# AN END TO POVERTY?

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## A HISTORICAL DEBATE

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To my mother

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# INTRODUCTION

This book employs history to illuminate questions of policy and politics which still have resonance now. It aims to make visible some of the threads by which the past is connected with the present. It does so by bringing to light the first debates, which occurred in the late eighteenth century, about the possibility of a world without poverty. These arguments were no longer about Utopia in an age-old sense. They were inspired by a new question: whether scientific and economic progress could abolish poverty, as traditionally understood. Some of the difficulties encountered were eerily familiar. Many of the problems which politicians and journalists imagine to have arisen in the world only recently – globalisation, financial regulation, downsizing and commercial volatility – were already in the eighteenth century objects of recurrent concern.

It is of course true that the world in which discussion of these issues first arose was very different from our own. It was dominated by the revolutions of 1776 in America and 1789 in France, as well as by the first movements to overcome slavery

and empire. The arguments discussed in this book took place in a period which witnessed the overturning of ancient forms of sovereignty across Europe, direct assaults upon monarchy, aristocracy and church, crises of religious belief, the emergence of 'the common people' as an independent political force, and a war fought across all the oceans of the world.

But to a greater degree than we are prone to imagine, those upheavals and their legacy are still relevant to us. Our conceptions of the economy, both national and international, and its relationship to political processes are still in some ways shaped by the conflicts discussed in this book. So are the relationships between religion, citizenship and economic life. Those who doubt the relevance of history because they believe that the world was made anew by the defeat of Communism, the end of the Cold War, and the demise of socialism at the beginning of the 1990s, do not escape its hold. They simply become the guileless consumers of its most simple-minded reconstructions. Those who devised the new reform programmes of post-socialist parties, desperate to remove any residue of an old-fashioned and discredited collectivism, hastened to embrace a deregulated economy hopefully moralised by periodic homilies about communitarian sentiment. By doing this, they imagined themselves to be buying into an unimpeachable and up-to-date liberal tradition handed down in a distinguished lineage of economists and philosophers inspired by the *laisser faire* libertarianism of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.

This book reveals that such assumptions are at best dubious and, for the most part, false. The free market individualism of American conservatives and the moral authoritarianism which often accompanies it are not the products of Smith (although they certainly draw selectively upon certain of his formulations), but of the recasting of political economy in the light of the frightened reaction to the republican radicalism of the French Revolution.

Smith's analyses of 'moral sentiments' and commercial society were not the exclusive possession of any one political tendency. The battle to appropriate his mantle was closely intertwined with the battle over the French Revolution itself. Modern commentators are agreed that Smith was not in any distinctive or meaningful sense a Christian, while those who wrote about him at the time strongly suspected it; worse still, at least for contemporaries, the evidence provided by his revisions to the 1790 edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which he had originally written in 1759, suggested that at the end of his life he was even less of a Christian than before. This was not merely a minor or incidental quirk in Smith's picture of the world, it informed his fundamental conception of human motivation as well as his theory of history. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith wrote of the ambition which drove on 'the poor man's son' to strive to become rich and, if successful, to advertise his newfound status by procuring 'mere trinkets of frivolous utility'. After a disquisition on the impossibility of translating wealth into happiness, Smith concluded:

> Power and riches appear then to be, what they are, enormous and operous machines contrived to produce a few trifling conveniences to the body, consisting of springs the most nice and delicate, which must be kept in order with the most anxious attention, and which in spite of all our care are ready every moment to burst into pieces, and crush in their ruins their unfortunate possessor.

Nevertheless, he continued, 'It is well that nature imposes on us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind.'[1]

The idea that some kind of trick or self-deception was the basic motivating factor behind human activity, but that it was nevertheless to be cherished – because it explained why mankind was induced to 'found cities and commonwealths, and to invent and improve all the sciences and arts, which ennoble and embellish human life' – was difficult to integrate either into Christianity or into what in the years after 1789 was presented as a post-Christian republican alternative. Smith's picture derived from classical sources, part stoic and part epicurean. It sat ill with Christian evangelicalism. Nor did it accord well with counter- or post-revolutionary apologias for aristocracies, merchants, established churches, low wages or the outlawing of combinations of labourers. But then nor could it be said to endorse republicanism, egalitarianism, democratic representation or the toppling of aristocracies. Supporters and opponents of the Revolution, therefore, annexed different parts of Smith's picture

of commercial society to support rival visions of social and political life.

This story of the bifurcation of Smith's legacy is relevant to the present. On the one side, anti-republicans married a version of Smith to a bleak possessive individualism underpinned by Christian evangelical theology. This authoritarian but anti-paternalist philosophy was elaborated into what became known in Britain as 'liberal Toryism' and it remained dominant in the 'Treasury view' of economic and welfare policy from the aftermath of the battle of Waterloo down to the criticisms of Keynes and the end of the gold standard in 1931.[2] In modified form, parts of it have survived and continue today in the neo-conservative ethos of American Republicanism.

One extreme bred another. It was this conservative and anti-utopian transformation of political economy which in turn produced by way of reaction the genesis of revolutionary socialism. Especially influential was Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* of 1798. The population theory provided the main bulwark against further attempts to enlarge the framework of collective welfare provision for around a century. Furthermore, its replacement, both in economic theory and in social policy of a language of civil society and political participation by a language of 'natural forces', legitimated and institutionalised a fear and suspicion of the 'labouring poor' which the reaction against the Revolution had already done so much to intensify.

For conservatives, the Revolution was almost from the

beginning a demonstration of the fallacy of ignoring the primacy of the passions over reason in human affairs. In the course of the 1790s, this outlook, deeply rooted in Christian assumptions about original sin, was translated into the terms made available by the Newtonian language of natural theology and was extended into the sphere of sexual gratification. By treating reproduction as a biological imperative and the primal driving force behind the activities of the mass of humanity, past, present and future, Malthus subordinated all history, law and culture to an instinctual non-social and ahistorical force. Once this conception had been implanted at the heart of political economy, the core of economics was henceforth situated in the realm of nature. It was for this reason that a crude behavioural approach to human psychology came to be considered the appropriate method in the development of economic theory.

What this ignored was the fact that observed regularities in the process of production, consumption and exchange, far from belonging to nature, were only possible when such transactions were regulated according to law and custom. It was for this reason that Hegel, who was a careful reader of Smith, treated the emergence of 'civil society' and the formalisation of its anatomy in political economy as distinctive products of the modern world. For 'civil society' presupposed a set of legal and cultural norms within which a 'system of needs' could develop. It presupposed the overthrow of the violence and arbitrariness of slavery and feudalism.

In Germany, Hegel's optimistic and moderately progressive picture of civil society was also pushed on to the defensive by a combination of fundamentalist pietism, aristocratic reaction, possessive individualism and a romantic reassertion of the divine right of monarchy.[3] Marx's redescription of Hegel's conception of civil society, what he called 'the capitalist mode of production', also therefore drew more upon Malthus than upon Smith and Hegel in its depiction of the economy. The economy was depicted as an arena in which man had become dominated by his own creations and had reverted to a language of 'natural forces' to describe his relations with his fellow beings. As Marx wrote to Engels about *The Origin of the Species* in 1862:

> It is remarkable how Darwin rediscovers, among the beasts and plants, the society of England with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, 'inventions' and Malthusian 'struggle for existence'. It is Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes* [the struggle of all against all] and is reminiscent of Hegel's *Phenomenology* in which civil society figures as an 'intellectual animal kingdom', whereas, in Darwin, the animal kingdom figures as civil society.[4]

Thus, both in the dominant language of political economy and, perversely, in what was to become the most influential critique of political economy, a strange consensus conspired to push the legal, institutional and cultural

dimensions of the analysis of commercial society to the margins.

