

Franco-American Trade During the American War of Independence : A False Dawn for Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism?

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France's alliance with the newly united states of America in their War of Independence (1776-1783) was like the previous eighteenth-century conflicts between Britain and France, only more so. As these powers lurched from the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1713), to the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and finally to the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), these affairs lost the classic dynastic character of European warfare, moved increasingly off the Continent and into Europe's colonial periphery, and came to be understood by the generality of observers, even outside of the ministerial circles that guarded the *arcana imperii*, quite simply as wars of commerce. Seen through this optic, the nature of the Franco-American Treaty of Amity and Commerce (1778) is better understood by what it implied: open military conflict between France and Britain in an attempt to strip Britain of the same North American colonial possessions (and hence trade) that France lost by the Treaty of Paris (1763), that closed the Seven Years' War. In a word, more of the same, except that the commercial, colonial character

of the Anglo-French rivalry was more fully expressed in this conflict.¹ This impression is only strengthened if we examine the thoughts of one of the architects of this alliance, the Secretary of State, the Comte de Vergennes, who was insensitive, when he was not downright hostile, to the larger dimension of this struggle as the first of the wars of colonial liberation.² Far from marking a new dawn in political order of the Euro-Atlantic world, the commercial character of France's involvement in American War of Independence seemed to mark it as yet another expensive episode of colonial-mercantile warfare in the zero-sum game of international trade.³

Viewed through a different optic, however, the Franco-American alliance in the American War of Independence did more than simply transcend its narrowly commercial character: rather, its utopian political dimension is intelligible only *through* a consideration of commerce. Writing in 1787, Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville and Etienne Clavière saw in the

Abbreviations

A.N., A.E, France: Archives Nationales, Affaires Etrangères

MDEU, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Mémoires et Documents, Etats-Unis

JACF, *Journal d'agriculture, du commerce des arts et des finances*

A note on translation and orthography: all translations are by the author, unless noted. The original for translated passages are to be found in the notes or in text. I have preserved in the original, generally without comment, irregularities of spelling, capitalization and accent.

¹ There was one marginally “continental” aspect to this conflict: France promised to help Spain recover Gibraltar as part of the price of their involvement—a promise on which France eventually reneged. Reginald Horsman, *The Diplomacy of the New Republic, 1776-1783* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1985).

² Of course, early eighteenth-century uprisings in the French and British Antilles could lay claim to being precursors to this breach. See, for example, Stephen Saunders Webb, "An Assassination in Antigua: the Anglo-American Revolution at Mid-Passage." Paper presented at the University of Chicago Early Modern Workshop, April 2003. Dull argues that Vergennes was not even out for revenge against England in this conflict so much as to restore the international balance of power. Dull's argument is taken up below. Jonathan R. Dull, "France and the American Revolution Seen as Tragedy," in *Diplomacy and Revolution: the Franco-American Alliance Of 1778*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1981), 80-87.

³ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World Economy, 1600-1750*, 3 vols., vol. 2, *The Modern World System* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), ch. 5, “Struggles in the Core.”

American constitution, like so many other observers, a “philanthropic system...conforming to the laws of nature,” but this system was absolutely inseparable from the equally philanthropic reign of free trade, which present circumstances, unfortunately, prevented from being implemented in full.⁴ The manner in which the political and economic logic fit together is fully evident in the prospectus for the Société Gallo-Américaine that Brissot and Clavière appended to their treatise *De la France et des Etats-Unis*:

1. By its arms, France has helped to affirm the independence of Free America.
2. A treaty of commerce based upon the interest of both countries must unite them more and more intimately.
3. The moral and political well-being of the two nations must be the principal object and result of these commercial liaisons.

1. La France a par ses armes contribué affermir l'indépendance de l'Amérique libre.
2. Un traité de commerce fondé sur l'intérêt des deux contrées doit les unir de plus en plus intimement.
3. Le bien moral & politique des deux nations doit être l'objet & le résultat principal des ces liaisons de commerce.⁵

Brissot and Clavière's short-lived (January-April 1787) Société Gallo-Américaine set itself the task of strengthening the commercial and cultural linkages that had failed, in the wake of the War of Independence, to materialize as completely as the most optimistic observers had hoped.⁶ These dreams were not imposed upon this alliance retrospectively however, but rather

⁴Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville and Etienne Clavière, *De la France et des Etats-Unis* (London: 1787), 87. References to many of the printed works used in this essay were found in Durand Echeverria and Jr. Everett C. Wilke, *The French Image of America: a Chronological and Subject Bibliography of French Books Printed Before 1816 Relating to the British North American Colonies and the United States*, 2 vols. (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994). Echeverria uses many of the same sources in his earlier study Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: a history of the French image of American society to 1815* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), to which every scholar of this episode is greatly indebted.

⁵ Warville and Clavière, *De la France*, 239.

⁶ It seems that the Société was also conceived by Brissot as an organ(one of many) to raise money for his long-projected sojourn to the United States. This and other aspects of the Société are discussed in

were drawn from the most forceful currents of enlightened opinion in France—and indeed all over Europe.⁷ Earlier, Guillaume Raynal attempted to wrest the larger significance of these events from the apparently narrow interests of Vergennes and other *revenchistes* who pursued the war from the French side.⁸ Raynal's writings on this subject were published in 1781 in a pirated extract of the third (1780) edition of *Histoire philosophique et Politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*.⁹ In narrating the origin of the conflict between colony and metropole, Raynal described the commercial and political oppression of the North Americans as a part of the same complex of tyranny:

A people submitted to the will of another people, which can arrange its government, laws and commerce to their liking, impose it upon them as it pleases them, limit their industry and fetter it by prohibitions, is a serf, yes, it is a serf; and its servitude is worse than that which it would suffer under a tyrant.

Fernanda Mazzanti Pepe, *Il nuovo mondo di Brissot: libertà e istituzioni tra antico regime e rivoluzione* (Turin: Multiversum, 1996), 200-20.

⁷ Echeverria, *Mirage in the West*, ch. 3. For the pan-European dimensions of this phenomenon, see Franco Venturi, *The Great States of the West*, trans. R. Burr Litchfield, 3 vols., vol. 1, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1776-1789* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), ch. 1. See also Eugenio Di Rienzo, "Il 'sogno americano' dell'abbé Morellet," in *L'Europa nel XVIIIe secolo*, ed. Eugenio Di Rienzo (Naples: 1991).

⁸ Of course some French observers tended to see the ruin of England as a universal aspiration. The playwright Beaumarchais, who helped the French government in its efforts to arm the American insurgents through a phony shipping company before 1778, expressed this view perfectly through the mere title of his 1778 pamphlet: Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *Le Vœu de toutes les nations, et l'intérêt de toutes les Puissances, dans l'abaissement et l'Humiliation de la Grande Bretagne* (Paris: 1778).

