



Hume and the Enlightenment

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Will the real Enlightenment historian please stand up! David Hume versus Catharine Macaulay.

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One year after the publication of the last volume of David Hume's *History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688*, in 1762, Catharine Macaulay published the first volume of her radical rebuttal of Hume's history, her *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Elevation of the House of Hanover*. Macaulay not only disagreed with Hume's interpretation of English history, she also profoundly disagreed with his ethical theory, a disagreement which is most fully spelt out in her *Treatise on the Immutability of Moral Truth* (1783). Although she spelt out her ethical ideas only in the year when the last volume of her history appeared, Macaulay's interpretation of English history is intimately bound up with her understanding of the immutability of moral truth, which grounds the possibility of moral progress and expanded moral understanding.

In this paper I compare both the historical accounts of Macaulay and Hume, as well as their understanding of the nature of ethical truth in order to answer the question, 'what counts as enlightenment?' Is Hume really a philosopher of the Enlightenment? Or should we reserve this title for those radicals, like Macaulay, who propose that reason can discover the moral truth, and who therefore endorse the possibility of a progressive history?