A Gigantic Manliness: Thomas Paine's Republicanism in the 1790s

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I

Thomas Paine's writings, like those of Adam Smith, have largely been associated with some of the major traditions of modern political thought: in Paine's case, liberalism, capitalism, and, most recently, social-democracy.[2] The republican turn in intellectual history has done much to liberate Paine's ideas from association with causes he would not have recognised. A number of studies have added to our knowledge by placing Paine's work in the context of various neo-Harringtonian, Commonwealth, Old Whig and natural law traditions which have been found in late eighteenth-century political discourse.[3] One problem with this literature is that the term 'republican', so often one of abuse in the eighteenth century, is too pervasive. In particular, historians have not specified which states writers were talking about when using such terms, which makes a great deal of difference when describing a writer's political position. For example, it was possible to believe republics to be theoretically superior to monarchies while supporting the idea of Britain as a mixed monarchy which had little in common with historical republics. This was the view which Catherine Macaulay defended throughout her life, and which David Hume articulated in 'The Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth'. Equally, Richard Price and Joseph Priestley believed in the ideal of a

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2 John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (London, 1995). My thanks for criticisms of earlier versions of the paper to Istvan Hont, Kieran O'Halloran, Michael Sonenscher, Donald Winch and Brian Young. The research was supported by a grant from the Nuffield Foundation. Translations from the French are my own, unless otherwise stated.

3 A. Owen Aldridge, *Thomas Paine's American Ideology* (Delaware, 1984), chs., 10-11; D. A. Williams, *Paine and Cobbett: The Transatlantic Connection* (Kingston, 1988), pp. 40-70; G. Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought* (London, 1989), esp. ch. 4, and 'Republicanism and Commerce in Britain, 1796-1805, *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994), 249-90; J. Fruchtman, *Thomas Paine and the Religion of Nature* (Baltimore, 1993) and *Thomas Paine: Apostle of Freedom* (New York, 1994), ch. 12; D. Wootton, 'The Republican Tradition: from Commonwealth to Common Sense', *Republicanism, Liberty and Commercial Society, 1649-1776* (Stanford, 1994), pp. 1-44.

universal republic in which fraternity would reign, but neither described themselves as republicans when discussing Britain.

At first glance, Paine's republicanism does not accord with that of any contemporaries who were not his disciples.[4] Paine was one of a very small number of Anglo-American writers who believed that Britain's mixed government did not suit her society. Indeed, he believed mixed government would ultimately be responsible for putting an end to Britain's national greatness. Most recent commentators have, as a result, described Paine as an innovative political voice in republican thought. One of the best studies goes so far as to conclude that Paine was the founder of a new form of republicanism both in America in 1776 and in France in 1791.[5] Others have questioned whether it makes sense to call Paine a republican at all in the 1790s, at least in the sense of belonging to a distinctive tradition of political argument. The rejection of the republican interpretation can mean a return to the 'bourgeois liberal' Paine, and another set of historically questionable definitions.[6] On the other hand, a popular nineteenth-century view of Paine has been revived, stemming from a claim that his peculiar, critical and libertarian ideas 'cannot be captured by a single model or tradition'.[7] This approach returns us to the original problem, which is easy to specify but difficult to resolve. Paine called himself a republican, yet his ideas do not accord with accepted interpretations of republican argument in late eighteenth-century Britain or North America.

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4 On the latter see J. A. Alger, 'The British Colony in Paris, 1792-93', *English Historical Review*, 13 (1898), 672-694; V. C. Miller, *Joel Barlow: Revolutionist. London, 1791-92* (Hamburg, 1932).

5 Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976), pp. 216, 237.

6 Isaac Kramnick, 'Republican Revisionism Revisited', *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism* (Ithaca, 1990).

7 Mark Philp, 'English Republicanism in the 1790s', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 6 (1998), 235-62.

The aim of this essay is to explain the distinctiveness of Paine's idea of a republic as he formulated it in the early 1790s, and to do so by reference to a republican tradition which *was* recognized by Paine's British contemporaries. Advantage is taken of several clues in Paine's major writings to develop the argument that Paine's achievement was to translate for a British audience certain French writers' ideas about the nature of modern republicanism. Paine was influenced by a French republican tradition which developed in the late 1770s and became prominent in political argument towards the end of the 1780s. The central claim of the writers involved was that transforming European monarchies into commercial republics without hierarchical ranks would create states more stable and powerful than existing monarchies of whatever type, including Britain's mixed monarchy. Paine's links with France are well known. The commencement of the first part of *The Rights of Man* describes a friendship with Lafayette stretching back to 1777. The first page of the pamphlet stated an intention to refute Burke on behalf of Paine's many French friends who were actively involved in Paris. Paine first visited France in 1780, returned twice in 1787, and began a series of lengthy stays from June 1789. Through his links with the venerated Franklin, and because of the notoriety of *Common Sense* and the 'Letter to the abbé Raynal', Paine was fêted by the Parisian admirers of the American Revolution in 1787.[8] At this time, as he made clear in *The Rights of Man*, he became close to 'the Bishop of Toulouse's secretary', probably the anglophile abbé Morellet. He also became acquainted with Morellet's friend, Condorcet, and the anti-physiocratic circle of Jacques-Pierre Brissot and Etienne Clavière. Paine's subsequent links with such men, when a member of the Convention, almost brought him to the guillotine in 1793-4. Imprisoned in the Luxembourg for ten months, and anticipating execution, he refused to recant the

8 The *Mémoires secret* of January 3, 1783 referred to 'le célebre auteur du sens commun' (vol. xxii, 9). However, before his first visit of 1787 he wrote to Franklin that apart from Lafayette 'there are none I am much acquainted with'. On his arrival, his correspondence shows that this speedily changed (*Complete Writings* (New York, 1969), 2 vols., ed. E. Foner, ii, 1261). With regard to Paine's French links it is unfortunate that J.-P. Brissot failed to complete the commentary on Paine which he promised in his *Mémoires* (Paris, 1912, 2 vols., i, 134). Given that Paine's friendship with Franklin was the source of most of his French contacts a useful guide is A. O. Aldridge, *Franklin and his French Contemporaries* (New York, 1957). See also E. Badinter and R. Badinter, *Condorcet (1743-1794)* (Paris, 1988), pp. 227-31.

form of republicanism he had articulated with them, in the journal *Le Républicain* and among like-minded contributors to the *Cercle Sociale* publishing house.[9]

The majority of historians have refused to examine Paine's political ideas from a French perspective.[10] Seemingly good reasons have been given. It is well known that Paine was initially ignorant of the language. Furthermore, he was notoriously disdainful of other writers' work. As one acquaintance put it, 'He knew all his own writings by heart and nothing else.'[11] The first part of *The Rights of Man* was written in England, as was much of the second. To many they appear to be the product of local circumstance, obsessed as they are with the nature and future of the British state. Alternatively, because attacks on mixed government first made in *Common Sense* and *The Crisis* were reiterated in the major works of the 1790s, some historians have demanded a North American context to explain Paine's ideas. His writings have consequently been placed in the tradition of Commonwealth perceptions of Hanoverian rule as these were developed in the colonies.