⁹ Book 18, chapters 38-52, to be exact. Guillaume Thomas Raynal, *Révolution de l'Amérique* (London: Lockyer Davis, 1781). As Carlo Borghero points out, two views of the American Revolution jostle against one another in this work: one very radical, the other quite gradualist and reformist. The fact that may be explained by Denis Diderot's contributions to the *Histoire philosophique*, which are generally taken as the more radical of the two. Borghero discusses the publishing history of *Révolution de l'Amérique* as well as these other issues in "Raynal, Paine e la rivoluzione americana," in *La politica della ragione: studi sull'Illuminismo francese*, ed. Paolo Casini (Milan: Il Mulino, 1978). Cited in Venturi, *The Great States*. Borghero's view, which is shared by Venturi and adopted here, is that since Raynal's work was published and received as the work of one author, it should be treated in the same way, internal contradictions notwithstanding. For more on the problems of authorship in the *Histoire philosophique*, see Michèle Duchet, "L'Histoire des deux Indes: sources et structure d'un texte polyphonique," in *Lectures de Raynal: L'Histoire des deux Indes en Europe et en Amérique au XVIIIe siècle, actes du colloque de Wolfenbüttel*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Manfred Tietz, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1991).

Un peuple soumis à la volonté d'un autre peuple, qui peut disposer à son gré de son gouvernement, de ses loix, de son commerce ; l'imposer comme il lui plaît, limiter son industrie & l'enchaîner par des prohibitions, est serf, oui, il est serf ; & sa servitude est pire que celle qu'il subiroit sous un tyran.¹⁰

While France stood to benefit commercially and politically from a war intended give perfidious Albion its comeuppance, Raynal assured his readers that as a Frenchman he viewed the matter impartially and could affirm that the Revolution “responded to the wishes of Europe.” “The cause of the Americans,” he wrote,

is that of the whole human race; the cause becomes our own...amidst the sound of breaking chains, it seems to us that ours are going to get lighter, and we believe that we will shortly be breathing purer air in the knowledge that there is one less tyrant in the universe. Moreover, these great liberating revolutions are lessons for despots.

est celle du genre humain tout entière; elle devient la nôtre....Au bruit des chaînes qui se brisent, il nous semble que les nôtres vont devenir plus légères ; & nous croyons en quelques momens respirer un air plus pur, en apprenant que l'univers compte des tyrans de moins. D'ailleurs ces grandes révolutions de la liberté sont des leçons pour les despotes.”¹¹

Writing five years earlier, before he and Clavière proposed the Société Gallo-Américaine, Brissot, like Raynal, found justification for the American Revolution almost exclusively in the commercial restrictions imposed by the British on the Americans, but concluded that such a revolution would be good not only for the Americans, but for the British: “the independence of the United States, whose rightness we have demonstrated, will therefore become more useful to Great Britain. The just and the useful, as a party of modern philosophers teach, are united by indissoluble links.”¹² Clearly, his prediction that the Revolution would redound to the benefit of

¹⁰ Raynal, *Révolution de l'Amérique*, 87.

¹¹ Raynal, *Révolution de l'Amérique*, 140, 42, 74.

¹² J.-P. Brissot de Warville, "Considérations sur l'indépendance des Anglo-Américains," *JACF*, April-May (1782): April, 26. Adam Smith first speculated that such a breach would be ultimately profitable for

the British absent some concerted action on the part of the French inspired the Société, but just as noteworthy in this formulation, because it was pursued by so many others, was the yoking together of justice, utility, “modern philosophy,” and commerce (“liens indissolubles”). Here lay the deepest historical significance of this event for French writers who were inclined to see the Revolution as an historical watershed.

The relationship between commerce, what Brissot and Clavière called “the living spirit of society,”¹³ and the political example of revolution in the Americas was pursued further by Marie Jean Condorcet, in his response to an academy prize competition sponsored by Raynal himself in 1783. Raynal asked if the discovery of the Americas had been, on balance, beneficial or harmful to mankind as a whole.¹⁴ Like Raynal, Condorcet believed that the significance of the American Revolution lay partly with the example of the event itself and of the people who conducted it: they reaffirmed for the whole world a panoply of rights established historically in England at the time of the Glorious Revolution (1688-1689) and theoretically somewhat earlier in Locke’s *Second Treatise* (c1683). America’s contribution lay, however, in integrating an English “respect for liberty and property” with a critique of “Machiavellian” mercantilist trade restrictions and the beggar-thy-neighbor theories that underlay them.¹⁵

the British in 1776. [L’indépendance des Etats-Unis, dont nous avons démontré la justice, devient donc encore utile à la Grande Bretagne. Le juste & l’utile, ainsi que l’enseigne une classe de philosophes modernes, sont donc unis par des liens indissolubles.]

¹³ Warville and Clavière, *De la France*, xxxv.

¹⁴ For other answers to this prize essay competition—no prize was ever awarded—see Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Alexandre Mussard, *Avantages et desavantages de la découverte de l’Amérique, Chastellux, Raynal et le concours de l’Académie de Lyon* (Saint-Etienne: Université de Saint-Etienne, 1994). Condorcet’s own response was first printed in 1786 and subsequently in 1788.

¹⁵ Jean Antoine Nicolas Cariat Marquis de Condorcet, “The Influence of the American Revolution on Europe, translated and edited by Durand Echeverria,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1968): 107. On mercantilism as a species of economic “Machiavellianism,” see Lionel Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV: the Political and Social Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965), 46.

Beyond serving as a warning for tyrants and an inspiration for the free, the Revolution was situated, for Condorcet and others, within an historical dialectic involving commerce, knowledge and political freedom that was, in its various permutations, one of the principal “narratives of enlightenment” that informed European historical consciousness of the eighteenth century.¹⁶ Condorcet envisioned enlightenment itself as a type of wealth, available to all of humanity, that would accumulate at least twice as rapidly once Americans were freed of the “social distinctions [and] beckoning ambitions” associated with their tutelage to the mother country, England.¹⁷ Progress in both the useful arts and speculative sciences led to more advanced social views, which would lead enlightened peoples all over the world to reject the principles of economic Machiavellianism; progress would also lead them to question the ideas of natural inequality that dictated European social relations.¹⁸ Even at home in Europe, commerce was forcing the reexamination of age-old prejudices: “the noble is beginning to regard a banker or a merchant almost as his equal.”¹⁹

The narrative of enlightenment in which Condorcet situated the Revolution took commerce as fundamental, as an historical force that came into its own and worked its proper effects after having, for centuries, served Machiavellian purposes quite foreign to it. Commerce became irenic where it had been invidious, cosmopolitan where it had been local or national, and productive of social equality where it had accentuated difference. In a word, the American

¹⁶ Two recent works discuss in more detail the centrality of the concept of Enlightenment itself to eighteenth-century historical imagination. Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997). See also J. G. A. Pocock, *Narratives of Civil Government*, 2 vols., vol. 2, *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999). None of this means, however, that many did not believe that commerce could be an agent of decadence—but even these thinkers granted it a centrality that it would not have attained in the preceding century.

¹⁷ Condorcet, "Influence," 101.

¹⁸ Condorcet, "Influence," 107, 95.

¹⁹ Condorcet, "Influence," 95. Condorcet added: “provided he is extremely rich.”