Could there have been an alternative to this conservative trajectory and the revolutionary communism it provoked in response? What of the use that the republican supporters of enlightenment and the Revolution, Antoine-Nicolas Condorcet and Thomas Paine, made of Smith and other advances in the eighteenth-century moral and social sciences, to form the social underpinnings of a viable republic? As this book makes clear in its discussion of the reaction to the proposals of Condorcet and Paine in anti-Jacobin England and post-Jacobin France, such an alternative was virtually smothered at birth. Even when its protagonists were not literally burnt in effigy – as Paine was all over England in the early 1790s – or pushed like Condorcet to a premature death, their proposals were radically misrepresented. Nor was there a strong constituency pushing for such policies among those supporting the ideals of the Revolution. Moderates simply hoped that post-1789 France would resemble post-1688 England. But among those still pressing for reform at home, Smith was henceforward harnessed together with Malthus. Those who seriously questioned this equation were relegated to a romantic twilight zone beyond the pale of respectable economics. Conversely, for those on the left of the Revolution, the proposals associated with Paine and Condorcet were considered too respectful of commerce and

private property to be of use. Nor did the situation greatly improve in the two centuries following 1789. The tax and welfare policies of Condorcet and Paine, when not wholly forgotten, were only recalled as oddities of no programmatic relevance. Later proposals for national insurance and old age pensions drew upon other sources of inspiration and were designed to attain different political aims.

In the twentieth century, the tradition which pushed the interpretation of Smith rightwards, from Hayek to Himmelfarb, built up a strong and elaborate case resting, among other things, upon an old-fashioned respect for historical scholarship.[5] By contrast, the left, which was reluctantly forced to retreat from Marxism, often seems drawn towards the abandonment of any detailed engagement with the historical terrain at all. Its preoccupation with what it likes to call 'the enlightenment project' has generally been of a distant and condescending kind, largely uninterested in the detailed political and cultural disagreements that arose between those covered by the term. By making knowledge itself the enemy of progress, this approach has closed off historical curiosity and has deprived progressive currents in contemporary political debate of a usable and honourable historical tradition upon which to build.

In this book, by contrast, I will argue that the moment of convergence between the late Enlightenment and the ideals of a republican and democratic revolution was a fundamental historical turning point. However brief its appearance, however vigorously it was thereafter repressed, it marked

the beginning of all modern thought about *poverty*. Neoconservative historiography belittles the importance of this episode in the history of social thought as little more than an eccentric tinkering with Poor Law reform. Old left historiography minimises its significance because it is still fixated upon the 'bourgeois' limitations of such programmes. Post-Marxist parlance, on the other hand, condemns it for its supposed equation between knowledge, power and emancipation, or for its imagined epistemic inadequacies on questions of race, class or gender.

What was new about this revolutionary moment at the end of the eighteenth century was the realisation that there need no longer be such thing as 'the poor'. This in turn was a product of the new conditions of the eighteenth century. After the bitter and protracted conflicts unleashed by the religious and civil wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the eighteenth century was the first period in which the populations of many European countries experienced prolonged periods of internal peace. It was the first time, therefore, that observers were in a position to discern an underlying pattern, rhythm or system to economic life, a pattern that was relatively distinct from the bellicose politics – military, commercial and imperial – of the courts and aristocracies of Europe. This was the context in which, for the first time, contemporaries could begin to discuss the meaning and implications of living in a commercial society, or what would now be called 'capitalism'.

Across Europe, the period between the late seventeenth

and the early nineteenth centuries witnessed an increase in market-oriented activity on such a scale that economic historians have called it 'the industrious revolution'. The imperatives of commercial society reached into the poorest cottage. Leisure time declined, as the attractions of a money income or the necessity for it increased. Domestic production was increasingly devoted to marketed goods and no longer to goods or services directly consumed within the household. Seasons of under-employment in marginal agricultural areas were increasingly absorbed by spinning, weaving or other manufacturing activities in what used to be called 'the putting-out system', or more recently 'proto-industry'. There was a substantial increase in the market-oriented labour of women and children. The pace and intensity of work increased.[6]

In such a society, the afflictions regularly attending the lifecycle of wage and salary earners became clearly visible. For the first time, such afflictions could be seen to form part of a pattern which pre-existed the peculiarities of temperament or behaviour of particular individuals. This sense of a pattern was the product of a prolonged period of internal peace, of the rule of law, of growing prosperity, and of the relatively uninterrupted development of economic activity. As a result, habitual attitudes towards the poor had begun to become dislodged.

As far back as the end of the seventeenth century, the difference in prosperity between the English economy and any other in the world had been noted by John Locke. Modern

nations, even if poor in resources, could feed their populations without resort to conquest, thanks to the increasing productivity of the land. According to Locke: 'There cannot be a clearer demonstration than that American tribes who possess unlimited land, but no private property, have not one hundredth part of the Conveniences we enjoy.' A king of one their large territories 'feeds, lodges and is clad worse than a day labourer in England'. The same point was reiterated by Smith at the beginning of *The Wealth of Nations*.[7]

But if commercial society were associated with a progressive improvement in the conditions of life and a greater chance of bettering one's condition, it came at a cost. The cost of enjoying the opportunities offered by this more volatile world was the willingness to live with chance. The afflictions which individuals had to face were not confined to the ups and downs of the lifecycle. There would also be those 'constantly thrown off from the revolutions of that wheel which no man can stop nor regulate, a number connected with commerce and adventure'.[8] The ever-changing development of the division of labour and the expansion of the market meant that no person's employment could be considered wholly secure. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the development of this market became ever more extensive, shifts in the international division of labour meant that thousands of families could lose their principal source of livelihood overnight.

Finally, there was what has come to be known as 'the vision thing', which, as most political observers are aware, is

always prone to become more expansive in times of revolution. As a result of 1776 and 1789, references to the 'people' could no longer ignore or evade questions about representation, democracy or equality, while the rich were reminded that their hegemony was provisional and contingent. Politically, the effect of the American and French Revolutions was to dislodge or undermine early modern commonplaces about the place of the poor in the social hierarchy. Instead, there emerged the beginnings of a language of social security as a basis of citizenship.

In this new approach, there was no such thing as poverty; there was no such entity as 'the poor'. In their place, there were 'a great number of individuals almost entirely dependent for the maintenance of themselves and their families either on their own labour or on the interest from capital invested so as to make their labour more productive'.[9] Such individuals encountered difficulties in the course of their lives, some predictable, some unforeseen. Some individuals were afflicted by disability from the beginning; some were disabled by accident, violence or war. Breadwinners died prematurely or became chronically sick. In old age – and now even more in extreme old age – individuals could no longer earn their living, and so were likely to need increasing amounts of care. In many instances, their families were no longer able to help them; or they might have lost what families they once had. The care of children before they were able to contribute to the livelihood of the household could also become onerous. It could be measured particularly in

the temporary loss of the earnings of one of the parents, or alternatively in the cost of child care and schooling. Then again, economic misfortune might strike, not because a breadwinner died, but because marriages broke down or a partner suffered desertion. Throughout recorded history the phenomenon of the single-parent family has reappeared at the forefront of every investigation of poverty, too often to the surprise of investigators expecting to find something darker or more sinister at its unromantic core.