As was noted above, Paine has been described as an innovator working within this tradition because he claimed that Britain would collapse unless she became a free state of a particular kind. Yet Paine openly disavowed the accepted themes of Country or Old Whig writers. Where they were fearful of commerce and manufactures, Paine declared himself to be 'in all my publications… an advocate for commerce'.[12] While few British writers considered Britain's mixed government as

9 G. Kates, *The Cercle Social, the Girondins and the French Revolution* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 162-4.

10 Exceptions include A. O. Aldridge, 'Condorcet et Paine. Leur rapports intellectuels', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 32, (1958), 47-65 and 'Condorcet, Paine and Historical Method', *Condorcet Studies I*, ed. L. C. Rosenfield (New Jersey, 1984), pp. 49-60; G. Kates, 'From Liberalism to Radicalism: Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50 (1989), 569-587; B. Vincent, 'Thomas Paine: républicain de l'univers' in F. Furet & M. Ozouf, eds., *Le Siècle de l'avènement Républicain* (Paris, 1993), pp. 101-26; W. Doyle, 'Thomas Paine and the Girondins', *Officers, Nobles and Revolutionaries*(London, 1995).

11 Cited in D. Freeman Hawke, *Paine* (New York, 1974), p. 226. The author of the comment was Etienne Dumont in his posthumously published *Souvenirs sur Mirabeau*, ed. J. Bénétruy (Paris, 1950), p. 180.

12 *Rights of Man* Part Two, in *Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1989), ed. B. Kuklick, p.196.

unsuited to that state, Paine believed that the only free state, whether small or large in size, was a republic without king or aristocracy. It was more important to eliminate hierarchical ranks than to enjoy the supposed civil rights of 'free-born' Britons. Limited monarchy had to be replaced by national sovereignty, creating very different ideas about social duties and political obligations. Far from spreading effeminacy, Paine associated his commercial republic with the moral transformation of the populace. It would institute what he called 'a gigantic manliness'. This complex term signified honesty of thought and deed, courage and the pursuit of rational modes of living; patriotic and dedicated to the public good in all spheres of existence, especially trade and politics. The citizens of Paine's republic, the entire population of adult males, would replicate in civil society the virtues which had hitherto characterised disinterested dedication to the public good in political life alone. Although peaceful in nature, he believed that when challenged such a republic would defeat in war all mixed and absolute monarchical governments, even when ranged in leagues against it. In short, Paine's was a 'modern' form of republicanism, with little in common with traditional British or American perspectives. This does not mean that Paine was wholly original. He was aware of French interest in the possibility of transforming large European monarchies into modern republics from the late 1770s. Knowledge of republican ideas developed in France does much to illuminate Paine's beliefs and political identity.

II

To describe Paine as a modern republican underlines the difficulty of understanding this ex-Briton by reference to domestic traditions of political argument. It is also important to note that Paine's writings taken as a whole cannot be understood as different parts of a single ideology. Paine frequently stated that his ideas were all of a piece, and in later writings constantly referred back to *Common Sense*, which he perceived to be his own political testament.[13] Certain themes do span

13 It is significant that Lanthenas translated *Sens Commun* and *La crise Américane* in 1794. *Le Siècle de la raison ou recherches sur la vraie théologie et sur la théologie fabuleuse* appeared in the same year.

the first and the final writings, such as the critique of mixed government, the association of monarchy with ignorance and his defence of moderate wealth. Paine also developed and altered many of the views first articulated in the 1770s. If *Common Sense* and *The Crisis* are compared with the first part of *The Rights of Man*, for example, numerous differences emerge. The first was a product of circumstance. Although *Common Sense* praised 'the republican…part of the constitution of England', Paine nowhere sought to foment revolution in Britain or to challenge the form of government which appeared most suited to established European monarchies. The most he did was to remind Englishmen, as Hume had done before him, that their national vanity, based on comparison with the supposed tyranny of France, was without foundation. As he put it, 'the *will* of the king is as much the *law* of the land in Britain as in France.'[14] By contrast, *The Rights of Man* sought 'the happiness of seeing the New World regenerate the Old.'[15]

A more important difference concerns Paine's view of ranks. In the 1770s monarchy and hereditary succession were blamed for the ills of states, being the source of war, ignorance and corruption. Paine ranked monarchy 'in scripture as one of the sins of the Jews'. In modern times he held it to have become 'the popery of government.'[16] In *The Rights of Man* Paine maintained these opinions, arguing that Burke's *Reflections* 'shortened his journey to Rome' in defending 'this vassalage idea…monarchy'. In addition, however, Paine attacked the aristocracies of Europe as being co-responsible for the decline of their states. Paine called aristocrats parasites, 'a kind of fungus'; rather than nobility, they represented 'No-ability, in all countries.' In a characteristic paragraph he once more used the example of the Jews to illustrate his point:

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14 *Common Sense*, in *Political Writings*, pp. 7, 15.

15 Part One, dedication to George Washington. Paine's change of opinion can be traced to *Prospects on the Rubicon* which was probably written in France in August 1787 (*Complete Writings*, ii, 621).

16 *Common Sense*, pp. 9-11.

> By the universal economy of nature it is known, and by the instance of the Jews it is proved, that the human species has a tendency to degenerate, in any small number of persons, when separated from the general stock of society, and intermarrying constantly with one another.[17]

Where, in the 1770s, Paine had defined a republic as a state without monarchy, he now held that equality between ranks was essential to republican liberty. He stated the intention 'to exterminate the monster Aristocracy, root and branch', and demanded that Englishmen follow the French example by destroying their nobility. Abolishing primogeniture was to be the first iconoclastic act.

The third aspect of Paine's ideas which changed in the 1790s concerned his attitude to commerce. In *Common Sense* Paine declared that in North America 'our plan is commerce', claiming that liberty of trade would 'secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe.' Yet in the final section of the pamphlet, 'Of the Present Ability of America', neo-Harringtonian themes can be discerned. Commerce made for powerful states, but it was also believed to be a force for peace and fraternity based on reciprocal exchange, and as such was the enemy of aggressive patriotism. The fact that America was a largely non-commercial nation therefore increased rather than diminished her military capabilities. A spirit of patriotism derived from yearning for independence made the American soldier more than a match for his British counterpart:

> Commerce diminishes the spirit both of patriotism and military defence. And history sufficiently informs us that the bravest achievements were always accomplished in the nonage of a nation. With the increase of commerce England hath lost its spirit. The city of London, notwithstanding its numbers, submits to continued insults with the patience of a coward. The more men have to lose, the less willing they are to venture. The rich are in general slaves to fear, and submit to courtly power with the trembling duplicity of a spaniel.[18]

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17 *Rights of Man*, Part One, pp. 93-4, 105-13.