Revolution announced the triumph of what Albert Hirschmann has termed the eighteenth century's doctrine of *doux commerce*²⁰:

From these same principles, it follows that the welfare of a people is not enhanced by the misfortunes or weakness of their neighbors. On the contrary, it will be increased by the prosperity of other nations, for the people will profit by the examples of good laws and reforms and by the development of new industries, and, in short, by all the advantages which will result from the exchange of ideas and knowledge. At the same time, it is obvious that the progress of each nation will add to the wealth of all and will make it easier to share this wealth more easily.²¹

It should be underlined that this complex set of hopes attached to the Revolution, in which commerce stood at the center, was not a logic that was cobbled together by enlightened but jingoistic (and exclusively French) partisans of the American insurgents. Readers of Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Causes and Nature of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) understood very clearly the relationship between a critique of economic Machiavellianism and the political aspirations of the former British colonists, which is why the first parts of Smith's work to be translated into French, in 1778, were those sections that addressed the origins, and inevitable emancipation of, the American colonies.²² As is commonly recognized, however, Smith was not

²⁰ Albert O. Hirschmann, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph*, second ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996).

²¹ Condorcet, "Influence," 90. Although Condorcet clearly is alluding to the (highly debatable) tendency of wealth to equalize *within* a nation as it becomes more prosperous, he may well also be referring to the tendency, observed by Hume, of wealth to equalize *between* nations. On this subject see Istvan Hont, "The 'Rich Country-Poor Country' Debate in Scottish Classical Political Economy," in *Wealth and Virtue: the Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983). More discussion of the French side of the debate can be seen in Istvan Hont, "The 'Rich Country-Poor Country' Debate Revisited," in *The Political Economy of David Hume*, ed. Carl Wennerlind (London: Routledge, forthcoming, 2004).

²² The translator of these fragments, which were given such a politically current title, explicitly denied having done so for the benefit of "ceux qui s'occupent de la politique du moment," but nevertheless admitted the currency of Smith's writings when he expressed the hope that by publishing this particular fragment, he would interest readers in the whole of Smith's work. Adam Smith, *Fragment sur les colonies en général, et sur celles des Anglois en particulier*, trans. Elie Salomon François Reverdil (Lausanne: La Société Typographique, 1778), preface.

the first to argue for free trade between European nations and their colonial peripheries, and to join this polemic to a critique of “feudal” political institutions. In an oft-quoted letter to foreign minister Vergennes, Controller-General Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot called for the establishment of “Allied Provinces...no longer subjected to the metropole.” Turgot concluded that “nothing can stop the course of things which will certainly lead, sooner or later to the total independence of the English colonies, and, by an inevitable consequence, a complete revolution in the relations between Europe and America.”²³

In making this bold prediction, which he based upon the increasing economic strength of the colonies, Turgot was following a distinctly Physiocratic line of thought developed much earlier. The Physiocrats—the first veritable “school” of economic thought, organized around the doctrines developed by François Quesnay in the 1750s—believed that colonial commerce was fundamentally wasteful because it drew away capital from its most productive employment, agriculture, to commerce which was, technically (and in some senses morally) speaking, sterile. The high profits accruing to overseas trade were the product, on the one hand, of monopoly pricing power, and on the other, of operating subsidies (in the form of protection costs and public financing) granted by the states that were supposed to—but in reality did not—profit from this trade. (This was, as few recognize, the argument of Adam Smith, the supposed apostle of

²³ Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, "Mémoire sur la manière dont la France et l'Espagne devoient envisager les suites de la querelle entre la Grande-Bretagne et ses Colonies (1776)," in *Oeuvres de Mr. Turgot* (Paris: Delance, 1809), 460, 52. Quoted by Paul Cheney, "Les économistes français et l'image de l'Amérique: l'essor du commerce transatlantique et l'effondrement du 'gouvernement féodal'," *Dix-huitième siècle* 33 (2001): 244 and Anthony Pagden, "Heeding Heraclides: Empire and its Discontents, 1619-1812," in *Spain, Europe and the Atlantic World: Essays in Honor of John H. Elliott*, ed. Richard Kagan and Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995). [Provinces alliées...non plus sujets de la Métropole...Rien ne peut arrêter le cours des choses qui amènera certainement tôt ou tard l'indépendance absolue des colonies anglaises, et, par une conséquence inévitable, une révolution totale dans les rapports de l'Europe avec l'Amérique]

industrial capitalism, in favor of agriculture.²⁴) This argument from economic productivity was joined to a denunciation of the “colonial pact,” which dictated that colonies should bear the allegiance, taxes, and economic hardships imposed upon them by the metropole gladly because the latter had founded them, and continued to protect them.²⁵ According to the Physiocrats, commercial restrictions and recurring commercial wars not only violated principles of natural justice, but would dissolve—along with the justification for political and economic tutelage imposed upon the colonies—with the establishment of equal terms of trade and equal political status, for the colonial periphery.²⁶ Here was an early example of the way in which the political and economic ambitions of the colonists and their enlightened supporters were yoked together.

Even those writers who did not accept the whole of the Physiocratic analysis were coming to believe that economic cosmopolitanism, the promise of *doux commerce*, was the only way out of the impasse created by the rise of colonial commerce: war and immiseration where there should be peace and mutual enrichment. Writing in 1776, Jacques Accarias de Serrione, a keen observer of the economies of Holland, England and France, wrote that the true spirit of commerce, and not commercial enmity and warfare, should fix the balance of power between nations: “If the spirit of commerce ever spreads everywhere, wars will become less frequent in

²⁴ Among them Istvan Hont, "The Political Economy of the 'Unnatural and Retrograde' Order: Adam Smith and Natural Liberty," in *Französische Revolution und Politische Ökonomie*, ed. Marion Barzen (Trier: Karl Marx Haus, 1989).

²⁵ For contemporary justifications and explanations of the colonial pact, see François Véron de Forbonnais, "Colonie," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné* 8 (1782). See also Montesquieu, "De l'esprit des lois (1748)," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Roger Caillois, *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), book XXI, ch. 21.

²⁶ See Cheney, "Les économistes français," 236-38; A. Labrouquère, "Les idées coloniales des physiocrates" (thèse pour le doctorat, Université de Paris, 1927); Henri See, "Les économistes et la question coloniale des physiocrates," *Revue d'histoire des colonies* (1929). The latter is cited by Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières: Buffon, Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvétius, Diderot*, *Bibliothèque de L'Evolution de l'Humanité* (Paris: Albin Michel, c1995), 160.

