather than selfish or unreflective considerations. Virtue, then, has both a cognitive and behavioural component, which can be seen from the way that when she opposes freedom with virtue above, she separates virtue into both prejudice and vice. Virtue is also both an individual and a collective concept.

The reason why virtue is a necessary constituent of freedom has a religious grounding. In the case of Macaulay, at least, Green understands this as part of what she describes as Christian Eudaimonism, an idea that is said to combine an Aristotelian idea of the pursuit of the highest good, where this good serves as the basis of human flourishing, with a Christian notion of

what the highest good is, namely to follow God's moral commands (2017, 13 [wait for published page](#)). There are two parts to this ideal, a conception of what the moral law consists of and a corresponding claim about moral motivation. For Macaulay, the answer to the first part is fairly clear. She is committed to the belief, widespread in her time, in a beneficent God who has given human beings the rational capacity to discern and know the immutable principles that form the basis of the moral law. While we are constructed in such a way that following these principles will bring us ultimate happiness, it is less clear that this forms the motivation for our behaviour rather than the outcome. Although the object of our behaviour and the pleasurable consequences are intricately tied together and not easily separated (as William Prior points out, even Christ tells us that "whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (2001, 338, citing Mark 8:35), a good case can be made for saying that Macaulay saw the duty to be virtuous as primary:

there is a principle of rational agency, which corresponds with the precise admeasurement of every action, with a rule of right; although the conduct it directs, militates against natural inclination, against the interest of natural affection, and where every pleasurable sensation is sacrificed to the conviction of judgement, and to the rigid dictates of a well informed understanding. Pure religion and pure morality draw their perfection from this source alone; and as the conformity of action to the duties enjoined by this principle, form the perfection of every rational agent, such a conformity must, in the abstract sense of the word, be the only rule of action which corresponds with the true interest of every such agent. Hence we gain an idea of that rational interest which must every attend on rational nature (1783, 129-30).

As Green notes, there is a Kantian quality to Macaulay's understanding of rational agency as moral agency here (something we also find in Wollstonecraft), and while the history of Christian and ethical thought has been infused with eudaimonistic thinking, we can perhaps

trace its decline to the Kantian period (Prior, 340). One way to retain the idea of eudaimonia might be to include the afterlife as part of its meaning, something which is central to Macaulay's thinking (1783, 290).

We can also see a specifically republican rationale for including virtue as part of the broader concept of freedom. In republican terms, freedom is to live under a non-arbitrary power. Non-arbitrary here means not only principled, rather than capricious, but also necessarily to act in our best interests. Within the state, this is said to be quality required of the law, but the same also applies to individual decision-making. If we rely on inclination, passion or received wisdom, then we cannot guarantee that these are in our interests. There is no sound principle underpinning these guides to behaviour. "To submit to reason," however, Wollstonecraft argues, echoing Macaulay, "is to submit to the nature of things, and to that God, who formed them so, to promote our real interest" adding that "it is the right use of reason alone, which makes us independent of ~~everything—excepting~~ the unclouded ~~reason—~~ "whose service is perfect freedom" (2014, 277, 148). The structure of individual submission to a rational and non-arbitrary guiding principle then mirrors that of the citizen to the law which if it is to be non-arbitrary must also be rational.

The rationality of the law is part of what ensures that it can serve as the basis for the common good of the people. "The conduct of a good and benevolent man", Macaulay argues, "so entirely squares with the interest of his fellow-creatures, even those whose natures are the most vicious, that he will find from the selfish passions of men a support and comfort, in those afflictions which he incurs from evils, which are inseparable to human existence" (1783, 286). Again there is a cognitive and behavioural aspect to collective virtue. Citizens

must be governed by a law that reflects their shared interests, and they must regulate their conduct accordingly.