18 *Common Sense*, p. 35; also, 'Thoughts on the Peace', in *Letter to the Earl of Shelburne…* (London, 1792), 9th edn., pp. 23-5.

In *The Rights of Man* Part Two, Paine expressed no fears concerning the sacrifice of military power to commercial wellbeing. Despite being a commercial republic, he considered France to be far stronger than Britain. Indeed, he was certain that the constitutional innovations of the National Assembly had resolved the famous eighteeth-century paradox about French power: a state superior in resources, numbers, size and civilization had been defeated in war by its inferior rival, Britain.[19] Paine always adhered to Charles Davenant's neo-Machiavellian claim that the form of government of a state determined its greatness.[20] As a consequence, he believed the Revolution would ensure that France fulfilled her economic potential and would once again be militarily superior to her smaller neighbour.

A more optimistic view, which Paine expressed at the end of *The Rights of Man* Part Two, stated that if the kind of republicanism he favoured was adopted in Britain, an alliance would then be made with the other commercial republics of Holland, France and America. These states would be so powerful that they could dictate terms to every throne and altar. In particular, Paine advised them to force Spain 'to open South America to the rest of the world for trade.' He concluded that 'better times are in prospect…for the world…the insulted German and the enslaved Spaniard, the Russ and the Pole, are beginning to think.' Inaugurating the 'Age of Reason', Paine called his generation 'the Adam of a new world.'[21] The question that needs to be asked at this point is how far such ideas accorded with those of his radical British contemporaries.

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19 For a statement of the paradox see Arthur Young, *Letters Concerning the Present State of the French Nation… With a complete comparison between France and Great Britain…* (London, 1769), pp. 440-2.

20 For Davenant's commentary on Machiavelli's maxim, "That no cities have augmented their revenues or enlarged their territories, but while they were free and at liberty", see 'An Essay upon the Probable Methods of Making a People Gainers in the Balance of Trade' (1699) in *The Political and Commercial Works* (London, 1771), 5 vols., ii, 337; also, I. Hont 'Free Trade and the Economic Limits to National Politics: Neo-Machiavellian Political Economy Reconsidered', J. Dunn, ed., *The Economic Limits to Modern Politics* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 41-99.

21 *Rights of Man*, Part Two, pp. 200-3.

It is accepted by most historians that the perceived decline of Britain from the time of the war with the North American colonies led to a revival of what has recently been termed a 'neo-Roman theory of free states', demanding the purification of the constitution by means of a return to fundamental principles.[22] Opinions differed on the nature of the required reforms, which ranged from tinkering with the powers of the crown to a radical affirmation of popular sovereignty.[23] Yet few writers believed it was necessary to reconstitute the political system. In general, British writers did not believe that the established constitution would destroy itself, any more than they believed that Britons had anything to learn from other European republics or monarchies.[24] Political thinking was largely carried out by reference to British history, and events in other parts of the world were understood in such terms.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the careful use of the term 'republican' by radicals who believed reform was necessary. Such radicals believed that Britain's strength depended upon a mixed rather than a republican form of government. Even those, such as Catherine Macaulay, who believed that the seventeenth-century republican tradition had a role to play in late eighteenth-century politics, took pains to emphasise that they supported a mixed form of government for late eighteenth-century Britain. This preference was determined by the necessity of social order. In addition, an established system of hierarchical ranks was required to prevent the rule of the ignorant or the rise to power of a corrupt demagogue. By contrast, republics were associated with a degree of material and civil equality which was dangerous to social peace and destructive of the

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22 Q. Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), ch. 1. See also P. Miller, *Defining the Common Good* (Cambridge, 1994), ch. 6.

23 John Cartwright, *The Constitutional Defence of England* (London, 1796), pp. 119-24; see also I. Hampsher-Monk, 'Civic Humanism and Parliamentary Reform: the Case of the Society of the Friends of the People', *Journal of British Studies*, 18, (1979), 70-89; A. Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty* (London, 1979), ch. 2.

24 J. G. A. Pocock, 'Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm: the Context as Counter-Revolution' in F. Furet & M. Ozouf, eds., *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture* (Oxford, 1990), 4 vols., iii, 19-43.

most important virtue in the British radical canon: independence. Macaulay was explicit on this point. The 'whole art of true and just policy', was 'to preserve the natural subordination established by God himself.' Rather than being a republican, she preferred to think of herself, as her friend Thomas Hollis put it, as 'a true Old Whig, almost unic [sic]', sharing Hollis' belief that 'all commonwealths are founded by gentlemen.'[25] James Burgh emphasised that he opposed the creation of a republic in Britain because this would be 'throwing out all the three estates at once.' It was rather necessary 'not to abolish either king, lords or commons, but to preserve and re-establish them, on their original and proper foot.'[26] Richard Price used similar arguments to defend himself against the charge of republicanism in 1785; Britain simply had 'too many high and low' to countenance such a transformation.[27] In 1787 he gave his most detailed denial:

> …so far am I from preferring a government purely republican, that I look upon our constitution of government as better adapted than any other to this country, and in theory excellent…what I here say of myself I believe to be true of the whole body of British subjects among Protestant Dissenters. I know not one individual among them who would not tremble at the thought of changing into a democracy our mixed form of government, or who has any other wish with respect to it than to restore it to purity and vigour by removing the defects in our representation, and establishing that dependence of the three states on one another in which its essence consists.[28]

The British radicals adhered to what was probably the only maxim shared by Smith, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Voltaire: that republicanism was a doctrine for small states alone, because large states lacked the homogeneous political culture necessary to sustain popular institutions. Endorsing this view in the 1790s, Burke saw himself as the guardian of a fundamental

25 Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line* (London, 1763-83), 8 vols., iv, 355n; Hollis, *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis*, i, 428, cited in B. Hill, *The Republican Virago* (Oxford, 1992), p. 167. See also C. Robbins, 'The Strenuous Whig, Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn', *Absolute Liberty* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1982), pp. 168-205.

26 *Political Disquisitions* (London, 1774-5), 3 vols., iii, 297-9.

27 *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (London, 1785), p. 72n; *Additional Observations on the Nature and Value of Civil Liberty* (London, 1787), pp. 8, 20, 44.