These new ways of thinking about the traditional notion of poverty raised new questions. Should the welfare of the poor be left to the face-to-face ministrations of the charitable, or should it be assigned to the statutory but often punitive relief afforded by the Poor Laws? Should individuals be entrusted to exercise their own independent foresight and be prepared to pit their own modest resources unaided against the uncertainties of life? Or should the development of international markets be slowed down or limited through government control or protection? Should the abandonment of leadership implied in the term *laisser faire* be condemned and replaced by a new sense of interdependence between rich and poor reminiscent of what had once supposedly pertained in the feudal world? Should people attempt to create a new sense of spiritual community? Should chance be eliminated altogether through the establishment of 'villages of cooperation' or the formation of one large 'association of the producers'? Or should governments attempt to live with chance, both national and international,

but establish effective control over its effects through the universal and comprehensive adoption by their citizenry of a scheme of universal and comprehensive social insurance? As this book argues, such were the questions about poverty and its abolition which the era of the American and French Revolutions first raised – questions, or questions very like them, which are still with us today.

# I

# THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE PROMISE OF A WORLD BEYOND WANT

It was in the 1790s at the time of the French Revolution that there first emerged the believable outlines of a world without endemic scarcity, a world in which the predictable misfortunes of life need no longer plunge the afflicted into chronic poverty or extreme want. This idea was not another version of the medieval fantasy of the land of Cockaigne, in which capons flew in through the window ready-cooked. Nor was it the update of a more serious invention, *Utopia*, most famously that created by Sir Thomas More in 1516. This was the 'nowhere', or 'good place' according to the pun contained in the Greek word, whose social customs and arrangements offered an ideal perspective from which to criticise the present and to imagine another way of being. What was put forward was neither a vision of a lost golden age nor the dream of an unreachable place; and what was described was neither a world turned upside down nor an apocalyptic community of goods.

Redistribution there would certainly be, but measured, moderate and gradual, an optimistic – but in no sense

impossible – extrapolation of the progress of the century and the opportunities of the present. What were described were the new social arrangements which would underpin the peaceful land of the 'new Adam'. The French Revolution was ushering in a new world, which was spreading outwards from western Europe and the American Republic. Concretely, and in the words of English subject turned 'citizen of the world' Tom Paine, it would be a society in which 'we' no longer 'see age going to the workhouse and youth to the gallows'; one in which orphanhood, single parenthood, unemployment, sickness, old age or the loss of a breadwinner would be relieved by right.[1]

The reasons for this optimism were spelt out in general terms by the famous *philosophe* and visionary mathematician Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, formerly the Marquis de Condorcet, in his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*. Condorcet completed the *Sketch* while in hiding from the Jacobin authorities at the beginning of the 'Terror', on 4 October 1793. It was published by the French Republic at its own expense one year after Condorcet's death in a prison cell in March 1794, in the last months of Robespierre's rule. 'Everything tells us', Condorcet argued, 'that we are now close upon one of the great revolutions of the human race.' The intellectual progress of humankind was now about to be accompanied by a material transformation of the human condition. 'The labours of recent ages', Condorcet wrote, 'have done much for the honour of man, something for his liberty, but so

far almost nothing for his happiness.'[2] But the history of modern times – from Descartes to the French Revolution – had prepared the way for a great change in the physical and social prospects of mankind. This transformation had already begun. Condorcet attempted to describe its trajectory in his concluding chapter of the *Sketch*, 'The Future Progress of the Human Mind'.

Against those who maintained that the gulf between rich and poor was an inescapable part of 'civilisation', Condorcet argued that inequality was largely to be ascribed to 'the present imperfections of the social art'. 'The final end of the social art' would be 'real equality' – 'the abolition of inequality between nations' and 'the progress of equality within each nation'. Ultimately, this progress would lead to 'the true perfection of mankind'. Apart from the 'natural differences between men', the only kind of inequality to persist would be 'that which is in the interests of all and which favours the progress of civilisation, of education and of industry, without entailing either poverty, humiliation or dependence'. That would be in a world in which 'everyone will have the knowledge necessary to conduct himself in the ordinary affairs of life, according to the light of his own reason', where 'everyone will become able, through the development of his faculties, to find the means of providing for his needs'; and where, at last, 'misery and folly will be the exception, and no longer the habitual lot of a section of society'.[3]

Beyond France, slavery would be abolished, colonies would become independent and commerce would spread

worldwide under the aegis of free trade. Asia and Africa would break free from 'our trade monopolies, our treachery, our murderous contempt for men of another colour or creed, the insolence of our usurpations'; they would no longer be prey to 'the shameful superstition' brought to these peoples by monks. Instead, assistance would be provided by men occupied in 'teaching them about their interests and their rights'. Soon, large tribes would become civilised and races so long oppressed by 'sacred despots or dull-witted conquerors' would gain their freedom. Eventually, even savage tribes and 'conquering hordes who know no other law but force' would merge into 'civilised nations'.[4]

This vision of a new international order would have been shared by many different strands of progressive opinion in the last decades of the eighteenth century. The horrors of the slave trade and the shame of colonialism had become well-known topics of debate in the aftermath of the Seven Years War in the oft-cited writings of Montesquieu, the Quakers, Abbé Raynal and Adam Smith in the 1760s and 1770s.[5]

Far more novel and distinctive were the proposals set out in the *Sketch* to forward 'the progress of equality within each nation'. In the agriculture and industry of the 'enlightened nations' of Europe, Condorcet pointed out, 'a great number of individuals' were almost entirely dependent for the maintenance of themselves and their family 'either on their own labour or on the interest from capital invested so as to make their labour more productive'. In contrast to those owning land or capital, these groups depended directly 'on

the life and even on the health of the head of the family'. Their livelihood was 'rather like a life annuity, save that it is more dependent on chance'. 'Here then', wrote Condorcet, 'is a necessary cause of inequality, of dependence and even of misery, which ceaselessly threatens the most numerous and most active class in our society.'[6]

But such inequality could be 'in great part eradicated'. People in old age could be guaranteed a means of livelihood 'produced partly by their own savings and partly by the savings of others who make the same outlay, but who die before they need to reap the reward'. A similar principle of compensation could be applied by securing for widows and orphans 'an income which is the same and costs the same for those families which suffer an early loss and for those who suffer it later'. Through the application of the same principle, it would also be possible to provide all children with the capital necessary for the full use of their labour at the age when they started work and founded a family.[7]

In Condorcet's conception, the necessary complement to these proposals was a universal scheme of education. The aim was not only to enable the citizen to 'manage his household, administer his affairs and employ his labour and faculties in freedom', but also to 'know his rights and be able to exercise them'; and even beyond that, to 'be a stranger to none of the high and delicate feelings which honour human nature'. The priority was to avoid all 'dependence, whether forced or voluntary'. In his 1791 proposals for a national education system in France, Condorcet had underlined the

same theme: 'it is impossible for instruction, even when equal, not to increase the superiority of those whom nature has endowed more favourably. But to maintain equality of rights, it is enough that this superiority entail no real dependence: that each individual be sufficiently instructed to exercise for himself the right guaranteed him under the law, without subjecting himself blindly to the reason of another.'[8]

The danger of dependence, whether economic or spiritual, was not confined to the use of patronage by rich and powerful individuals or by corporations. It extended equally to government. For that reason, public education instituted by government must be limited to instruction. The teaching of the constitution of each nation should 'only form part of instruction as a matter of fact'. The danger of any other approach was that public education might be identified with the inculcation of 'a kind of political religion', and that the citizen might become attached to the constitution 'by a blind sentiment'. Such measures often went together with a yearning to return to the patriotic ethos of the ancient republic, ignoring the fact that 'the aim of education can no longer be to consecrate established opinions, but, on the contrary, to subject them to free examination by succeeding generations that will be progressively more enlightened'.[9]

The practical application of such a scheme in England, in the shape of a detailed set of proposals to replace the Poor Rate by a tax-based system of universal insurance, was set forth in the second part of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*,

published in February 1792. A more redistributory variant of the same idea was argued in his later pamphlet *Agrarian Justice*, which appeared in England in 1797.