Europe.”²⁷ Free trade between nations, Accarias de Serionne hoped, would not only put an end to episodic European wars, but would civilize the inhabitants of these nations. Writing against Rousseauists on the one hand and reactionary nobles on the other who polarized from either end the eighteenth-century debates over luxury and, hence, commerce, Accarias de Serionne observed that without commerce, “we would be savage wandering people, without laws and without religion.” Beyond these commonly enumerated fruits of civilization, commerce, accepted now by the “esprit philosophique,” also offered more advanced, if infrequently recognized benefits: peace and solidarity between peoples of the world.²⁸

Accarias de Serionne provides a typical example of the way in which commercial cosmopolitanism was seen to fit within the broader political evolution of Europe precisely because he was a respected but in no way extraordinary author. He cited the most important contemporary authorities, his works were reprinted and repackaged, and he was cited, in turn, by the most important economic journals of the day.²⁹ In a word, he expressed a growing consensus among economically liberal progressives (those with Accarias de Serionne’s “esprit philosophique”) that found its way, a decade later as we have seen, into attitudes toward the American Revolution.

Indeed, the Comte de Vergennes, who was initially set before readers of this essay as a narrow, anti-philosophic reactionary *also* saw the Anglo-American conflict through a lens ground for him by cosmopolitan progressives who believed that it was commerce, and not

²⁷ Jacques Accarias de Serionne, *Les Intérêts des nations de l'Europe développés relativement au commerce* (1766), I, 5. Significantly, Accarias de Serionne cites Montesquieu, a principal theorist of *doux commerce*, in support of this observation. [Si jamais l'esprit de Commerce se répand partout, les guerres deviendront moins fréquentes en Europe. La rivalité des Nations n'excitera plus qu'une émulation générale.]

²⁸ Accarias de Serionne, *Les Intérêts des nations de l'Europe*, I, 367-68. [nous serions des Peuples féroces, errans, sans loix & sans Religion]

²⁹ The *Ephémérides du Citoyen* and the *Journal d'agriculture, du commerce des arts et des finances*.

simply dynastic warfare, that should determine Europe's balance of power. Accarias de Serionne, like Vergennes, feared a "Monarchie Universelle de Commerce" on the part of England, but the latter sought to punish England by supporting America. Interestingly, however, Vergennes, however, was not insensible to the charms of *doux commerce* in setting France's long-term policy toward the Anglo-American world. After seeking to reduce England, the same Vergennes oversaw the signing of the Eden Treaty in 1786, which liberalized trade between France and England. Vergennes hoped to revitalize French industry to be sure, but an equally pressing goal was to restabilize the European balance of power by diffusing—through commerce—the conflict between France and England.³⁰

Many historians have rightly observed that public enthusiasm over the Revolution in the thirteen colonies was a sublimated form of dissatisfaction and reformist impulses specific to France.³¹ Nevertheless, France's ambitions during this war were inscribed, as we have seen, within a broader "philosophical" history of commerce that helped to explain how countries so different as France, England, and the infant United States could be described by the same set of historical dialectics that were transforming machiavellian competition into *doux commerce*.

Reformers and exponents of the larger narrative of *doux commerce* took as a given (or, perhaps, in a Kantian sense, as a regulative ideal) that the polities of the Atlantic world were developing, under the impress of commerce, a new form of civil society that was rendering the old distinctions between monarchical and republican states less relevant.³² According to David

³⁰ Dull, "France and the American Revolution Seen as Tragedy," 85.

³¹ In addition to the works by Echeverria and Venturi cited above, see R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: a Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1959), 253-62 and Rienzo, "Il 'sogno americano' dell'abbé Morellet."

³² For a further development of these ideas, see Paul Cheney, "Constitution and Economy in David Hume's Enlightenment," in *The Political Economy of David Hume*, ed. Carl Wennerlind (London: Routledge, forthcoming, 2004).

Hume, the rise of commerce had engendered a set of political and legal reforms that made “civilized monarchies” increasingly similar to “republics” such as England: “they are a government of Laws, not of Men.”³³ Later, in 1748, Montesquieu adumbrated these hopes further when he observed that “commerce has ensured that the knowledge of the moeurs of every nation has penetrated everywhere: they have been compared to one another, and this has resulted in great benefits.”³⁴ Montesquieu believed, for instance, that the rise of commerce was undermining the basis of monarchical despotism, because capital “flees” uncertainty and political repression, while “l’esprit de commerce” unified nations and led to peace.³⁵

At the same time, even as he laid out the guiding premises of the conciliatory theory of *doux commerce*, Montesquieu, who was regarded by his contemporaries as the “father of the science of commerce,”³⁶ proceeded to analyze the rise of modern commerce in terms of the functional differences between monarchies, aristocracies and republics in matters of commerce. When Montesquieu wrote that “commerce stands in relation [rapport] with the constitution,” and then proceeded to analyze this *rapport* in some of the lengthiest sections of the *Spirit of the Laws*, he formalized the common sense of his contemporaries into an explicit set of relationships that could serve as a template for an analysis of the rise of European commerce among its variously constituted states.³⁷ A guiding question of this science of commerce, particularly in France, was: could monarchies hope to rise to the levels of prosperity and commercial power as

³³ David Hume, "Of Civil Liberty (1741)," in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985).

³⁴ Montesquieu, "De l'esprit des lois (1748)," book XX, ch. 1. [le commerce a fait que la connoissance des moeurs de toutes les nations a pénétré partout: on les a comparées entre elles, et il en a résulté de grandes biens]

³⁵ Montesquieu, "De l'esprit des lois (1748)," book XX, ch. 2.

³⁶ "De l'Esprit des Loix, premier extrait," *Journal de Commerce* April (1759), 85-86.

³⁷ Montesquieu, "De l'esprit des lois (1748)," book XX, ch. 4. [le commerce a du rapport avec la constitution,]

their republican neighbors, given the seemingly permanent differences between them — differences that poorly upon monarchies--in matters of social structure, government and institutions?

An examination of French diplomatic correspondence both before and after the 1778 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between France and the United States shows just how persistent the manner of thinking about the economy formalized by Montesquieu at mid-century remained. Since this method tended to emphasize the economic, social and political differences between France and the new American Republic, it underlined, in turn, how fragile the cosmopolitan hopes attached to the Revolution, hopes associated with most liberal doctrines of political economy at the time, really were. Indeed, while most historians speak of “disillusionment” after the war, a look at the views of France’s Consuls in the United States demonstrates how little basis a detailed comparison of French and American society provided for illusion in the first place.³⁸

As its principal ally and financial supporter during the War, France enjoyed increased trade with the United States, whose commercial ties with England were curtailed during this conflict. A tighter liaison with the United States not only provided an outlet for high-value manufactured goods such as textiles coming from the metropole, but also promised an expanded

³⁸ Horsman, *Diplomacy*, passim; Jacques Godechot, "Les Relations économiques entre la France et les Etats-Unis de 1778 à 1789," *French Historical Studies* 1, no. 1 (1958). Peter Hill analyses Franco-American relations by means of the Consular correspondence that is the source for this section, but his study treats a later period, and he is not interested in economic doctrine. Peter P. Hill, *French Perceptions of the Early American Republic, 1783-1793* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1988).

market for the produce of France's sugar islands.³⁹ Sensing the tenuousness of France's commercial advantage over the long term, the French government, through its Consuls of commerce, worked to formulate a commercial strategy for the Americas that would parlay temporary gains into something more permanent "before the peace, that is to say before competition is opened up indiscriminately to every nation, or before preference can be given to England."⁴⁰ Indeed, the question of a resurgent American preference toward the English loomed large. An anonymous merchant advised his local Consul: "Let us not flatter ourselves, they seem attached to us now because they have need of us; [but] they do not like us any more than do the English."⁴¹ Even before the Treaty of Amity and Commerce that joined these two nations, it was unclear that prolonged contact, through commerce, had bred anything but misunderstanding and dislike. The French government anticipated quite early the difficulties that Brissot and Clavière admitted, in proposing the Société Gallo-Américaine, but tried nevertheless to understand how to extend their commerce.