28 *The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind* (London, 1787), in *Political Writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 164-5.

political truth against a new, predominantly French, heresy.[29] The large republic of the United States did not challenge this assumption, even after federal powers were increased, because it was perceived to be a union of small states. It was altogether unique because its politics were not marred by the 'European' problems of an entrenched systems of ranks, an inegalitarian distribution of property, and a history of domestic and international unrest.[30] Christopher Wyvill made this point in his attack on 'the enthusiastic Politician' Paine, whose 'avowed purpose is to overturn and destroy our…Mixed Government, by King, Lords and Commons', and replace it with 'his wild project for the universal establishment of Republican Forms of Government.' It was fortunate, he believed, that 'the Proselytes to republican notions are few at present, and inconsiderable.'[31]

The most radical of the anti-Burke tracts, James Mackintosh's *Vindiciæ Gallicæ,* illustrates the differences between French and British perspectives on republicanism. Mackintosh supported the 'democratic character' of the French Revolution because of the peculiarities of French history. French and English governments had originally been similar in form, enjoying the benefits of Gothic representative institutions. In France, however, 'the downfall of the feudal aristocracy… before Commerce had elevated any other class of citizens into importance' caused noble powers to devolve on the Crown. The resulting reign of the 'dissolute tyrant' Louis XIV ensured that 'the three great corporations of the Nobility, the Church and the Parliaments were tainted by despotism', degrading the people to 'political helotism'. Thus the Revolution in France had of necessity to be more democratic than that of England in 1688. In the latter 'the Clergy, the Peerage and Judicatures of England…qualified to partake of a more stable and improved liberty.'[32]

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29 *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* [May, 1791], *Further Reflections on the Revolution* (Indianapolis, 1992), pp. 65-6.

30 Josiah Tucker's comment in *Cui Bono* (Gloucester, 1781, p. 117) is memorable and significant: 'As to the future Grandeur of *America*, and its being a rising Empire under one *Head*, whether Republican or Monarchical, it is one of the idlest and most visionary Notions, that ever was conceived, even by writers of Romance.'

31 *A Defence of Dr. Price and the Reformers of England* (London and York, 1792), pp. 8, 60-7.

32 *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* (London, 1791), 2nd edn., pp. 18, 63-7.

Justifying 'democratic character' did not make Mackintosh a republican. He did not support the idea of a general revolution across Europe, national sovereignty or the destruction of ranks as necessary to a free state. Rather, it was essential for popular sovereignty to be affirmed in institutions compatible with the manners of the nation. This explains why, writing soon after the publication of *Vindicæ Gallicæ*, he opposed 'that spark of Republicanism which moderation must have extinguished, but which may, in future *conceivable circumstances*, produce effects, at the suggestion of which good men will shudder.'[33] Unlike Paine, Mackintosh defended the 'manly' legacy of 1688 and the 'senatorial nobility' which was then established. He concluded 'nothing can be more absurd than to assert that all who admire wish to imitate the French Revolution.'[34]

The perspective of British writers on the Revolution in France was shaped by the lack of a domestic tradition of reflection upon the possibility of making republics out of large European states. Once more the example of Richard Price is instructive. In correspondence with the Duc de la Rochefoucauld and others, he made clear his view that the Revolution was a means of making France more like Britain. In June 1790 he pointed out that the celebration of the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille had been accompanied by John Horne Tooke's toast 'that the English nation had only to maintain and improve the constitution which their ancestors had transmitted to them'.[35] Price's hope was that events in France would inspire a revision of the 1688 constitutional settlement to emancipate Catholics and Dissenters and broaden representation. Existing ranks, property rights, and civil distinctions would remain, creating a mixed form of government in each nation. In turn this would secure international peace and greater prosperity fuelled by uninhibited commerce. The publications of the Revolution Society in London envisaged similar effects, and

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33 *A Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt* (London, 1792), cited in *The Life of Sir James Mackintosh* (London, 1836), 2nd edn., 2 vols., i, 79-82.

34 *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, pp. 250-60, 293-302, 351.

35 *Correspondence of Richard Price* (Durham, N. C., 1983-94), 3 vols., iii, 305-11; *Memoirs of John Horne Tooke* (New York, 1968), 2 vols., ii, 35-7.

stressed their commitment to 'the Revolution, which seated our Deliverer King William the Third on the Throne [and] do hereby declare our firmest attachment to the civil and religious principles which were recognised and established by that glorious event.' They included Stanhope's letters describing Louis XVI as a patriotic king, 'the RESTORER OF FRENCH LIBERTY…placed like the Kings of England…at the head of an enlightened people and free constitution of government.'[36]

Many Englishmen shared the chauvinistic view of William Fox that the origins of the French Revolution could be found in Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* and the British tradition from Locke to Price.[37] Mackintosh was equally of the opinion that the Revolution of 1688 had inspired the French, being 'the first example in civilised Europe of a Government which reconciled a semblance of *political*, and a large portion of *civil* liberty, with stability and peace.' It created 'the school of sages, who unshackled and emancipated the human mind, from among whom issued the Lockes, the Rousseaus, the Turgots and the Franklins.'[38] At the commencement of the Revolution, a writer as Francophile as Helen-Maria Williams noted that the French 'imbibed the noble lesson which England has taught' and 'are become madly fond of the English'.[39] Before his death Price expressed a less nationalistic view, arguing that the French Revolution represented the fusion of the intellectual traditions of Britain and France against 'arbitrary power': 'Milton, Locke, Sidney and Hoadly in this country…Montesquieu, Fénelon and Turgot in France.'[40] Catherine Macaulay saw the French constitutional debates of the National Assembly as a perfect fusion of republican and monarchical political maxims. They had ingeniously combined 'the mere

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36 *The Correspondence of the Revolution Society in London, with the National Assembly, and with various societies of the Friends of Liberty in France and England* (London, 1792), pp. 1-3, 10-11.

37 *The Interest of Great Britain Respecting the French War* (London, 1793), pp. 12-14.

38 *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, pp. 326-35.

39 *Letters written in France* [1790] (Oxford, 1989), pp. 68-9.

40 *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* [November 1789], *Political Writings*, pp. 180-2.

office of an executive governor, with the stability that is annexed to hereditary descent' and 'a truly popular constitution [founded on] the will of the people'. Yet, as in all of her writings, she took pains to justify restrictions on political liberty as compatible with the rights of man in the state of nature, since 'no one not inclined or by bodily infirmity not able to till the ground, had a right to the fruits produced by the labour of others.'[41]

When France became a republic in September 1792 it was anathema to British radicals. Even David Williams, who had been made a citizen by the National Assembly, condemned the Convention 'collected principally from the dregs of France'. In 1793 he attempted to engineer links between Lord Grenville and the Girondins in the hope of establishing in France 'a constitution similar to that of Britain'.[42] Charles James Fox, in his attack on the policy of war being fostered by Pitt, declared that republicanism was 'the evil that I dread'. He defended 'Those who desire Reform…the middle order of men, who dread as much Republicanism on the one hand, as they do Despotism on the other.'[43] The majority of radicals saw the creation of the republic as a retrograde step, which weakened France just as it ruined opportunities for domestic and international peace.[44] It could be explained as a reaction to the corruption of the monarchy, but its disastrous nature appeared to have been confirmed by the widespread reports of politically-inspired assassinations and massacres, culminating in the policy of Terror. To most Britons, Burke's view of 1792 was

41 *Observations on the Reflections of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, on the Revolution in France* (London, 1790), pp. 78-9, 86, 95.

42 *Incidents in my own life which have been thought of some importance*, ed. P. France (Falmer, 1980), pp. 27-31.

