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Guest Editor's Introduction

## **Women and Republicanism in the Eighteenth Century:**

### **Completing the Historical Record**

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Republican political theory has a rather poor track record in terms of its historical treatment of women and femininity. Classical republicans, such as Livy and Cicero, excluded women from full citizenship by characterising the ideal citizen as male. In his *Discourses* on Livy (1531), Machiavelli continued the tradition by highlighting the masculine qualities that a citizen must uphold if a republic is to retain its freedom and advance toward civic greatness. His ideal citizen was expected to cultivate *virtù*, the defining characteristic of a virile man who has purged himself of the so-called 'effeminate' qualities of passivity, dependence, and lack of determination [Pitkin 1999: 25]. ~~The man of virtù was bold, brave, active, decisive, and self-reliant.~~ This historical emphasis on manly heroism has made some feminists reluctant to embrace the ideals and principles of republican theory. While some have endorsed the republican concept of freedom as non-domination [see Broad 2014, 2015], others have rejected those aspects of republicanism that denigrate dependence, the domestic sphere, and private interests (traditionally associated with women) by contrast with independence, the political sphere, and public spiritedness (traditionally associated with

men); they have been critical of both the literal and figurative exclusion of women from civic virtue and active political participation [Phillips 2000: 284–5; Pateman 2007: 3–4]. Anne Phillips observes that ‘All this adds up to a perception of republicanism as an uneasy ally. When the tradition was born out of such resolutely masculine origins, this is hardly a surprising finding’ [2000: 293].

This issue of *Australasian Philosophical Review* addresses the uneasy alliance between women, feminism, and republicanism, from new and varied historical perspectives. Sandrine Bergès’s lead article expertly exorcises much of the past uneasiness by drawing attention to the republican commitments of three women writers of the French Revolution: Olympe de Gouges, Marie-Jeanne Phlipon (Manon) Roland, and Sophie de Grouchy. Far from being hostile to women, Bergès points out, these eighteenth-century figures actively endorsed republican ideas for the sake of advancing women’s citizenship. Building on the work of recent theorists [Green 2012; Halldenius 2015; Coffee 2017, 2018], Bergès further demonstrates that republicanism was not an exclusively male enterprise after all—a political theory penned solely by men, for the sake of securing men’s interests. Rather, if we take a more gender-inclusive historical approach, republicanism might be seen as amenable to women and their specific concerns.

Bergès identifies three principles traditionally associated with neo-republicanism in the works of Gouges, Roland, and Grouchy. The first is a conception of liberty as freedom from domination or dependence; the second, the idea that the good of the republic is closely connected to the virtue of its citizens; and the third, an ideal of political participation in which every citizen actively contributes to the public good. In their engagement with the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, these women adapt these republican ideas to merge the usual

distinctions between the political and domestic spheres, and to show how women, the family, and the home can contribute to the flourishing of a nation. More than this, they extend republican principles to call for equality across the boundaries of class, gender, and race; they develop an expanded and enriched republicanism.

In the commentaries on Bergès's article, there are hints that an alliance between women and republicanism might still be fraught with difficulties. Some responses suggest that it might not be possible to fit women into the republican canon, without altering or amending its core themes in some way. Like Bergès, the respondents also focus on the writings of eighteenth-century women—not only Gouges, Roland, and Grouchy, but also Catharine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft, Germaine de Staël, and members of the French Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, such as Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon—figures who also adapted various republican ideas to acknowledge women's lived experiences and preoccupations. On the one hand, there are those who express broad agreement with Bergès's affirmation of the compatibility of republicanism and women's concerns, but seek to spell out the novel and inventive ways in which women adapted republican ideas in the eighteenth century; these commentators include Patrick Ball, Martina Reuter, Spyridon Tegos, and Martin Fog Lantz Arndal. On the other, there are those who challenge the claim that these women's insights can be easily reconciled with republicanism, due to the nature of neo-republican theory and historical republicanism more generally; these include Karen Green and Lena Halldenius.