The author of a 1778 memoir pushing for the establishment of a permanent Consul of Commerce in the United States set the problem in terms of knowledge versus ignorance. The French would require a detailed understanding of the commerce and economy of the United States, "their population, their productions, their industry [and] all the necessary, useful and agreeable objects of their consumption." Such an undertaking would help them "to understand,

³⁹ Two other problems were solved by an expansion of this trade: 1) the islands received needed wood and provisions more cheaply; and 2) the turn-around time for merchant's capital was reduced by sending goods to the United States, which increased overall profits. See France: A.N., A.E., BIII 441 "Fragment sur le Commerce intérieur des Isles Françaises et sur leur Commerce extérieur avec la France et les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique" (1778).

⁴⁰ Fear of the eventual opening up of competition was rife, see also MDEU, vol. 2, "Considérations Politiques sur le Commerce de la France avec les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique," 53r.

⁴¹ MDEU, vol. 2, 24 July, 1777, 44r. [Ne nous flattons pas, ils nous paroissent affectionnés aujourd'hui, parce qu'ils ont besoin de nous; ils ne nous aiment pas plus que les Anglois.].

appreciate, extend and solidify” their advantages, but France needed more than a source of state-sponsored market research to accomplish this task.⁴² Consuls placed in the United States would also “carefully observe its inhabitants; their characters, their desires, their moeurs and uncover everything of interest there ...for the Consuls of France and for their policies.”⁴³ Consciously or not, another postulant to the job of Consul invoked Montesquieu when he described the task of drawing comparisons between the productions, manners and political systems of the thirteen states of the U.S. as contributing to “the science of every commercial *rapport*.”⁴⁴ What this meant, concretely, was that no commercial strategy could be worked out that did not understand patterns of trade in their larger sociological context. Consumption and production were linked quite intimately to the forms of society and government that the Americans were forging for themselves in the New World, but it remained to be seen how the unique patterns of French civilization could fit into all of this.

Observing the character, passions and manners of Americans—as well as the political context in which these factors operated—also meant exploring the ways in which French

⁴² This is not to diminish the importance of this sort of information, which was crucial to any useful understanding of France’s competitive position, present or future. See for instance France: A.N., A.E., BIII 441 no. 8, “Mémoire sur les Etats-unis de l’Amérique Septentrionale, le Commerce qui s’y fait, & celui qu’on y peut faire” (1778), which discusses the different qualities of French versus English cloths, and the uses to which they can be put in different regions of the United States. [avant la Pais, c’est à dire avant que la Concurrence en soit ouverte à toutes les Nations indistinctement où que la Préférence en puisse être donnée à l’Angleterre.”];[Leur Population, leur Productions, leur industrie, toute les objets nécessaires, utiles, agréables de leur Consommation.];[savoir, apprécier, étendre et fixer]

⁴³ France: A.N., A.E., BIII 441, “Considérations sur le Commerce de la France avec les Etats-Unis” (1778). [bien observer ses habitants; leur caractères, leur passions, leurs moeurs et y découvrir tous les objets relatifs...aux intérêts du Consuls de la France...[et] à Ceux de sa Politique.”] The function of Consuls of commerce wherever they were present, was to make sure that treaties were obeyed; to attempt to enforce standards of honesty on French merchants; to arrange for the provisioning of Naval vessels; and to police sailors on shore, among other duties. Because of their protracted contact with the locals, the views of the Consuls of Commerce were often highly respected, even above diplomats on mission from the Minister of Foreign Affairs. See Hill, *French Perceptions*, 13-19.

⁴⁴France: A.N., A.E., BIII 441, “Mémoire: Etablissement d’un Consul Général dans les Etats-unis d’Amérique” (1783). [la science des rapports du commerce en tout genre.]

behavior generated friction in the putatively republican milieu of North America. One writer compared the problem to that faced by social climbers, “whose entry into society depends on their reputation”—and whose need for success left little room for error. Because in any society success entailed emulation, French merchants abroad should model their behavior after the “virtuous character of America.”⁴⁵ This said, there was ample reason to believe that French merchants were far from punctilious, exploiting their temporary advantage to overcharge for cheaply made commodities, and gouging Americans on insurance and freight charges into the bargain.⁴⁶ Concluding somewhat pessimistically that “the gratitude that the Americans owe us will not form an indissoluble bond,” the author called for heavy surveillance of French merchants. Without such a moderating influence, the author feared that the Americans might be thrown, by French abuses, back into the arms of their original oppressors, who are “tyrants, but who share religion, language, habits, moeurs and manner of dress with them.”⁴⁷ These sympathies were more permanent, it was thought, than the ideology of Franco-American fraternity that prevailed during the war, which is why another Consul, perhaps Létombe, thought it desirable and necessary to “extinguish liaisons of affinity, blood, religion, laws, moeurs, and language” with the English that hindered new bonds with France.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ France: A.N., A.E., BIII 441, “Second Mémoire: Etablissement d'un Consul Général dans les Etats-unis d'Amérique”(1783). [dont la Réputation dépend de leur entrée dans le Monde];[Caractère vertueux de l'Amérique]

⁴⁶ A practice criticized everywhere in this group of documents. See also France: A.N., A.E., BIII 441 “Troisième Mémoire: Etablissement d'un Consul Général dans les Etats-unis d'Amérique” (1783). See also Hill, *French Perceptions*, 66 and Godechot, “Relations économiques,” 29-30.

⁴⁷ “Second Mémoire.”[la reconnaissance que nous doivent les Américains ne formera pas un lien indissoluble];[Tyrans mais dont la Religion, la langue les usages, les moeurs, les vêtements, leur seront communs]

⁴⁸ MDEU, vol. 2, “Considérations Politiques,” 53v. [eteindre liaisons d'affinité, du sang, de religion, de loix, de moeurs, de langage.]