Wollstonecraft follows Macaulay in the basic structure and the philosophical grounding of virtue. There are, however, several points at which she distinguishes her own view in ways that while not incompatible with the formal account of virtue do give a significantly different emphasis. The first concerns Wollstonecraft's insights into the role that the imagination plays in augmenting and grounding our rational capabilities (Green 1997 and especially Reuter 2016). Where Macaulay tends to oppose reason with the passions and appetites, as being locked in a contest between wisdom and folly (1783, 288), Wollstonecraft understands it as integral to the process of reasoning that we harness our passions through the power of imagination which gives life and content to what would otherwise be abstract rational and moral thinking. "In what respect", she asks, "are we superior to the brute creation, if intellect is not allowed to be the guide of passion?" arguing that without "feelings of the heart... reason would probably lie helpless in inactivity" (1995, 31). Wollstonecraft makes this point specifically in the context of Macaulay's position, stipulating in her review of the *Letters* that, "we should not so widely deviate from nature, as not to allow the imagination to forage a little for the judgment... It may be necessary for the passions to be felt before their operations can be understood" (1790, 245). We must, therefore, proactively cultivate our imaginative capacities, through both reflection and the right sort of stimulation, such as by reading novels (2014, 85; 1790, 245). The emphasis on the role of the imagination gives reasoning a real-world grounding which leads to a second difference between Macaulay and Wollstonecraft which is that Wollstonecraft is much less sanguine about the possibility of social reform coming about by appeal to rational considerations alone, stressing much more the importance

of collaborative reconstruction of our social and cultural institutions and practices occurring prior to any solution. I shall say more on this point in below the final two sections.

An important implication of the immutable character of virtue is that there can be, as Macaulay argues, “but one rule of right for the conduct of all rational beings; consequently that true virtue in one sex must be equally so in the other [such that] what is vice in one sex, cannot have a different property when found in the other” (1790, 125-6). Having established that “morals must be taught on immutable principles” (Letter XXI), in the next letter she develops the idea that there can be “no characteristic difference in sex”, focusing especially on Rousseau’s arguments in *Emile* concerning the naturally distinct yet complementary virtues that he sees attaching to men and women. The separate virtues, Rousseau claims, allow each sex to fulfil a role to which it is peculiarly suited while also supporting the deficiencies in the other and producing a harmonious whole. Macaulay dismisses this as a made up “moral person of the union of the two sexes, which, for contradiction and absurdity, outdoes every metaphysical riddle” (128), a thought which Wollstonecraft echoes in suggesting that it makes of a woman “a fanciful kind of half being” or chimera (2014, 65). Macaulay’s arguments in this chapter had a lasting impact on Wollstonecraft who suggested in her review of the *Letters* that her “observations in this subject might have been carried much further” had Macaulay not been focused on the subject of education (1790, 246). Wollstonecraft was to do just that in the second *Vindication*, where she adopts many of Macaulay’s arguments, applying them to other authors of the time, and incorporating them into her wider social criticism. In grounding woman’s virtue on mutable prejudices, rather than immutable truth, she concludes, you prevent her from achieving independence of mind, instead allowing her to be enslaved by her feelings and the opinions of others (2014, 77, 89) adding that “it would be an endless task to trace the variety of meannesses, cares, and

sorrows, into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion, that they were created rather to feel than reason” (2014, 89).

REPUTATION

In the final chapters of Book I of *the Letters on Education*, Macaulay begins an argument that lays the foundations for an analysis of gender relations and the domination of women that was to influence Wollstonecraft so deeply. Macaulay’s diagnosis is itself significant and worthy of far greater attention than it has received from feminists. Nevertheless, taken together, Macaulay’s and Wollstonecraft’s analyses are each made stronger by the other. Where Macaulay sets up the problem in far richer and more detailed philosophical terms, in my view Wollstonecraft has the more compelling account of its far-reaching social implications and of how this might be addressed (Coffee 2017). Macaulay’s arguments begin with the analysis of virtue given above that virtue must be taught on immutable positions (letter XXI) and so there can be no characteristic difference in sex (XXII). She completes her argument in two letters dedicated to women’s coquetry (XXIII) and the behaviour of male rakes (XXIV). These latter two are the focus of this section, particularly in light of Macaulay’s observation that “there is but one fault which a woman of honour may not commit with impunity; let her only take care that she is not caught in a love intrigue, and she may lie, she may deceive, she may defame, she may ruin her own family with gaming, and the peace of twenty others with her coquetry, and yet, preserve both her reputation and her peace” (1790, 132; Wollstonecraft 2014, 166).