43 *The Speech of the Right Hon. Charles James Fox, on the King's Speech…December 13, 1792* (London, 1792), pp. 9-10.

44 J. E. Cookson, *The Friends of Peace* (Cambridge, 1982), chs., 2, 7; C. Emsley, 'The Impact of the French Revolution on British Politics and Society', C. Crossley and I. Small, eds., *The French Revolution and British Culture* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 31-62.

correct: events in France underlined the superiority of Britain's mixed form of government, and the political traditions of independence and civil liberty which supported it.[45]

IV

Paine's exceptionalism with regard to the strength of modern republics, the equality of ranks and the weakness of Britain, was made famous by the publication of the first part of *The Rights of Man* in February 1791. His ideas were so extreme in a British context that the radical printer Joseph Johnson refused to publish them, recalling the first copies when he realised their content. Certain themes of late eighteenth-century British political thought can nevertheless be found in his work. A debt was openly acknowledged to two writers in particular. The first Paine described as 'one of the best-hearted men that exists', and also 'a friend and republican'.[46] Richard Price's vitriolic attacks on corruption in government, the excessive influence of the monarch, and the dire consequences of an escalating national debt, all found a place in Paine's works. More distinctive was Paine's use of Price's defence of moderate wealth as the ideal for modern citizens, accompanied by a shared fear of growing poverty in Britain. With regard to commerce, it was probably from Price that Paine drew the argument that only certain forms of commerce were compatible with political and moral virtue. Price believed that a nation whose commerce was of this sort would be more economically successful than the mercantile state he perceived Britain had become. This view was repeated by Paine in *Common Sense,* which stated that 'oppression is often the *consequence*, but seldom or never the *means* of riches.'[47] The opposite was also true: 'though avarice will preserve a man from being necessitously poor, it generally makes him too

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45 Bentham was certainly of this view: see the illuminating work of J. H. Burns, 'Bentham and the French Revolution', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 16 (1966), 95-114, and F. Rosen, *Bentham, Byron and Greece* (Oxford, 1992), ch. 3.

46 *Rights of Man*, Part One, p. 53; 'Lettre à MM. Chabroud et Chapelier', *Le Républicain, ou le défenseur du gouvernement représentatif, par une société des républicains*, no. 2 (July, 1791), p. 31.

47 *Common Sense*, pp. 8-9.

timorous to be wealthy.' Britain's decline could therefore be traced to the corruption engendered by the mixed constitution, whose negative moral effects in turn reduced the forms of commerce conducive to wealth and virtue.

Price's support for the American republic and faith in its future as an independent state also found echoes in Paine's work. Both men believed that republics were inherently more stable and peaceful than monarchies. They were also certain that human nature was heavily influenced by forms of government, and that the kind of transformation experienced by North America would regenerate the morals and manners of the general populace; in particular those of corrupt immigrants from European monarchies. Finally, they shared the ultimate goal of the creation of a universal republic which would guarantee peace in conditions of commerce and fraternity, where historic aspirations to universal monarchy had established peace by means of slavery and war. Price, however, believed that mixed government *was* compatible with economic success, and did not accept that liberty demanded the destruction of social hierarchy.

The other major influence on Paine among British writers was Adam Smith, whom he famously claimed for his own side in *The Rights of Man*, against the 'disorderly cast of [Burke's] genius…without a constitution.'[48] Paine's references to Smith were, as in this instance, frequently imprecise. It is possible to conclude that Paine's use of Smith was therefore misleading and that he interpreted him, if he read his books at all, as a supporter of free commerce and little more. However, it is notable that much of *The Rights of Man*, in which Paine discusses British 'improvements in agriculture, useful arts, manufactures and commerce', was modelled on Book III of the *Wealth of Nations*. Paine followed Smith's argument that such progress had been made 'in opposition to the genius of government'. Equally, he blamed the 'spirit of jealousy and ferocity'

48 *Rights of Man*, Part One, p. 88.

between states for increasing poverty and reducing trade. More importantly, Paine appears to have used Smith's discussion of 'the natural progress of opulence' in his description of the 'unnatural' progress of political power in Europe. The story of the establishment of political liberty, its loss and the struggle to restore it, echoes the analysis of the establishment of the commercial stage of human society detailed by Smith in Book III.

Paine's description of republican government as natural to man, and the American and French revolutions as 'a renovation of the natural order of things…combining moral with political happiness and national prosperity', owed a great deal to Smith's idea of 'natural liberty'.[49] Where Smith placed the 'mercantile system', Paine placed monarchy; where Smith placed free commerce, Paine placed his republic. Other links have also been noted by historians, including opposition to primogeniture.[50] It is significant that while Smith considered the condition of the British poor to be above the condition of kings in uncivilized nations, Paine argued that civilization was only possible in republics. In existing European monarchies the majority of the population found themselves 'far below the condition of an Indian.'[51] Political upheaval and a resulting moral transformation were in Paine's view the only options for any nation seeking to become genuinely civilized. Such opinions lead to the conclusion that Smith would have considered Paine as he did Price, 'a factious citizen, a most superficial Philosopher and by no means an able calculator'.[52]

V

49 *Rights of Man*, Part One, pp. 137-41; Part Two, pp. 185-94.

50 The best account of Paine's relationship with Smith, which makes many of these points, is Donald Winch's *Riches and Poverty* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. pp. 100-3, 128-31, 150-6

51 *Rights of Man*, Part Two, p. 195. The same claim was later made in *Agrarian Justice*.

52 Letter to George Chalmers, 22 December 1785, cited in *Riches and Poverty*, p.124.

Unlike Smith and Price, Paine believed Britain's mixed government to be a tyranny and a despotism, wholly unsuited to a populace claiming to be free born. He was under no illusion concerning the limits of British traditions of political thought and held them to be as bankrupt as attempts to harness public credit. Mixed government, he argued as early as *Common Sense*, was a contradiction in terms because 'the power which has most weight will govern'. In 1688 the English might have 'been wise enough to shut and lock a door against absolute monarchy', but at the same time they 'have been foolish enough to put the crown in possession of the key'.[53] The first part of *The Rights of Man* likewise concluded that the machinery of mixed government was oiled by corruption. Such views could have been drawn from a variety of historical sources, but it is noteworthy that such opinions are very difficult to find among contemporary British writers, however radical. Yet between the 1760s and 1770s they were being vociferously propagated from Paris by the *économistes* or physiocrats.[54]

François Quesnay and his disciples across Europe and beyond were among the greatest anglophobes, and argued against the conventional wisdom of the relative prosperity of the British poor. More importantly for links with Paine, the mixed sovereignty which Quesnay associated with Britain's government was also an object of physiocratic hostility. In 1767 several works were published which illustrated this opposition. The first, Quesnay's own *Despotisme de la Chine*, condemned the disorder which accompanied any dilution of sovereign power:

> All the different ranks of the State can contribute in a mixed government to the ruin of the nation, through the discordance between private interests which divides and corrupts the tutelary authority, causing it to degenerate into political intrigues and abuses deadly to society.[55]

53 *Common Sense*, pp. 7-8; on this attack see G. Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought*, ch. 3.