Paine put forward his proposals as part of a larger reformation in the practice of government which would follow the replacement of monarchy by a representative and democratic republic. In England, he claimed, there were 'two distinct characters of government'. There was first a 'civil government or the government of laws which operates at home' and was composed of a set of institutions 'attended with little charge' since the country 'administers and executes them, at its own expense by means of magistrates, juries, sessions, and assize, over and above the taxes which it pays'. On the other hand, there was 'court or cabinet government which operates abroad, on the rude plan of uncivilised life', and was attended with 'boundless extravagance'.[10]

In England under monarchical government, Paine claimed, 'every war terminates with an addition of taxes'; 'taxes were not raised to carry on wars, but wars were raised to carry on taxes'. Parliamentary government had been 'the most productive machine of taxation ever invented'. Yet 'not a thirtieth, scarcely a fortieth part of the taxes which are raised in England are either occasioned by, or applied to the purpose of civil government'. This was why Paine believed that 'the hordes of miserable poor with which old countries abound' were 'the consequence of what in such countries they call government'. 'In the present state of things,' Paine wrote, 'a labouring man with a wife or two or three children

does not pay less than between seven and eight pounds a year in taxes.' The labourer was not aware of this since it was concealed from him in the articles he bought and he therefore complained only of their dearness. But since these hidden taxes amounted to at least 'a fourth part of his yearly earnings', he was 'consequently disabled from providing for a family, especially if himself, or any of them, are afflicted with sickness'. [11]

This reasoning provided the justification for Paine's proposals. Relying on Sir John Sinclair's *History of the Revenue*, he estimated that since 1714 it had cost £70 million to maintain the Hanoverian monarchy – 'a family imported from abroad'. If courtly sinecures were abolished and no office holder were to receive a salary in excess of £10,000, Paine estimated that together with the necessary defence costs of a peacetime establishment, £1.5 million per year would be sufficient to maintain 'the honest purposes of government'. This would leave a surplus of more than £6 million revenue. The use of this surplus to remove or alleviate the most obvious precipitants of chronic want would also make it possible to abolish the major form of additional local taxation, the Poor Rate, 'a direct tax' amounting to £2 million per year, 'which every householder feels and who knows also to the last farthing'.

Paine identified the two most pressing forms of poverty as 'the expense of bringing up children' in large families, and the diminution of strength and employability in old age. He therefore proposed that a grant of £4 per annum

be made to every child under fourteen, and pensions of £6 per annum to all over fifty, rising to £10 per annum for those of sixty and over. Like Condorcet, however, he also stressed the centrality of education to any scheme of social amelioration. The £4 per annum was to be spent on sending children to school to learn 'reading, writing and common arithmetic', their attendance to be certified by ministers in every parish. The reasons for this were as much political as social. 'A nation under a well-regulated government should permit none to remain uninstructed. It is monarchical and aristocratical government only that requires ignorance for its support.'

Paine also attempted to remedy the poverty trap which his scheme might cause. There were, he noted, 'a number of families who, though not properly of the class of poor, yet find it difficult to give education to their children; and such children, under such a case, would be in a worse condition than if their parents were actually poor'. Supposing there to be 400,000 such children, he proposed that each of these be allowed 10*s*. per annum for six years, which would give them six months' schooling a year and 'half a crown for paper and spelling books'.[12]

Paine completed his scheme with a number of smaller grants: 20*s*. to be given 'immediately on the birth of a child to every woman who should make the demand'; and similarly 20*s*. to every newly married couple. Grants should be made available to defray the funeral expenses of those 'who, travelling for work, may die at a distance from their

friends'. Shelter and employment should be provided to those young and without skill or connections – 'the casual poor' – migrating to London and especially liable to fall into distress. Allowances should be made to soldiers and sailors disbanded as a result of the new state of peace, with increases of pay for those who remained, along with other deserving low-income groups, such as curates and 'inferior revenue officers' – a category to which Paine himself had once belonged.[13]

As Paine summed up the effects of his plan:

> The poor laws, those instruments of civil torture, will be superceded, and the wasteful expense of litigation prevented. The hearts of the humane will not be shocked by ragged and hungry children, and persons of seventy and eighty years of age, begging for bread. The dying poor will not be dragged from place to place to breathe their last, as a reprisal of parish upon parish. Widows will have a maintenance for their children, and not be carted away on the death of their husbands, like culprits and criminals; and children will no longer be considered as increasing the distresses of their parents. The haunts of the wretched will be known, because it will be to their advantage; and the number of petty crimes, the offspring of distress and poverty, will be lessened. The poor, as well as the rich, will then be interested in the support of government, and the cause and apprehension of riots and tumults will cease.[14]

The proposals of Condorcet and those of Paine bear some clear and unmistakable similarities, not only in specific points of emphasis, but in a shared optimism about the role of knowledge, reason and freedom in the overcoming of poverty, violence and ignorance. The immediate reason for this affinity is clear enough. It arose from the collaboration between the two men in the increasingly fevered and frightening political battles fought out in revolutionary France, from the move towards a republic following the king's attempted flight and capture at Varennes on 21 June 1791 to the expulsion from the Convention and arrest of Girondin deputies, with whom both Condorcet and Paine were associated, on 2 June 1793.[15]

But the affinity between their positions also had deeper roots. For both men subscribed to a new form of republicanism, forged out of three major political and intellectual developments in the last third of the eighteenth century. The first was a more confident belief in the control over chance and the future through the coming together of the collection of vital statistics and the mathematics of probability. The second was the great impetus given to the growth of positive future-oriented conceptions of commercial society following the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, and in France the liberal reforms attempted by the Turgot ministry of 1774–6. The third was the radicalisation of the understanding of each of these starting points under the impact of the American and French Revolutions.

The first of these developments concerned what Con-

dorcet described as 'the calculus of probabilities'. Condorcet based his confidence in the future upon the possibilities opened up by this 'calculus' in all forms of knowledge. Back in 1782, at the time of his appointment as permanent secretary to the Academy of Sciences, Condorcet had stressed the importance of this calculus, both as the basis of the connection between scientific and social advance and as the common foundation of the moral and physical sciences, which henceforth 'must follow the same methods, acquire an equally exact and precise language, attain the same degree of certainty'. [16] Condorcet had come to share David Hume's belief that all truths, even mathematical truths, were no more than probable. But this was in no sense a concession to scepticism. Like Hume, Condorcet did not doubt the reality of necessity, only the possibility of our knowing it. In the moral sciences, the recognition of all truths as in different degrees probable would allow the introduction of precision into the knowledge of human affairs in place of the 'prejudices planted by superstition and tyranny'.