Macaulay’s remark comes at the beginning of a chapter on “Coquetry” in which she gives an analysis and critique of women’s romantic behaviour. Immediately before the passage cited,

Macaulay describes women's legal situation, observing there to be "a total and absolute exclusion of every political right to the sex in general, [while] married women... have hardly a civil right to save them from the grossest injuries". An example of what Macaulay means, something Wollstonecraft was to represent powerfully in *Maria*, was how married women had no legal representation of their own but were subsumed under the person of their husbands who assumed ownership and control of all property and income that a she might bring to the relationship. What Macaulay describes is clearly a form of slavery. Women had no legal standing – no country even (Wollstonecraft 2005, 81) but were subject to the arbitrary power of their husbands or fathers. Her invocation of slavery is term highly significant. Recall earlier that republicans construct their conceptual framework around a fundamental distinction between the freeman and slave. Freeman are independent and capable of virtue. They merit the status of citizen because they can discharge its duties. Slaves are naturally dependent and incapable of fulfilling the rational virtues of citizenship (hence Macaulay's initial dismantling of Rousseau's arguments).

The description of women as slaves was not unique to Macaulay and Wollstonecraft but had a long heritage amongst female emancipationists. And it was controversial. Indeed, while Wollstonecraft makes free use of the idea – that women are slaves in a literal sense is a central theme of both the second *Vindication* and *Maria* – Macaulay typically stops short of describing contemporary European women as slaves, reserving this label for women of "the barbaric ages" and Ottoman women (129, 131). However, Macaulay's purpose here is subtle. She does not engage directly with the political concept of bondage and does not use this word explicitly. Instead she analyses the reality of women's daily lives in the context of gendered relationships and social expectations. In so doing, what she describes about women's lives conforms exactly to the republican of structure slavery (for a detailed discussion of her

analysis see Coffee 2017). The implications are far-reaching showing not only how women have been made slaves but how deeply this becomes entrenched, how hard it is to reverse and why, as Wollstonecraft puts it “its effects seem to be transmitted to posterity” (2014, 110).

In casting women as slaves, Macaulay makes two points in particular. These derive from the idea that slaves are non-persons. Their non-personhood is why they can be enslaved. They do not have to be consulted or listened to and they are not considered to have a valid point of view. Over time, a culture emerges that enshrines these attitudes towards slaves in social attitudes and understandings. Macaulay acknowledges that in her time women were not formally **regarded as being not fully human** (in the way that, for example, African slaves often were). However, she argues that in the distant reaches of time, women were regarded as men’s “mere property” and even though that attitude had faded away, its implications remained embedded in the social practices, traditions and cultural institutions that it bequeathed (1790, 138). This this was what both made Rousseau’s arguments possible and was in turn reinforced by what he said. Macaulay’s first point is that a woman’s character was irrelevant to how she was viewed. Because her basic capacity for reason, and so virtue, had been denied, then it did not matter what her actual talents, learning and achievements might be. These did not count because she did not really count. Instead, she was simply judged according to the appropriate standard for someone of her kind, namely her sexual purity. Macaulay goes further. It is not her actual chasteness that matters but only her appearance of being chaste. That is why women could get away with any manner of vices so long as their reputation remained intact. In this way, women were reduced to a single dimension which was itself a charade.

Macaulay's second point is concerns the dangers associated with a life based on reputation alone. Her account, again, conforms to the classical analysis of slavery. From a master's perspective, all that matters is whether a slave can be trusted. Once trust is lost, the slave is useless. There is no possibility of rehabilitation notwithstanding their overall qualities, talents or learning. All that matters for a slave is that they conform to an expected type. Classically that stereotype was the docile, loyal ignorant slave (the Uncle Tom, for example). In the case of women, the stereotype became the dutiful, modest, contented wife. Maintaining the illusion of this stereotype is an onerous task. A woman of honour has a very limited range of activities that she can undertake without jeopardising that reputation. She must not do anything unseemly. She must watch her every move. Everything she does must be directed towards preserving that reputation. If she loses that, Macaulay tells us, she loses everything. This meant that women had constantly to watch themselves, making sure not to draw disapproval or suspicion from even innocent behaviour. "The snares" she writes, "that are continually laid for women, by persons who run no risk in compassing their seduction, exposes them to continual danger; whilst the implacability of their own sex, who fear to give up any advantage which a superior prudence, or even its appearances, give them, renders one false step an irretrievable misfortune" (138).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Underpinning Macaulay's argument above are two important themes. First, our present ideas about the social world are the product of a long history of changing circumstances that have left their imprint that influence us in ways that most people are unaware of. Secondly, false ideas easily become entrenched where they have the support of social pressure and popular opinion (138). These two factors present a substantial obstacle to the prospect of remedying injustice and securing a free state with a virtuous population of free men and women. And the