54 'Maximes de Gouvernement Économique' in *François Quesnay et la Physiocratie* (Institut National d'Études Démographiques, 1958 [henceforth, INED]), 2 vols., ii, 496-510.

55 *Despotisme de la Chine*, *INED*, ii, 919.

It was followed by equally vitriolic condemnations in the writings of Mercier de la Rivière and Nicholas Baudeau, who attacked mixed sovereignty as a practical impossibility in France or elsewhere, given the fact of material inequality between social orders and the size of the state.[56] Only an independent absolute monarch had the authority to stand above the fray of private interests and impose the 'essential laws of the natural order' against the military aristocracy debasing France. The step which Paine would not have taken, identifying Britain as an exemplar of an insecure popular 'republic', was made by Victor Riquetti de Mirabeau as early as *L'Ami des hommes*, in which he condemned 'a nation where the cries of the people too often prevail over reason.'[57] They did, however, also share the belief that Britain was in decline *because* of her mixed constitution. What made Paine distinctive was his argument that Britain would be surpassed, not by an agricultural monarchy governed by a 'legal despot', but rather by a new kind of republic. It would be a state more powerful, with a civil society more commercial, than any other in history.

The modern republic Paine ultimately envisaged was more egalitarian than other societies and also more commercial, creating a political community which was uniformly patriotic and inclined towards peace. Historic praise of the spirit of union to be found in absolute monarchies would in future be applied to large republics.[58] Such unity would, Paine believed, lead to victories if defensive wars became necessary. When France became a republic he advised its legislators that they had nothing to fear from the existing military powers of Europe. Modern republics would

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56 Le Mercier de la Rivière, *L'Ordre Naturel et Essentiel des Sociétés Politiques* (London, 1767) pp. 139-50; Nicolas Baudeau, *Première Introduction à la Philosophie Économique ou Analyse des États policés* (Paris, 1767), pp. 385-406.

57 *L'Ami des hommes* (La Haye, 1758-62), 6 vols., i, 131. He made the same point in his 'Éloge de Sully', *Ephémérides du Citoyen*, viii (1770), 29-34.

58 John Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times, by the Author of Essays on the Characteristics, &c.* (London, 1758), 7th edn., 2 vols., i, 103-4: 'the national spirit of union…is naturally *strong* in *absolute Monarchies*, because, in the Absence both of Manners and Principles, the *compelling* Power of the *Prince* directs and draws every thing to one Point, and therefore, in all common Situations, effectually supplies their Place.'

wage a new kind of war, 'a war of the whole nation…When a whole nation acts as an army, the despot knows not the extent of the power against which he contends.' Should the enemy successfully penetrate France, he would find himself 'in the midst of a nation of armies.'[59] The modern republic was more powerful than a mixed state, because it combined the unified authority of absolute monarchy with the civic commitment of an ancient republic. Paine only became fearful for the Revolution when the political culture became characterised by divisions between Paris and the provinces during the struggle in the Convention between Robespierre's Jacobins and the Gironde.[60]

The question was how such a political culture might be created. Paine's answer was to call for a national convention to legitimate the erection of republican political institutions. The term 'republican' was used in two senses. First, meaning the rule of the wise for the good of the public. As Part II of the *Rights of Man* put it: 'Republican government is no other than government established and conducted for the interest of the public, as well individually as collectively.' A republic embodied the *Res Publica*, described by Paine as 'the public affairs of a nation.'[61] The association of the republic with the sovereignty of wisdom was of course an ancient tradition, particularly associated with neo-Platonic philosophy. Even Burke defended this use of the term.[62] It was stronger, however, in France, where writers from Bodin onwards used *république* in this sense. What made it attractive was its compatibility with the sovereignty of an enlightened king.

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59 *Address to the people of France* [September, 1792], *The Writings of Thomas Paine* (London, 1899), 3 vols., iii, 99; *On the propriety of bringing Louis XVI to trial* [November, 1792], iii, 117.

60 *Letter to Danton* [May 1793], *The Writings*, iii, 135-9.

61 *To the Authors of Le Républicain* [July, 1791], *The Writings*, iii, 5-7; *Anti-Monarchal Essay, for the use of New Republicans* [October, 1792], iii, 102-7..

62 *Letter to William Elliot* [May 26, 1795], *Further Reflections*, p. 273: 'by the true republican spirit alone, monarchies can be rescued from the imbecility of courts and the madness of the crowd. This republican spirit would not suffer men in high place to bring ruin on the country and on themselves. It would reform, not by destroying, but by saving the great, the rich and the powerful.'

Indeed, it had been used in the seventeenth century to contrast the wisdom of French kings with the ignorance and excesses of the English republic.[63] Condorcet revived the term in physiocratic circles when he described Turgot as a republican of this stamp in the influential *Vie de Turgot* of 1782.[64] It also led him to describe the Declaration of the Rights of Man as the keystone of the Revolution, infusing ancient ideas about the rule of the public good into a political edifice founded on national sovereignty.[65] His intention was to give old republican maxims the force of law, and thereby constrain the powers of demagogues with dangerous ideas.[66] Although he shared these views, to Paine it was more important to use this sense of 'republic' to attack monarchy. It was the basis of his argument against the association of republics with small states. Small states should rather be monarchies, because the knowledge required to rule them was less extensive:

> …when it is attempted to extend this individual [monarch's] knowledge to the affairs of a great country, the capacity of knowing bears no longer any proportion to the extent or multiplicity of the objects which ought to be known, and the Government inevitably falls from ignorance into tyranny.[67]

Political representation was the great discovery of the moderns, which Paine, alongside the authors of *The Federalist*, believed would give republicanism new life. Representation made the political culture of the nation homogeneous and patriotic, while ensuring that the enlightened were called upon to govern. The resulting state would be impregnable:

> So powerful is the Representative System; first, by combining and consolidating all the parts of a country together, however great the extent; and secondly, by admitting of none but men

63 J.-M. Goulemot, 'Le Mythe de Cromwell et l'obsession de la république chez les monarchistes Français de 1650 à 1700', J. Viard, ed., *L'Esprit Républicain* (Paris, 1970), pp. 107-110.

64 *Vie de Turgot*, *Œuvres de Condorcet*, ed., A. Condorcet O'Connor, (Paris, 1847-9), 12 vols., v, 209-10.

65 *Idées sur le despotisme*, *Œuvres*, ix, 148-9.

66 *Déclaration des droits*, *Œuvres*, ix, 198-9, 206.

67 *Lettre aux auteurs du Républicain, Le Républicain*, no. 2 (July 1791), p.9.