In her lead article, Bergès's historical approach is distinctive for looking to a variety of genres beyond the usual political treatise—to letters, speeches, petitions, pamphlets, and newspaper articles. Ball takes this methodology to a new level, by examining the interplay between texts (namely speeches and slogans) and political actions in the Society of

Revolutionary Republican Women in late eighteenth-century France. By rioting on the streets, these militant working-class women used markedly different means to express the republican values of non-domination, civic virtue, and public participation. In response to their lack of freedom and citizenship, they asserted their right to insurrection and they demonstrated their public spiritedness and commitment to civic virtue through direct political action. Olympe de Gouges is another enlightenment figure who reconceived traditional republican values through her words and deeds. As Reuter demonstrates, in her calls for women's rights, Gouges did not endorse the manly ideal of republican citizenship but rather re-envisaged the citizen in ways that could accommodate women's differences to men. Gouges questioned the gender-neutrality of the republican ideals of citizenship, civic virtue, and the nation, as well as the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Further divergences from republican norms can be found in the writings of Sophie de Grouchy. Tegos highlights Grouchy's refinements on the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination and independence. To attain true independence, in Grouchy's view, the republic must dispense with the old regime's value for deference to authority, in favour of a reciprocal respect and rightly regulated sympathy toward others. A reformation in manners is necessary, she suggests, to ensure that the new republic does not inflict the same moral damage on citizens as the previous regime. Arndal's commentary also shows how the inclusion of women in political history can expand our ideas about what counts as republican. In his analysis of Wollstonecraft and Staël, he highlights the ways in which their optimism concerning republicanism is informed by their Christian views. They not only endorse the values of non-domination, civic virtue, and active political participation, but they see these as closely related to their faith in God's providence and their religious beliefs concerning human progress.

On the whole, these commentaries demonstrate that eighteenth-century women pose certain challenges to common assumptions about historical republicanism. In her own commentary, Green turns this idea around, to assert that Gouges, Roland, and Grouchy need not be viewed as republican at all. First, she questions the presupposition that men's political models represent the norms that these women's ideas must emulate in order to count as republican. If we force their ideas to conform to models developed by men—such as those of Philip Pettit, Green suggests—then this can lead to distortions and misrepresentations of their views. But if we read them on their own terms, then they might be understood as advocating a notion of positive liberty instead, and a moral approach informed by Christian eudaimonism, not republicanism. Along similar lines, Halldenus reminds us that historical republicanism is a hyper-masculine theory, traditionally built on the exclusion of women from full citizenship; the ideal republican citizen is the man of civic virtue, the man of determination, bravery, and public spiritedness. For this reason, Halldenus points out, when Grouchy fails to defend gender and class equality, she is more recognisably republican than Wollstonecraft, a philosopher who subverts the tradition by calling for women's rights.

And so, the spectre of republican sexism rears its head yet again. Is there any way forward, we might ask, to cement an alliance between women, feminism, and republicanism? In response to commentators, Bergès makes a promising suggestion: to be mindful of the *context* from which we draw our republican models. We might begin with present-day neo-republican models; or we might take our standard from early modern republican texts written solely by Englishmen; or we might take an inclusive historical approach and acknowledge women's past contributions to the tradition, drawn from a variety of different sources, including Rousseau, Livy, and Plutarch. If we take the first two approaches, it will be a

foregone conclusion that women's contributions are subversions or departures from the norm—they might not even count as republican, as Green suggests. But if we take the last approach, then this creates a space for historical women's writings to bring something unique and distinctive to republican theory, something that might be amenable to feminist principles and to current political-theoretical concerns.

In his editorial coda, Alan Coffee expands on this suggestion, to argue that while some eighteenth-century women may have subverted historical features of republicanism—such as its sexism and hyper-masculinity—they did not necessarily subvert or overthrow core republican principles, such as its normative commitment to equality and independence. ~~In my opinion,~~ Coffee's final thoughts offer another promising ~~plausible~~ way forward. We must bear in mind that past associations between republicanism and patriarchal prejudices have been historic and contingent associations, not necessary and essential features of republican theory. There might, therefore, be many different reiterations and restatements of republicanism, compatible with any number of moral, political, and religious viewpoints; women's ideas need not fit a single historic paradigm in order to belong to the tradition. With this in mind, we might affirm, as Coffee does, that women writers constituted a unique alternative school of thought within eighteenth-century republicanism.

Whatever one's final opinion about the compatibility of republicanism and women's concerns, it cannot be denied that any history that ignores women's contributions to eighteenth-century republican thought is a partial and impoverished history. By advancing research on this topic, this journal issue takes a significant step toward the correcting of past omissions and removing of past prejudices.

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