Because the “Anglo-Americans” were cut from the same cloth, the prosperity of the new United States could easily be seen as a threat, rather than simply “an unprecedented growth in human population and felicity” that others imagined.⁴⁹ One French merchant, who emphasized at each turn the hatred of the Americans for the French, believed that the “necessary consequence” of American independence and prosperity would be an attempt at France’s sugar colonies. “As we wait on their plans for conquest,” he continued, “we must at least expect that they will hurt our trade by means of the trade which they clandestinely conduct with our colonies” The conclusion?: the Americans are much more “ambitious” and “tricky” than even the English, therefore “the insurgents do not deserve our trust any more than the English: they have the same moeurs, maxims, opinions and leanings.”⁵⁰

It was perhaps this basic insight into the opposition between the French and the Anglo-American worlds, a sudden narrowing of the broad horizons presented by the universalizing discourse of *doux commerce*, that led diplomats to think of France’s commercial possibilities in terms of cultural differences and elective affinities. This approach, as I have argued, drew upon an important tradition in France of comparative economic thought about the relationship between the constitution—in the largest sense of the term—and the economy. Indeed, more than twenty years earlier, this comparative approach was applied by Georges Marie Butel Dumont to the

⁴⁹ MDEU, vol. 4, 1776, “Mémoire,” 8r. *Moeurs* is a word that designates a number of different things: habits, customs or even morals. A broader, more contemporary translation might be “culture,” but the term is left untranslated throughout the text. [un accroissement sans exemple de l’espèce humaine et de la félicité humaine]

⁵⁰ MDEU, vol. 2, 24 July, 1777, 43v. [En attendant ce project de conquete, il faut du moins s’attendre qu’ils porteroient du préjudice a notre commerce par celui qu’ils feroient clandestinement dans nos colonies.]; [les insurgent ne meritent pas plus notre confiance que les Anglois, ils ont les moeurs, les maximes, les opinions, penchants]

thirteen North American colonies.⁵¹ Like many an anglophile of the period, Butel-Dumont was inclined to view English prosperity and commercial expansion as an effect of its free and moderate government. Explicitly drawing upon Montesquieu, Butel-Dumont proposed to examine the “spirit of the laws” that governed these colonies, and relate them to their respective levels of prosperity.⁵² Moving beyond the abstract and ill-informed praise that French authors often heaped upon English institutions,⁵³ Butel-Dumont compared the constitution, climate, history, geography, population and moeurs of the thirteen colonies of North America in order to ascertain, from a comparative vantage point, which institutions led to commercial growth and prosperity. François Barbé-Marbois used the same comparative technique in his inquiry into the thirteen American states, but this time to find a niche for French trade in the context of an ill-assorted Franco-American Alliance.

Barbé-Marbois, who is most famous for having arranged for Napoleon the sale of Louisiana to the United States, first arrived in that country in 1779 as the Secretary to the French Legation in Philadelphia, under the Chevalier de la Luzerne. Although Barbé-Marbois’ literary production finally amounted to some fifteen volumes, including a two-volume narrative of his deportation to the French penal colony in Guyana, perhaps his most famous contribution to letters was the impetus he gave to Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Georges-Marie Butel-Dumont, *Histoire et commerce des colonies angloises dans l’Amérique septentrionale: où l’on trouve l’état actuel de leur population, & des détails curieux sur la constitution de leur gouvernement, principalement sur celui de la Nouvelle-Angleterre, de la Pensilvanie, de la Caroline, & de la Géorgie* (London: 1755).

⁵² Butel-Dumont, *Histoire et commerce des colonies angloises*, preface et passim.

⁵³ Josephine Grieder, *Anglomania in France, 1740-1789: Fact, Fiction and Political Discourse* (Geneva: 1985).

⁵⁴ Barbé-Marbois was sent to French Guyana in 1797 by radical elements in the Directory, and returned from exile in 1799. These and other biographical details were gleaned from: Eugene Parker Chase, "Introduction," in *Our Revolutionary Forefathers: the Letters of François, Marquis de Barbé-Marbois During his Residence in the United States as Secretary of the French Legation, 1779-1785* (1929), ed.

Jefferson's work on the *Notes* began as a response to a questionnaire that was sent in 1780 by Barbé-Marbois, in his capacity as Secretary, to learned men and dignitaries in each of the thirteen colonies, asking about their geography, climate, fauna, peoples, manufactures, commerce and finances.⁵⁵ Although Barbé-Marbois' biographer speculates that his questionnaire was intended as spadework for a history of the thirteen colonies, the calls for this sort of information prior to his assumption of the function of Secretary to the French Legation, and the use he eventually made of this material, all point to the conclusion that Barbé-Marbois' questionnaire fit into the larger project of reorienting French commercial strategy in the United States.

It apparently did not take much penetration to see that this country, by dint of its superior natural resources, would eventually dictate the terms of trade (and much else) to the nations of the Old Continent, since so many writers during this period echoed the same views. At the very same time, Barbé-Marbois and others saw expanding opportunities for the trading nations of Europe in the short to medium term. Because of its geography and social structure, the United States could not be expected to develop its industry to the point of independence for quite some time. Wide open spaces, reasoned de Valnais, the French Consul in Boston, ensured that a class of yeoman farmers would predominate, making industrial labor scarce and expensive: "even the artisan, who has expatriated himself to come here to exercise his profession, soon abandons it to

Eugene Parker Chase (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 3-36.; Michaud, *Biographie Universelle, Ancien et Moderne*, 45 vols. (Paris: Delagrave et Compagnie, 1843).; and, more novelistically, Jean Devoisse, *L'Homme qui vendit la Louisiane, récit* (s.l.: Olivier Orban, 1989).

⁵⁵ What little is to be learned about the relation between Marbois and Jefferson can be found in Frank Shuffelton, "Introduction," in *Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Frank Shuffelton (London: Penguin, 1999), vii-xxxiii; and Dorothy Medlin, "Thomas Jefferson, André Morellet, and the French Version of the *Notes on the State of Virginia*," *William and Mary Quarterly*, January (1978). Documents and correspondence between Jefferson and Marbois (but unfortunately not the initial exchanges between the two men) can be found in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1954), volumes 5 and 6.

devote himself entirely to agriculture.”⁵⁶ Barbé-Marbois explained that in the republican United States, whose residents harbored a particular love of freedom, artisans and laborers were considered little better than domestic servants, a circumstance that augured well for European manufactures.⁵⁷ While the habit of freedom in the United States created opportunities for Europe as a whole vis à vis the United States, Barbé-Marbois pursued a finer-grained analysis that could point to France’s place in this new scheme of things.

What Barbé-Marbois found by drawing on the results of these questionnaires is fascinating in the invidious distinction he draws—intentionally or not—between France and the United States, and between regions in the new Republic.⁵⁸ Barbé-Marbois’ basic conclusion was that while he regarded the United States as the new theater of human progress in its pursuit of equality and political and commercial freedom, he recognized that marked differences between regions and states persisted. In particular, social and political inequalities became more pronounced in the South, and it was in these states, which more closely resembled France in their *moeurs*, that French products and merchants could expect to prosper. New Englanders guarded their liberty more jealously than residents of the South; indeed, independent of constitutional arrangements, which varied quite considerably, citizens enjoyed more *de facto* equality in the egalitarian North than in the neo-feudal South. Such preferences obviously had political consequences, but the ramifications were also economic: “In the North [there is] more public prosperity, more individual felicity, a pleasant mediocrity, and a greater population.” This sense

⁵⁶ France: A.N., A.E., BIII 441, de Valnais, “Mémoire sur les Etats de New-Hampshire, Massachusetts-Bay et Rhode-Island” (1781). [L'artisan, qui s'est même expatrié pour y venir exercer [sic] sa profession, l'abandonne bientôt pour se livrer tout entière à la culture des terres.]