> properly qualified into the government, or dismissing them if they prove to be otherwise, that America was enabled thereby totally to defeat and overthrow all the schemes and projects of the Hereditary Government of England against her.[68]

Paine favoured the broadest possible franchise at the base of the representative system, although he ignored women. For men, exclusion was only possible 'as a punishment for a certain time upon those who should propose to take away that right from others.'[69]

Paine expressed faith in the progress of reason, in the capacity of a constitutional code to temper excesses, and the unity of opinion generated by republican patriotism. In numerous writings of the late 1780s Condorcet had given equal support to the first two claims. It was no surprise, therefore, that he was closest to Paine among supporters of the Gironde. After the King's flight to Varennes in April 1791 Condorcet was converted to the third tenet of Paine's creed. National unity, Paine convinced him, could only be maintained if the nation expelled Louis Capet. With J.-P. Brissot, Etienne Clavière and Achille Du Châtelet they created the journal *Le Républicain* to propagate their shared beliefs.[70]

The abbé Sieyès' critique of Paine and Condorcet's republicanism, in *Le Moniteur* of July 1791, brings the nature of these shared views into sharp relief.[71] Sieyès claimed not to understand why they called themselves republicans because the representative government they supported was compatible with a single monarch as chief magistrate or a committee of elected magistrates. Arguing in favour of the former, Sieyès stated that his preference for elected monarchy was

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68 *A Letter to Mr. Secretary Dundas* [6 June] (London, 1792), p. 5.

69 *Dissertation on First Principles of Government* [1795], *The Writings*, iii, 267n.

70 L. Cahen, *Condorcet et la Révolution Française* (Paris, 1904), pp. 248-69; K.-M. Baker, *Condorcet: from Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics*(Chicago, 1975), pp. 304-6.

71 Sieyès had challenged republicans to defend their views when he claimed 'il y a plus de liberté pour le citoyen dans la monarchie que dans la république.' (*Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur*, 6 July 1791, pp. 46-7). Paine responded with a letter dated 8 July which was published with Sieyès' response in *Le Moniteur* of 16 July (pp. 137-9).

superior to Paine's 'polyarchy', in part because of the speed of action associated with an executive of one person. Above all he feared that a senatorial executive would degenerate into an aristocratic tyranny. Paine and Condorcet therefore threatened 'social liberty' by favouring 'public life against private life.' Sieyès' aim, by contrast, was to establish a severely limited government: a criticism which those who praise the 'liberal' Paine might bear in mind. While the first part of *The Rights of Man* defended the 'rational order of things in the French constitution' of 1791, the second part had a different aim: to persuade the French to remove their King and create an elected committee of chief magistrates. Paine was therefore responding to Sieyès' criticism of this plan when he made the argument that a republic 'one and indivisable' would counter aristocracy by maintaining the material equality of the citizenry. The establishmen of moderate wealth became a fundamental element of his political strategy, to prevent merchants, legislators, judges or landowners from becoming a new nobility. This scheme, which some historians have anachronistically associated with the idea of a welfare state, became of fundamental importance because of Sieyès' criticism. The policy of pensions, annuities, a progressive income tax, and a civic education, all of which he was to defend to the end of his life, were heavily indebted to Condorcet's ideas about social insurance and national instruction. Returning the compliment, Condorcet was able to provide Paine with evidence to flesh out his republican perspective on material equality in modern nations.

VI

The idea of a national convention was also the key to Paine's second characterisation of a republic. Such a convention embodied the sovereignty of the nation, which to Paine entailed not simply the abolition of monarchy but the more important destruction of social hierarchies: ranks would not be abolished but henceforth members of any rank would be equal to those of any other. The term rank thereby would signify an occupation rather than status. Equality between ranks was called by Paine 'equality of Rights…the true and only basis of representative government'.[72] Evils which

72 *Dissertation*, iii, 265.

plagued 'the old governments of Europe' could be traced to 'distortedly exalting some men, so that others are debased, till the whole is out of nature'.[73] Placemen, courtiers and beneficiaries of civil lists would no longer exist; nor would distinctions between different groups within a community. Hierarchical ranks had been responsible, Paine believed, for the decline of Britain, whose taxes beggared the industrious because the landed aristocracy wielded authority and required public revenues to buy popular support. As a consequence 'the word 'Commons', applied as it is in England, is a term of degradation and reproach, and ought to be abolished. It is a term unknown in free Countries.'[74] Without distinctions between ranks Paine was certain there would be 'no riots, tumults, and disorders…[nor] that class of poor and wretched people who are so numerously dispersed all over England.'[75]

The central message of the second part of *The Rights of Man* was that the Revolution in France was great because it was the first upheaval in Europe to recognise the importance of ending social hierarchies. Men had become 'of one degree'. There were 'no more titles, no nobility or aristocracy…the peer is exalted into the *man*.' The French would be rewarded with a society where 'the poor are not oppressed, the rich are not privileged. Industry is not mortified by the splendid extravagance of a court rioting at its expense.'[76] Low taxes would allow commerce to thrive while the nation would be better and more justly governed. It was a historical fact that 'the greatest characters the world has known rose on the democratic floor.' Where Sieyès sought to maintain social hierarchies, embodied in the *marc d'argent* property qualification for 'active citizenship' in the first French constitution, Paine's aim was to regenerate humanity by

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73 *The Rights of Man*, Part One, p. 71.

74 *Letter Addressed to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation*, *The Writings*, iii, 61, 86-7.

75 *Letter to Dundas*, p. 8.

76 *The Rights of Man*, Part II, *Political Writings*, p.159.

reconstructing the social order. Ranks would not be associated with political or civil inequalities, and moderate wealth would protect this social constitution.

The union of national sovereignty with a commercial and patriotic society in which ranks would be equal was an idea which Paine popularised in British political discourse. Contemporaries recognized that it marked him out from other radicals. As Horace Walpole put it, Paine's answer to Burke 'deserves a putrid fever. His doctrines go to the extremity of levelling.' Commenting on Paine's debate with Sieyès, Walpole claimed it concerned 'the plus or minus of rebellion.'[77] In Burke's view, Paine had contributed to the creation of a 'a seductive liberty' by the 'Revolution of doctrine and theoretick dogma', envisaging a universal republic through 'the creation of a commonwealth…and the abolition of monarchy, nobility, and church establishments…in each country.'[78] Like Paine, whose intellectual manoeuvres he understood, Burke emphasised the importance of levelling ranks and the creation of a homogeneous political culture which was terrifying in its patriotism. These points were echoed in hundreds of pamphlets.[79] Paine's prosecution for sedition by the British government in June 1792 was based on the claim that he 'reviled what was most sacred in the Constitution, destroyed every principle of subordination and established nothing in their turn.'[80]

Such ideas might have been alien to British political argument but they had a longer history in France. Calls for the abolition of ranks were made by Diderot in his *Vie de Senèque* of 1778 and

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77 Letters to Mary Berry, April 3 and July 26, 1791, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven, 1937-83), 48 vols., vi, 239, 319.

78 *Thoughts on French Affairs* [December, 1791], *Further Reflections*, pp. 208-11.