More ambitiously, a probabilistic approach would make possible a single mathematically based social science, or what Condorcet came to call 'social mathematics'. The most contentious part of this new science was its theory of rationality – half descriptive and half prescriptive – which was to be applied to all processes of human decision-making. Like the putative agent depicted by twentieth-century games theorists or proponents of 'rational choice', rational man would act to maximise his interest according to the balance

of probabilities. Ultimately, if every individual were enabled to think rationally, the conflict between individual and common interest would disappear and all would acknowledge 'the sweet despotism of reason'. This emphasis upon the reformation of mental processes helps to explain the importance attached to instruction in Condorcet's educational reforms. The centrality of mental reform to the security and harmonious operation of the new French Republic was reiterated by Condorcet's followers among the Idéologues, the group led by Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis in the class of moral sciences at the newly founded Institut (intended as a 'living encyclopedia') in France under the Directorate between 1795 and 1801. It was also echoed to some extent by Bentham and his circle in Britain.

But such problems did not arise so directly in the area of what might be called social insurance. Here it was more a question of transforming a variety of existing but partial practices into a framework which would be truly comprehensive. In the *Sketch*, Condorcet included among existing applications of 'the calculus of probability', 'the organisation of life annuities, tontines, private savings, benefit schemes and insurance policies of every kind'.[17] Successful forms of 'the application of the calculus to the probabilities of life and the investment of money' now existed. But in the coming epoch, as a means of reducing inequality, they should be applied 'in a sufficiently comprehensive and exhaustive fashion to render them really useful, not merely to a few individuals, but to society as a whole, by making it

possible to prevent those periodic disasters which strike at so many families and which are such a recurrent source of misery and suffering'.[18]

Paine's days as an excise man may have left him with a sharpened knowledge of the operation of the tax system, but he did not possess expert knowledge in either mathematics or statistics. Nevertheless, his proposals were based upon similar assumptions. He justified his pension scheme as a *right* rather than a charity, with estimates of the tax the recipients would have paid during their working lives. 'Converting, therefore, his (or her) individual tax in a tontine, the money he shall receive after fifty years is but little more than the legal interest of the nett money he has paid.'[19]

Later, in *Agrarian Justice*, published in 1797, Paine proposed grants of £15 for all 21-year-olds and annual pensions of £10 for those over fifty, to be paid out of a national fund collected from death duties on estates and fortunes above a certain size. Justifying the roughness of his actuarial assumptions, he explained that 'my state of health prevents my making sufficient inquiries with respect to the doctrine of probabilities, whereon to found calculations with such degrees of certainty, as they are capable of'. Defending his scheme as an alternative to charity, he argued that there was 'but little any individual can do, when the whole extent of the misery to be relieved is considered'. It was 'only by organising civilisation upon such principles as to act like a system of pullies that the whole weight of misery can be removed'.[20]

Social insurance of the kind proposed by Condorcet involved the application of the mathematics of probability to questions of life expectancy on the basis of mortality statistics. But the coming together of the apparently self-evident set of procedures presupposed in Condorcet's proposal was less straightforward than it might first appear. Until around 1750, each of the components combined in social insurance had developed in relative isolation. Pioneering work in the mathematics of probability had been done by Pascal, Fermat, Huygens and De Witt in the mid-seventeenth century. But the problems considered were those encountered in lotteries, coin-tossing and games of chance. They were not immediately related to the concerns of 'political arithmetic', in which questions of life expectancy and its measurement by means of mortality statistics were eventually encountered.

Bills of mortality had been recorded in London parishes since 1562, not because of any civic interest in life expectancy, but in order to provide an early warning of the onset of plague. The first analyst of these tables to speculate about the relationship between age and death was John Graunt, whose *Natural and Political Observations on the Bills of Mortality* appeared in 1662. But his main interest was again in immediate policy issues, for example, the number of able-bodied males available for military service and the limited effect of quarantine as a means of containing the spread of plague. His tables assumed that for the average English person, after the age of six there was

an equal chance of dying in any of the seven decades that followed. This lack of interest in the empirical details of age at death was highlighted by the fact that, while cause and place of death were recorded, age at death was not included in the bills of mortality until 1728. Even in the case of the pricing of annuities, a procedure in which states had an obvious interest since annuities were sold as a means of servicing debt, a system of estimating life expectancy based upon relevant empirical information was slow to develop. The first proposal to use probability theory in order to price annuities was that made by Jan de Witt to the Estates General of Holland and West Friesland in 1671. He estimated probability of death as a correlate of age, but did not employ statistics and simply assumed that the risk of death remained the same for all ages between three and fifty-three.[21]

The problem was as much political as intellectual. Sharp and mathematically trained observers soon saw how mortality statistics could extend mathematical probability beyond games of chance. In a memorandum of 1700, Leibniz suggested measurements of life expectancy, age distribution and geographical distribution of disease and causes of death.[22] By the 1720s, mathematicians like De Moivre had produced life tables as a simplified guide to the pricing of annuities. Yet despite their common interest in the sale of annuities either as business or as a means of servicing debt repayment, neither insurance companies nor governments paid much attention to the advantages of applying the calculus

of probabilities to reliable series of statistics until the middle of the eighteenth century.

In the case of the insurance industry, Keith Thomas and other historians have taken its appearance in London towards the end of the seventeenth century as evidence of the emergence of new attitudes towards control of the future and the minimisation of the consequences of unavoidable risk. But this was only half true. The period between the 1690s and the 1740s was chiefly notable for a succession of speculative manias and 'bubbles' in which insurance schemes figured almost as prominently as John Law's plan for the reflation of France and the South Sea Bubble. Insurance policies were placed alongside annuities and lottery tickets, while the law reinforced the association between insurance and gambling by grouping them together in a common notion of risk.

As Lorraine Daston has argued, the obstacles to the development of a modern conception of life insurance were first and foremost social. It was not until there emerged a new attitude towards the welfare of the family within the professions and the middling ranks – clergy, doctors, lawyers, skilled artisans – that there could develop a form of life insurance based upon mathematical probability and reliable series of statistics. This new attitude valued predictability and prudence above luck, and provision for the family above provision for self. In place of the desire for speculative winnings, which had been the motivation behind tontines and lotteries, the new insurance ethos was governed by the fear of downward social mobility occasioned by death or

bankruptcy. Its promise was that 'a man who is rich today will not be poor tomorrow'.[23]

The emergence of these new attitudes was signalled by the unprecedented success of The Society for Equitable Insurance on Lives and Survivorships, founded in 1762. The effective founder of this society was the mathematician James Dodson, who calculated premiums on the basis of the London bills of mortality. This marked a radical break with contemporary practice, in which premiums were set more by guesswork than by tables. It also transformed the position of the actuary, who until then had acted as no more than a secretary and book-keeper, and was without mathematical skills. The novelty of the enterprise was underlined by the grounds given by the Privy Council for rejecting the first application to form the society in 1761. It doubted the mathematical process by which 'the chance of mortality is attempted to be reduced to a certain standard: this is a mere speculation, never yet tried in practice'.[24]

Government interest in the collection of statistics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was in nearly every case driven by military or fiscal needs. This is also partly why social insurance came to be of interest to the French state in the 1780s and after. At the end of the American War of Independence in 1783, the French government became increasingly anxious to extend its tax base. But in the absence of significant tax reform, governments were forced to continue to rely upon lotteries and life annuity contracts to cover the gap between expenditure and tax revenue. The

pricing of such expedients demanded precise probabilistic skills and accurate mortality data. In this situation, Condorcet's theoretical vision of the calculus of probabilities suddenly acquired a pressing practical relevance. Politically engaged mathematicians and scientists, pre-eminently Condorcet and Lavoisier, were able to exert influence on government policy and practice. In the 1780s the Academy of Sciences decided to print the population statistics which had been demanded annually from the intendants from 1772 and further to establish a public bureau of statistics as a department of the National Treasury.