⁵⁷ France: A.N., A.E., BIII 441, Barbé-Marbois, “Mémoire: “Les Anglois commercoient avec les treize Etats” (1782), 7v.

⁵⁸ The names of the respondents to this questionnaire are scribbled in the margins of Barbé-Marbois’ document.

of equality stemmed from the ferocity of the Protestant sects that so dominated New England. Barbé-Marbois regarded Presbyterians as a group of fanatics, but appreciated their compensating virtue of detesting “arbitrary government” even more than their British counterparts. Their detestation of arbitrary government reinforced a set of “severe *moeurs*” that contributed to the “pleasant mediocrity” in the polity by uniting around “an attitude that proscribes excess.”⁵⁹ These were a people who worked, saved and invested in order to exploit their vast natural resources. Barbé-Marbois concluded that France would have little commerce with the states of New England, except in the unlikely event that corruption overtook them.

Toward the South the situation changed drastically. In addition to finding more planters of French origins (e.g. in South Carolina, a destination of victims of the Edict of Nantes of 1685), Barbé-Marbois discerned more generally a social structure and local character that resembled France and its institutions, leading him to conclude that “luxury and inequality of wealth in these states favors our commerce.” France was likely to benefit from the persistence of slavery in these states—which was only symptomatic of a larger pattern of inequality—in a number of different ways. The first was that French traders could be expected to compete more easily in an environment where inequality bred lassitude: “Liberty has animated everybody in the North, where everything belongs to those who work. In the South, slavery fetters the activity of the half of mankind.” Indeed, in the South, as one Consul observed, free men would not bestir themselves to clear agricultural land, but depended instead upon slave labor.⁶⁰ Even where goodwill and motivation were not lacking, the simple fact remained that “excessive inequality of fortunes” made it impossible for the poor to launch any sort of enterprise. Instead, surpluses fell

⁵⁹Barbé-Marbois, “Mémoire: “Les Anglois commercoient...” [Dans le nord une plus grande prospérité publique, plus de bonheur particulier, un heureux médiocrité, plus de population.”];[l’opinion pour proscrire les superfluités]

⁶⁰ MDEU, vol. 10, “Observations,” 4v.

into the hands of the rich, whose tastes gravitated toward the goods fashioned for France's own parasitic classes: china, handsome furniture, porcelain, and fine cloths of every description.⁶¹

A comparison of Barbé-Marbois' analysis of the American states with that of Butel-Dumont's earlier treatment in his *Histoire et commerce des colonies angloises* gives us a sense of the underlying pessimism that informed the Consular appraisals of the situation on the ground in America. This study of the English colonies of North America was written in the mid 1750s as a part of a general efflorescence of economic writing in France, much of which was inspired by Vincent Gournay, France's Intendant of Commerce.⁶² Gournay never published anything, but cultivated and organized the efforts of an energetic group of economist-administrators who elaborated the theoretical basis for French economic reforms in print, while shepherding them through whatever administrative domains they controlled.⁶³ While many of the authors in the Gournay circle drew their inspiration from the example of England and were, correspondingly,

⁶¹ Barbé-Marbois, "Mémoire: "Les Anglois commercoient..." [le luxe et l'inégalité des fortunes dans ces états, favoriseront notre Commerce.]; La liberté, a toute animé dans le nord où tout appartient a celuy qui travaille. Au sud, l'Esclavage enchaîne l'industrie de la moitié des hommes.] The idea of North-South distinction that could be commercially exploited by France is echoed in many of the Consular letters and memoirs. See, for example, MDEU, vol. 4, 1780 "Observations entre la France, ou ses Colonies et les Etats-Unis, 32r-34v. and MDEU, vol. 10, "Observations sur Les Etats Unis de L' Amerique," 4r-6v.

⁶² Contemporary attestations of this phenomenon abound, but a more recent statistical survey can be found in Christine Théré, "Economic Publishing and Authors, 1566-1789," in *Studies in the History of French Political Economy: from Bodin to Walras*, ed. Gilbert Faccarello, *Routledge Studies in the History of Economics* (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁶³ On Vincent Gournay's circle and Butel-Dumont, see Loïc Charles, "La Liberté du commerce des grains et l'économie politique française (1750-1770)" (Thèse pour le doctorat, Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1999), 129, 39-41, Simone Meyssonier, *La Balance et l'horloge: la genèse de la pensée libérale en France au XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris: Editions de la Passion, 1989), 168-209.

deeply critical of the social and political institutions of old regime France,⁶⁴ their emphasis was placed squarely upon the enlightened reform of a Monarchy, and of an economy, that had made great gains, particularly in foreign trade, in the early part of the century.⁶⁵ Therefore, when Butel-Dumont compared the laws and institutions of England's colonies in North America with an eye towards the "spirit of their laws," it was of course intended to draw attention to the superior constitutions, manners and institutions of some American colonies (particularly New England), but their moderate, free government and intermediary bodies were explicitly intended as models for French reform. At the same time, Butel-Dumont, like Barbé-Marbois and his Consular colleagues, saw in the American South (particularly in Georgia and the Carolinas) backward, one might even say repellent, societies whose neo-feudal character condemned them to economic stagnation and inequality. The principal difference in their treatment lay in the fact that while Butel-Dumont took the American South (however accurately he characterized it) as an atavism and a negative example, Barbé-Marbois saw it, through the logic of cultural affinity, as France's commercial future. However unintended, this statement about France's culture and institutions was deeply pessimistic, and syncopated oddly, to say the very least, with drumbeat of universalist, cosmopolitan views that attached to the Franco-American alliance. Were commerce and enlightenment really drawing the nations of the Euro-Atlantic world into a common civilization?

⁶⁴ See, paradigmatically, Plumard de Dangeul, *Remarques sur les Avantages et les Desavantages de la France et de Grande-Bretagne par rapport au Commerce & aux autres Sources de la Puissance des Etats* (Leiden: 1754).

⁶⁵ Paul Butel, *L'Economie Française au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: SEDES, 1993), 80-87; Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, vol. 130, *Harvard Historical Studies* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1998), 138-63.

Some objection could be made that hard-headed diplomatic assessments with limited aims and no eye toward publicity are likely to conflict with macrohistorical theses formulated by *philosophes* weaned on Livy, Bossuet, and Voltaire.⁶⁶ However, if we return to one of the most optimistic, “philosophical” accounts, we can detect the same tension between the ostensible historical significance of the Revolution and the Franco-American alliance, and the realities that trade between these two nations had to accommodate.⁶⁷ Like Barbé-Marbois and others, Brissot and Clavière believed that a strengthening of trade relations between France and America would require a concerted study on the part of the French of America’s climate, resources, government and *moeurs*.⁶⁸ They also shared a common apprehension that the “philosophical” alliance and the consequent benefits to French trade could easily be trumped by the commonalities of Anglo-American culture—and of course the superior competitiveness of English manufacturers and commercial practices.