79 Most of which have been expertly analysed by Greg Claeys: *Thomas Paine*, ch. 6. See also J. A. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford, 1994), ch. 4.

80 Cited in M. Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1909, 2 vols., i, 344) from Paine's note in *Letter to Mr. Secretary Dundas*, p. 2.

1782.[81] They were popularised in revisions made by Diderot to the abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique des deux Indes* in the late 1770s and early 1780s. According to Diderot, proof that 'primitive liberty' could be restored by 'the general assembly of a great nation', could be found in North America. As a result, the new republic should be a model whose example ought to be followed by all European peoples who valued liberty. The secret of American success was 'the equality of station' and 'universal ease' which 'has given rise in every breast to the mutual desire of pleasing'. America was already, Diderot believed, the most stable polity in the world because it enjoyed the purest manners: 'Gallantry and gaming, the passions of indolent opulence, seldom interrupt that happy tranquillity…the female sex are still what they should be, gentle, modest, compassionate, and useful.' Such manners would ultimately make the state an international power infinitely superior to Britain or France.[82] Paine's knowledge of Raynal's *Histoire* is certain from his *Letter to the abbé Raynal* of 1782, in which he complained that certain paragraphs were plagiarised from *Common Sense*. That Paine read the book is no surprise given the sheer number of editions of the *Histoire* published during this period and the popularity of Justamond's translations of 1776 and 1788. Like *Common Sense*, it was pessimistic about Britain's future prospects and blamed mixed government for the decline of the state. Whether Paine was influenced by any of Diderot's ideas about ranks and manners in his subsequent writings is impossible to discern; like Diderot, he was reluctant to list his sources. It is, however, an interesting speculation. A surer link is with Brissot and Clavière, who were members of a political circle, including Chamfort and Honoré Gabriel Riquetti de Mirabeau, which blamed the French nobility for the weakness of the state and the economy. In a series of publications from 1787, Clavière and Brissot called for the regeneration of humanity by means of republican government, the levelling of ranks, and a

81 *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, et sur les mœurs et les écrits de Sénèque pour servir d'introduction à la lecture de ce philosophe, Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, ed. J. Assézat (Paris, 1875), 12 vols., iii, 48, 71, 321-4.

82 *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* (London, 1798), trans. J. O. Justamond, 6 vols., vi, 108-9; ii, 90. Many of Diderot's contributions have been published in G. Goggi, *Pensées détachées* (Siena, 1976) and *Mélanges et morceaux divers* (Siena, 1973). Translations and commentary can be found in J. Hope Mason and R. Wokler, eds., *Diderot: Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1992).

political economy of moderate wealth.[83] Paine would have been introduced to both authors in the late 1780s because of their links with Franklin and the *Société des amis des noirs*. By means of their *Société Gallo-Américain*, they were then seeking to propagate their belief that the republicanism of the American Revolution could be applied to large European monarchies. Alongside Condorcet, they were involved with Paine in the creation of the journal *Le Républicain* in 1791 and with Paine contributed to the Girondin journal *La Chronique du mois*. It is likely that they influenced Paine's perspective on ranks, particularly in the early 1790s.

When Paine's ideas are placed in the context of various French republican writings, which appeared to be a single tradition from a British perspective, he ceases to be a lone figure. With regard to the French Revolution, he also ceases to be the innovative thinker so many studies have portrayed. Paine's calls for the destruction of nobility, moderate wealth, and a republican alternative to mixed government, were influenced by Price and Smith but probably developed under the tutelage of such writers as Diderot, Brissot, Clavière and, later, Condorcet. In the early 1790s Clavière and Brissot began to argue that the surest means to abolish nobility and make moderate wealth more widespread was the *assignat* paper-money project for the commercialisation of the French populace. Against them, Paine favoured Condorcet's schemes for pensions and public instruction. After the death of his republican associates in the Terror, Paine's republicanism took another turn. This reflected his loss of optimism about the capacity of republican political institutions to maintain themselves in conditions of historical allegiance to monarchy, church and nobility.[84] He began to argue that the only means of restoring the national unity essential to republican citizenship was to create a rational religion which would teach fraternity. Blaming the

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83 *Point de Banqueroute, ou lettre à un créancier d'état, sur l'impossibilité de la banqueroute nationale, & sur les moyens de ramener le crédit & la paix* (London, 1787); *Observations d'un Républican sur les diverses systêmes d'Administrations provincales* (Lausanne, 1788); *De la France et des Étas-Unis ou de l'importance de l'Étas-Unis pour le bonheur de la France* (Paris, 1791).

84 This can be traced to the letter to Jefferson, April 20 1793, *Complete Writings*, ii, 1330-2.

atheism of such men as Condorcet for their political defeat, he turned, with the old physiocrat Dupont de Nemours, to the religion of Theophilanthropy. The *Age of Reason*, published on Paine's emergence from the Luxembourg, sought to instil in citizens a patriotism capable of distinguishing between enthusiasm and fanaticism, where civic instruction, the civil constitution of the clergy and the *assignats* had failed. Such works as *Agrarian Justice*, however, continued to promote the ideal of moderate wealth which was also the central theme of Condorcet's final republican manifesto, the *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*. *Agrarian Justice* was dedicated to the Directory and noted that 'the present constitution of the French Republic [is] the *best orgranised system* the human mind has yet produced.' His only fear was that the constitution of 1795 violated 'the equality of the right of suffrage' and in doing so diminished 'the enthusiasm that right is capable of inspiring'. In short, only universal manhood suffrage would create a state capable of defeating the monarchies which sought to destroy it. Yet Paine was involved in the Directory's plans for the invasion of England from 1798 and continued to believe that France would defeat Britain in war because of the manliness of the republican state. He donated money to facilitate the abolition of 'the tyranny and corruption of the English government.'[85]

What is beyond dispute is that Paine successfully imported a French republican discussion of the limits of mixed government into a British political scene which had hitherto ignored it. Burke acknowledged this towards the end of his life. Rather than describing the French republic as the historical anomaly of the *Reflections*, doomed to collapse by civil war or the combined arms of Europe's monarchies, he called it a state of unparalleled power. The 'Republick of Regicide' appeared to have reversed the logic of public finance. Bankruptcy, 'the very apprehension of which is one of the causes assigned for the fall of the Monarchy, was the capital on which she opened her traffick with the world.' The patriotism and national unity of committed republicans

85 *Complete Writings*, ii, 675, 1403-5.

had ‘conquered the finest parts of Europe, distressed, disunited, deranged, and broke to pieces all the rest.’[86] Believing ‘our Constitution is not made for this kind of warfare’, Burke argued that Hume’s euthanasia of the constitution was no longer absolute monarchy; rather, it was Paine's republic.[87]

86 *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* [1796], *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford, 1991), 10 vols. so far, ix, 188-193.

87 *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*[1795], *The Writings and Speeches*, ix, 98, 108, 119.