problem is pervasive. Relationships of domination are seen as corrupting both parties equally and so the destiny of the sexes is inextricably bound up together. While women may suffer more grievously than men, nevertheless “till both are reformed”, Macaulay argues, “there is no expecting excellence in the other” (135). This is a problem that affects us all, men and women at every level and across society. “Every error thrown out in conversation”, she argues, “every sentiment which does not correspond with the true principles of virtue, is received by the mind, and like a drop of venomous poison will corrupt the mass with which it mingles” (103).

Macaulay has great faith in the power of reason to overcome these obstacles. If we can find the teachers who understand the rational, immutable principles upon which virtue is founded, and who can design and implement a suitable curriculum, setting an appropriate example to their pupils as they do so, then she is confident that social attitudes can be changed. She also believes that there is a lot that government can do by setting the right policy (banning brutal practices such as public executions and animal hunting) and by encouraging the kinds of arts and cultural pursuits that encourage virtue rather than vice (such as cookery rather than fashion). According to Macaulay, the solution lies in education. Both men and women must be educated in the rational, immutable principles upon which virtue is founded. The obvious problem with this is that in a society that has already been corrupted teachers must be found who can understand and agree on what these rational principles are and who can set the right example to their pupils.

The direction of Macaulay’s approach here is very much top-down. If the country’s leaders, administrators and teachers can set the right policies and example then they can guide the people into acquiring the right rational understanding and virtuous habits. Although

Wollstonecraft is committed to the same basic conception of reason, virtue and immutable principles as Macaulay, she is less sanguine about her model for reform. “Much cannot be expected from education”, Wollstonecraft argues, “till society be differently constituted”, (2014, 47). Her rationale is not that she thinks that society is in a more corrupted state than Macaulay. The two are perhaps equally dismayed at that. Rather the difference between them comes in the degree of confidence they have in the human capacity to cut through the effects of a distorted social environment, shaking off their partialities and prejudices to perceive rational principles. Wollstonecraft argues that people will have a reduced capacity even to use their rational faculties. In her words, their reason becomes “clouded”. “Men in general, she says come to, “employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they have imbibed, they cannot trace how, rather than to root them out” (38). The effect is to undermine the possibility of rational debate on the subject of women’s independence. “Truth” she goes on, “is lost in a mist of words, virtue in forms and knowledge rendered a sounding nothing, by the specious prejudices that assume its name”, adding that “deeply rooted [and widely spread] prejudices have clouded reason, and ... spurious qualities [have] come to assume the name of virtues”.

Wollstonecraft’s response is to work from the bottom-up. There is no prospect of rational education, enquiry and discourse reforming people because the very conceptual resources that they use to do that have already been distorted. These must be remade (Coffee 2012, 2014). This is not a process that can be dictated. Instead it must result from the interaction and collaboration of all parts of the population, men and women learning from and influencing each other. In the end, what is required is a wholesale conceptual revolution that reimagines the entire set of social, economic and political relations between the sexes, what she calls a revolution in female manners (2014, 71, 224). Wollstonecraft acknowledges that this will be a painfully slow process. It will take a long time for people to shed their prejudices and to

learn to think and deliberate virtuously. We can only go at the speed that the people can bear. But she remains confident through what she sees as the progress of reason and the inertia of reason, “governments will be meliorated, and the happiness of man placed on the solid basis” (1794, 69, 467; 2009, 56). Although Wollstonecraft herself gives us very little idea about how the process of reform will work, her analysis of the effect of social structures and norms on people’s ability to reflect and reason about their condition impartially, which builds firmly on the groundwork developed by Macaulay, remains penetrating and illuminating today.

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