At the same time, the success of the Society for Equitable Insurance in Britain had begun to attract a host of French imitators. This was also of financial interest to the government, which regarded its insurance monopoly as another lucrative source of income. From the mid 1780s, there were numerous schemes of social insurance proposed, some primarily humanitarian, others purely speculative. Once again, Condorcet, together with Lavoisier, Laplace and others, often sat on committees appointed by the Academy of Sciences to assess such schemes. Particularly important were the contributions made by Duvillard de Durand.

Like Condorcet himself, Duvillard had gained his first political experience, as a junior civil servant in the Controller-General's office, in the 1774–6 reforming ministry of Condorcet's hero, Turgot. Thereafter he worked in the Treasury and later in the statistical bureau of the Ministry of the Interior. In 1786, he impressed the Academy of Sciences

with a report on debt and annuities. In 1788, he acted as the 'profound mathematician' in the employ of the French Compagnie Royale d'Assurance, modelled explicitly on the English Equitable Society, in its victorious bid for the insurance monopoly. Together with Condorcet and other members of the *ancien règime* liberal élite, Duvillard was a member of the Society of 1789 whose official aims were to develop 'the social art' and to apply its principles to the establishment of a new constitution. Other members of this exclusive and sometimes self-consciously elitist society included Lafayette, the duc de La Rochefoucauld (-d'Enville), the duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt and Dupont de Nemours and later Sieyès – all, apart from Sieyès, old allies of Condorcet. It was the Comité de Mendicité, appointed by the National Assembly and headed by the duc de La Rochefoucauld, that invited Duvillard to draw up a national plan for life insurance, the *Plan d'une association de prévoyance*. Of the three mathematicians appointed by the Academy of Sciences to review this plan, two – Condorcet and Vandermonde – were members of the Society of 1789.

But Condorcet did not merely vet or puff the schemes of others, he also put forward proposals of his own. One of his schemes was occasioned by a plan proposed in 1785 by André Jean de Larocque which suggested the establishment of a general savings fund into which working people invested regular amounts in return for annuities which would secure them against premature retirement or old age. Both Lavoisier and Condorcet proposed variants of this

scheme. In 1790 Condorcet proposed 'accumulating funds' (*caisses d'accumulation*) which would both serve as a form of government borrowing and release funds for general investment by removing the need to hoard against the possibility of misfortune. The *caisses d'accumulation* would also create what Condorcet later described in the *Sketch* as 'a rich, active, populous nation without the existence of a poor corrupted class'.[25]

The radicalism of Condorcet and Paine was also distinctive in a second sense. It was a radicalism built upon the emancipatory possibilities of commercial society, as they had been elaborated in the works and proposals for reform of Adam Smith and Turgot. There were clear differences, however, in the philosophical assumptions which inspired these two thinkers. Turgot believed that citizens had rights which 'exist independently of society' and 'form its necessary elements'. He was also a rationalist who believed that the process of decision-making in public assemblies should be designed not merely to produce expressions of political will but to act as a vehicle for the discovery of truth. He was a strong advocate of universal education, not simply as an answer to the ever-shifting character of the demand for skills attending the development of the division of labour, but as a way of inculcating a civic spirit among the citizenry. He also believed in the perfectibility of the human species.[26]

By contrast, Smith avoided discussion of rights which he associated with Locke and opted for a markedly more

minimalist account of the political preconditions of a functioning commercial state. He wrote in 1755: '[L]ittle else is requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism, but peace, easy taxes and a tolerable administration of justice.'[27] He followed Hume in rejecting a contractarian account of the origins of government. Political obligation did not derive from a contract, but was the result of either natural deference to established authority or a regard for 'common or general interest' or 'public utility'. Similarly, Smith was not a rationalist. 'The natural progress of opulence' had been brought about, not because reason had played an ever-increasing part in human affairs, but because the vanity of feudal lords had led them to barter away their retainers in exchange for 'baubles and trinkets'. The delusion that wealth and power would bring happiness 'keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind'.[28]

Finally, Smith had no faith in the perfectibility of mankind. On the contrary, he became increasingly fearful of the possibility of an attempt at wholesale reform by a doctrinaire 'man of system'. For, however much he cherished the fact that 'the lowest and most despised member of civilised society' enjoyed 'superior affluence and abundance' when compared with 'the most respected and active savage', it remained the case that 'laws and government may be considered … as a combination of the rich to oppress the poor and to preserve to themselves the inequality of goods which would otherwise be soon destroyed by the

attacks of the poor'.[29] Deference and admiration for the rich kept an exchange society in motion, but it was a fragile construction. Therefore, despite his wholehearted praise for the growing moral and political independence of members of commercial society, Smith's account was never free from an undertow of unease: a nervous dread about what would happen if it became true, as Paine claimed in 1797, that 'the superstitious awe, the enslaving reverence that formerly surrounded affluence is passing away in all countries leaving the possessor of property to the convulsion of accidents'.[30]

Neither Turgot nor Condorcet could have felt comfortable with a theory of history which placed so much weight upon unintended consequences. Turgot earlier in his career had appeared to believe that history was a sort of theodicy in which evil was compelled to contribute towards the progress of the good: but as a reformer, he considered that the source of bad customs was bad laws. Without a residue of Christian belief to defend, Condorcet believed straightforwardly that all moral and political errors were the result of philosophical errors.[31] But these convictions did not pose an obstacle to their common acceptance of the basic premiss of Smith's 'science of the legislator': that the well-being of a state was commensurate with the well-being of the individuals who composed it; that most regulation only benefited privileged groups; and that the surest advice to 'the legislator' was to trust to our common 'desire of bettering our condition'.[32] From this shared starting point, Smith and Turgot drew similar practical conclusions. According to

Dugald Stewart, writing in 1793–4 about Smith's encounters with Turgot in Paris in 1765–6, 'the satisfaction he enjoyed in the conversation of Turgot may easily be imagined. Their opinions on the most essential points of political economy were the same; and they were both animated by the same zeal for the best interests of mankind.'[33]

This closeness of outlook was reproduced in the arguments of Condorcet and Paine. Condorcet remained a political disciple of Turgot. Fêted as a mathematician from his twenties, Condorcet, like Laplace, became a protégé of the mathematician and editor of the *Encyclopedia* D'Alembert. It was through D'Alembert that he was admitted to the Academy of Sciences and introduced to the salon of Mlle Lespinasse, where he met Turgot. He assisted in Turgot's reforming ministry of 1774–6 and remained in constant correspondence with the ex-Controller General after his fall. When Turgot died, he wrote an admiring study, *Vie de Monsieur Turgot*, in 1783.