⁶⁶ For a polemical survey of the historiographical culture of the Enlightenment, see Chantal Grell, *L'Histoire entre érudition et philosophie: étude sur la connaissance historique à l'âge des lumières* (Paris: PUF, 1993), especially 217-30 on Voltaire.

⁶⁷ Warville and Clavière’s understanding of the significance of this event “which France has so powerfully aided,” compared favorably with the “philosophical” scope of Condorcet or Raynal: “The first and the greatest advantage of this revolution, at least in the eyes of the *philosophe*, is its salutary influence upon human understanding, and on the reform of social prejudices. For this war has given rise to the discussion of several issues of importance to public happiness, the discussion of the social contract, of civil liberty....Enlightened by this revolution, the governments of Europe will be forced to gradually reform their ambitions and reduce their taxes...” [Le premier, le plus grand avantage de cette révolution, au moins aux yeux du philosophe, est celui de son influence salutaire sur les connoissances humaines; & sur la réforme des préjugés sociaux. Car cette guerre a occasionné la discussion de plusieurs points importants, pour le bonheur public ; la discussion du contrat social ; de la liberté civile....Eclairés par cette révolution, les gouvernements d’Europe seront forcés, de réformer insensiblement leurs vues, de diminuer leurs fardeaux...] Warville and Clavière, *De la France*, xxx-xxxii.

⁶⁸ Warville and Clavière, *De la France*, v.

Brissot and Clavière's proposed solution was grounded in a set of observations that emphasized the differences between "Free America" (their term for the United States, in anticipation of further uprisings) and the societies of Old Europe, of which France was, in some sense, the epitome. Unlike Barbé-Marbois and his colleagues, the logic was one of complementariness rather than of similarity, but in both cases France's perceived point of commercial leverage was hardly flattering. Adopting an explicitly Rousseauian language of luxury, refinement and decline, Brissot and Clavière argued that since Americans were transplanted Europeans, they had of course brought with them some taste for refinement and luxury. Nothing could wholly eliminate these tastes, particularly in those Americans living in large cities.⁶⁹ This said, as Europeans on the road to decline, Americans could hope to safely preserve themselves at the ideal midpoint between savagery and over-refinement described by Rousseau in his first discourse on the sciences and the arts by consuming European, and particularly French manufactures. In this manner, they could hope to avoid the social deformities that attended the production of manufactures in general, and of luxuries in particular: "at the least in slowing the growth of manufactures within their borders, the United States will slow the decadence of *moeurs* and public spirit."⁷⁰ These efforts were better left to France, whose aristocratic culture possessed a special genius for the production of refined novelties.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Warville and Clavière, *De la France*, 50-52. On Brissot's Rousseausim, see Mazzanti, *Brissot*, 26 et passim.

⁷⁰ Warville and Clavière, *De la France*, 61. [au moins en retardant la naissance des manufactures dans leur enceinte, les Etats Unis retarderont, la décadence des moeurs & de l'esprit public]

⁷¹ This was a common and long-held belief. See, e.g., Lacome de Prezel, *Les Progrès du commerce* (Amsterdam et Paris: A.-M. Lottin, 1760), 398.

Moreover, as these authors suggested, the social structures appropriate to the production (and not simply the consumption) of luxury goods reinforced inequality.⁷² From this, Brissot and Clavière concluded—to take one of several possible examples—that wine production should be left to the French, since vineyards necessitated large capital outlays that required, and reinforced, social inequality. On the other end of the social spectrum, the process of luxury manufacture itself condemned the lower orders to “vegetate miserably in the cities or in the surrounding areas, turning perpetually in the same circle of mechanical and routine labor.” These were activities fit for Europeans, but not for American citizens and yeoman farmers “far from this degradation.”⁷³ In effect, France was to benefit from trade with America by remaining a repository of political and social evils that the American Revolution was to have eliminated on the other side of the Atlantic.

Subsequent to the signing of the treaty of Paris in 1783, the most negative presentiments in matters of Franco-American trade of Barbé-Marbois and other observers were realized, even as larger crises in Franco-American relations loomed just beyond the horizon: the American

⁷² Many Americans also believed in this relationship, and the corrupting influence of manufactures. See Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 109-10 (on connections to Brissot and Clavière) and more generally chapter 4.

⁷³ Warville and Clavière, *De la France*, 117. [condamnées à végéter misérablement dans des villes ou dans leurs environs, roulant perpétuellement dans le même cercle de travaux mécaniques et routinières.] Brissot and Clavière did not discover the alienation that attended the expansion of factory labor, of course. See the prescient comments of Smith and Ferguson: Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), ed. Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), bk. V, ch.1, pt. III, art.II.; Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), ed. Duncan Forbes (Edinburg: Edinburg UP, 1966), especially parts forth and sixth.

debt, the Jay Treaty, the X, Y, Z affair, just to name a few.⁷⁴ What is striking in the episode just recounted is not simply that it was a harbinger—and perhaps even a cause, due to the now-familiar charge of “ingratitude”—of later misunderstandings between France and America. There is interest in this fact (how could there not be at this particular moment?) but as Philippe Roger points out, the discourse of Franco-American antipathy is many-sided, and the notion of origins is hazardous when we are speaking of phenomena relating to a nation’s deep political unconscious.⁷⁵ More significant, perhaps, in this episode are some of the paradoxes that attached, in the French case, to one of the master concepts of the Enlightenment as a whole: *commerce*.

For any self-respecting French *philosophe*, while Enlightenment was universal and universalizing, France was its origin and veritable home.⁷⁶ At the same time, while commerce was believed to play a central role in the spread of the Enlightenment and its values, France itself seemed excluded—by dint of its very *moeurs*—from commerce with the newest flower of the Enlightenment, the United States. Where it was viewed as having a role to play in this trade, as we have seen, it was for reasons that utopian thinkers such as Condorcet would have regarded as unworthy of an enlightened nation. It is a sign of the enormous conceptual weight that commerce carried that it could provide the underpinning for a narrative about the reconciliation of national interests under the banner of enlightenment, but also serve to emphasize, sometimes very

⁷⁴ A number of different works can be cited in this connection, so here I will only indicate a couple. Peter Hill expertly chronicles the travails between these two countries in the period subsequent to this essay using Consular correspondence and memoirs as well. See Hill, *French Perceptions*. Allan Potofsky takes up the most immediate sequel in his communication for this conference, “The Political Economy of “Deficit Consciousness” in the French Revolution.” Beyond the disaster of the 1794 Jay Treaty, which is not examined in much detail, Phillippe Roger’s recent work provides the broadest and most recent account reaching into the twentieth century. Philippe Roger, *L’Ennemi américain: généalogie de l’antiaméricanisme français* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

⁷⁵ Roger, *L’Ennemi américain*, introduction.

⁷⁶ On the paradoxes of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism and nationalism, see Robert Morrissey, “The *Encyclopédie*: monument for a nation,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (2002-2003), 143-50.

unflatteringly for France, the differences between two nations bound by the hazards of war, and a Treaty of Amity and Commerce.

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