Like Smith and Turgot, Condorcet was an enthusiast for free trade, on the grounds that 'the natural tendency' of wealth to equality would be enhanced if 'free trade and industry were allowed to remove the advantages that accrued wealth derives from any restrictive law or fiscal privilege'.[34] On the question of education, however, it was the ideas of Turgot, and before him the Physiocrats, which were to the fore. In the *Memoire sur les municipalités* (drafted by Dupont de Nemours in 1775 as a digest of Turgot's ideas and intended as a submission to the young Louis XVI), it was

proposed that a national educational council be set up to direct public instruction according to uniform principles. The aim would be to produce a more enlightened citizenry 'submitting to authority not from fear but through reason'.[35] Many of these ideas reappeared in more radical and less authoritarian form in Condorcet's proposals for public instruction in 1791–2. The aim was that 'each individual be sufficiently instructed to exercise for himself the rights guaranteed him under the law, without subjecting himself blindly to the reason of another'.[36]

Condorcet followed Smith in remarking that the more mechanical occupations became, 'the greater the danger that the people will contract that stupidity which is natural to men limited to a small number of ideas, all of the same kind'. 'Instruction' in place of apprenticeship was the only remedy for this evil, 'which is all the more dangerous in a state to the extent that the laws have established greater equality'.[37] But it was also in this context that the programmes of Turgot and Smith diverged. In one of his few explicit criticisms, Condorcet criticised Smith's proposal that public regulation and financial support should leave instruction itself to a competition between different churches. Condorcet explained this as a rare lapse in the exactitude and precision which governed the rest of Smith's work.[38] Condorcet wished to exclude the church from education, not for specifically anti-Christian reasons, but for the same reason that Turgot had already put to Louis XVI in 1776: 'Your kingdom, Sire, is of this world. The purpose of education, therefore,

was to fit the citizen for his rights and duties as a member of civil society'.[39]

In the case of Paine, evidence of an acquaintance with Smith and enthusiasm about the future of commercial society is scattered plentifully throughout his writings. Paine in *Rights of Man: Part One*, contrasted 'the disorderly cast' of Burke's argument compared with Smith's reasoning 'from minutiae to magnitude'. He clearly built some of his picture both of the power of the feudal barony as the result of conquest in English history and of 'the progress which the peaceful arts of agriculture, manufacture and commerce have made beneath such a long accumulating load of discouragement and oppression' from a reading of Book Three of *The Wealth of Nations*.[40] More specifically, Paine's proposals of progressive taxation in *Rights of Man: Part Two*, and of death duties in *Agrarian Justice* as a means of combating entails and primogeniture, if not actually advocated in Smith, were quite in the spirit of Smith's criticism: '[T]hey are founded upon the most absurd of all suppositions, the supposition that every successive generation of men have not an equal right to the earth and all that it possesses; but that the property of the present generation should be restrained and regulated according to the fancy of those who died perhaps five hundred years ago.'[41] So much for Burke's appeal to the principle of prescription!

What is also striking, however, is the meticulous way in which Paine distinguished his own case for 'agrarian justice' from the many theories of 'agrarian law', from Spence to

Babeuf, resting on an appeal to a primitive right to the earth in common. 'Nothing could be more unjust than Agrarian Law in a country improved by cultivation.' Paine proposed a tax in the form of a 'ground rent' to be paid as recompense for the loss to the community of access to the land in its original unimproved state. But, as he recognised, 'it is never possible to go from the civilised to the natural state' since 'man in a natural state, subsisting by hunting' would have required 'ten times the quantity of land to range over to procure himself sustenance, than would support him in a civilised state, where the earth is cultivated'.[42]

Starting from a future-oriented theory of commercial society, this distinctively modern form of radicalism enjoyed a number of advantages. Not the least important was the way in which it enabled Condorcet and Paine to get beyond the repetitive terms of the eighteenth-century debate about luxury and poverty, virtue and self-interest. In a passage not finally included in the *Sketch*, Condorcet associated the pursuit of 'superfluities' both with the progress of commercial society and with intellectual advance. He wrote of 'that need for ideas and new feelings which is the prime mover in the progress of the human mind … that taste for the superfluities of luxury which is the spur of industry' and 'that spirit of curiosity which eagerly penetrates the veil nature has drawn across her secrets'. In his 1791 essay on 'Public Instruction', he stated that from the perspective of 'the equality of wellbeing', it was 'irrelevant to the general happiness that a few men enjoy more elaborate pleasures as a result of their

wealth provided that men can satisfy their needs with facility, attaining in their housing, their dress, their food, in all the habits of their daily life, a measure of health and cleanliness, and even of comfort and attractiveness'. He favoured simpler manners, but not as the product of 'misguided notions of austerity'. As for self-interest, it was only a problem if viewed statically. In the future, the perfection of laws and public institutions, consequent upon the progress of the sciences, would accomplish 'the reconciliation, the identification of the interests of each with the interests of all'.[44]

Paine was equally confident that reform did not require moral improvement. 'As to the mere theoretical reformation, I have never preached it up. The most effectual process is that of improving the condition of man by means of his interest.' He believed this to be possible because 'all the great laws of society are laws of nature. Those of trade and commerce, whether with respect to the intercourse of individuals or of nations, are laws of mutual and reciprocal interest. They are followed and obeyed, because it is the interest of the parties so to do'; and in an aside similar to Condorcet, he stated, 'I care not how affluent some may be, providing none are miserable in consequence of it.' Indeed, in a neat challenge to the conventional understanding of asceticism which informed government and radicals alike, he wrote, 'I know not why any plant or herb of the field should be a greater luxury in one country than another.' But 'an overgrown estate in either is a luxury at all times, and, as such, is the proper object of taxation'.[45]

This removal of moral opprobrium from the language of 'luxury' was not characteristic of most forms of radicalism. Until the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, it was difficult to disentangle the notion of a polity based upon moderate gradations of wealth from the idea of an austere and virtuous republic. The terms of the debate had been set at the beginning of the eighteenth century in the writings of Fénelon and Mandeville.[46] *The Adventures of Telemachus, Son of Ulysses* by Archbishop Fénelon, the famous critic of the last years of Louis XIV, was published in 1699, translated almost immediately into English and became one of the most popular and reprinted books of the century. Even at the end of the eighteenth century, William Godwin claimed that the just man should rescue Fénelon from the flames in preference to his own brother or father.[47] In Fénelon's critique, 'luxury' had been associated with the extremes of inequality. The book described how Telemachus, under the guidance of a disguised Minerva, had learnt the art of virtuous kingship. His reform of Salentum (France) depicted a programme for growth without luxury. Foreign trade would be restricted to a single and highly regulated port, sumptuary laws would eliminate the craving for 'superfluities', manufacture would be restricted to 'real' needs and urban workers in the luxury trades would be resettled on the land.

Mandeville's response, *The Fable of the Bees* of 1714, was a defence of the existing commercial economy of Orange and Hanoverian England against Fénelon's neo-Jacobite appeal. It pointed out that 'luxury' or 'superfluities' were

not confined to the rich, but was only an invidious way of describing the new needs which developed with civilisation itself: a constant development in which what was first thought 'superfluous' soon became 'necessary'. The more contentious part of his message was directed at the hypocrisy of the language in which commercial society was defended. Mandeville maintained that morality and justice were simply devices of the rich to deceive the poor. The Christian values which supposedly underpinned society were a mere façade. Mankind could not be governed by reason and sympathy, only by flattery and deceit. If Christian moderation or self-denial were really to triumph, as pious apologias professed to desire, the result would be a more equal, but much poorer society, since equality and poverty went together. The paradox of a commercial society was that private vices – the incessant quest for luxury and love of display, an entirely self-regarding though hypocritically veiled self-interest – produced public virtue, a dynamic and innovative economy which kept the poor in constant employment.

In at least two respects, the terms of this debate help to explain Smith's importance in shaping the subsequent radicalism of Condorcet and Paine. Firstly, if a new form of radicalism were to be possible, there had to be something else between the agrarian austerity of Salentum and the selfish free-for-all celebrated by Mandeville. Secondly, no form of radicalism could tolerate the position of the rich if all they were supposed to do was engage in conspicuous consumption and spendthrift hedonism.

On the first point, what had made Mandeville's depiction of commercial society so unappetising was his denial (following Hobbes) that sociability was natural to man. This meant that justice and morality were no more than the inventions of 'skilful politicians'. Smith denied that society was simply built upon this form of individualism. Although vanity and delusion in man's nature could not be denied, human desire for betterment was not solely displayed in naked self-interest. Man did not merely love praise, he was capable of actions which were praiseworthy. Through language, man was endowed with a capacity for mutual sympathy and understanding. This capacity to put oneself in the place of another elaborated into the idea of an 'impartial spectator' formed the basis of Smith's theory of 'moral sentiment'. The impartial spectator, 'the man within the breast', was a shorthand for the way in which the judgement of others became interiorised within the self and acted as a constant check upon the unqualified egoism which might otherwise prevail. The value of this idea as a way of getting beyond the antinomies presented by Fénelon and Mandeville became apparent during the French Revolution. The radical search for some alternative to Christian ethics or ancient republicanism led to the translation of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1798 by Sophie de Grouchy, Condorcet's widow.[48]

The second point highlights Smith's relevance to changing eighteenth-century attitudes towards chance. The logic of Mandeville's anti-ascetic argument led him

to praise all forms of conspicuous consumption provided only that expenditure occurred within the confines of the domestic economy. Somewhat perversely, this now meant that the spendthrift became hero and that the unbridled gambling of the South Sea Bubble era appeared to acquire a solid economic justification. One of the most important advances made by *The Wealth of Nations* was to demonstrate that, while the employment-generating function of the consumption of the rich still needed to be acknowledged, the longer term progress of an exchange economy was dependent upon something more solid than prodigal expenditure. From his Paris visit of 1763–4, Smith learnt to distinguish between 'unproductive labour' – that used up in consumption and display – and 'useful and productive labour', which was the product of investment and the true measure of a nation's wealth. The development of the division of labour depended upon capital accumulation and capital accumulation depended on investment.[49]

Deferral of immediate consumption was therefore not mere miserliness, but evidence of an aspiration to treat the future as something other than the capricious goddess Fortuna of Renaissance statesmen or the dazzling uncertainties of the eighteenth-century gaming table. Just as the associations of insurance began to shift in the 1760s, an analogous change occurred in conceptions of commercial society, highlighted by the crucial position now accorded to investment in Smith's conception of the economy as a whole. By the 1780s, links between these changes were becoming

more common. One example in France, an inspiration of Condorcet's suggested *caisses d'accumulation* in 1790, was André Larocque's 1785 proposal for a *caisse générale des épargnes du peuple*, which would invest funds formed by regular contributions by working people and return the proceeds in the form of annuities to be paid out in old age or as a consequence of early retirement.

The arrival of new ideas about the control over chance and new future-oriented conceptions of commercial society in the 1760s and 1770s, which provided some of the preconditions for the new radicalism, may help to explain the shape of Condorcet's and Paine's interest in insurance. What this does not explain, however, is the comprehensive national scope of these schemes and the radicalism of the redistribution of income which would underpin them.

On the question of social insurance, the uniqueness of Paine's proposals can be highlighted by comparing them with those of another radical and one-time partial mentor of Paine, the famous Welsh dissenting preacher Richard Price. Price was, among his other accomplishments, a distinguished mathematician and pioneer of social insurance. After Philip Dodson's death, he had been called in to help the Equitable Society and had selected a new series of mortality tables based on Northampton and calculated the Society's premiums. He remained the Society's actuarial expert until he passed over the position to his nephew in 1782. Price

and Paine had been closely allied on the American question and Price may have been responsible for Paine's belief that poverty in civilised countries was increasing. But from the 1770s to the 1790s there was a growing divergence between their views on the future of commercial society. Price's view of the economy remained close to that of Fénelon, and to the English commonwealth tradition. He was therefore little affected by Smith, who considered Price to be a poor calculator and a 'most superficial philosopher'.

Price thought not only that poverty was increasing, but that population was declining, that only certain forms of commerce were compatible with virtue, and that luxury was enervating the nation. His advice to the Americans was to avoid foreign trade and luxury. Finally, and most importantly, his view of the poor was moralistic and conventional. Although he backed various parliamentary proposals for social insurance, notably those of Masères in 1773 and Acland in 1786, these schemes were not comprehensive, nor did they replace the Poor Rate system or contain any redistributory component.[50] His proposals did not look forward to twentieth-century schemes of social insurance, but rather to the mid-Victorian Gladstonian legislation promoting provident savings banks.

There was also an equally clear gap between Smith's approach to the question of equality and the radical use of his writings to justify the reduction of inequality by directly political means. The whole point of Smith's famous sentence about 'the invisible hand' when it was introduced into his

*Theory of Moral Sentiments* was that, although commercial society perpetuated and reinforced inequality, it also just as consistently mitigated its effects by the ways in which it channelled the expenditure of the rich. For, according to Smith, it led the rich 'to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants'.[51] For Smith, in other words, the progress of 'natural liberty' stood in place of a politics of redistribution.

To cite these contrasts is only another way of making the obvious point that what changed the perspective of radicalism between the 1760s and the 1790s were the American and French Revolutions: particularly the revolt of the American colonies, the declaration of the American Republic and the defeat of the British by the Americans and the French, in all of which Paine played a prominent part. Of special importance was the effect of the American Revolution upon radical opinion in the decade before the French Revolution. For the impact made by this momentous sequence of events upon radical thinking in France was quite different from that in Britain. In fact, the American Revolution opened up a fundamental divergence between the horizons of radicals in the two countries, which was to have a lasting effect. It also helps to explain why British radicalism, despite its Gallic sympathies, found it difficult to fathom the direction of French thinking once the Revolution had begun.

In Britain, the effect of the loss of the American colonies was to reinforce the already widespread assumption, shared by radicals and Whigs alike, that since the accession of George III in 1760 the balance of the constitution had been upset. The constitution had been undermined by the secret ambitions of the executive through its sinister employment of patronage and corruption. Regeneration, narrowly interpreted by the Whigs, meant 'economical reform' – the reduction of posts and sinecures at the government's disposal. Among radicals, it meant more frequent parliaments and a broader or more representative electorate. It could even mean manhood suffrage. 'No taxation without representation' had been the slogan of the colonists; and it was not difficult to extend this principle to Britain, where each paid taxes and each possessed in his (or very rarely her) labour a property, so it was claimed, with as much right to be represented as any other form of property.

But although the American crisis inspired novel demands among a minority of radicals, the majority, especially after the end of the war in 1783, were on the defensive. Radicals were demoralised by the Fox–North coalition, widely regarded as a shameful display of political opportunism and they showed little appetite for fundamental change. Thus, despite Whig and radical agitation against George III's abuse of the constitution, no one proposed that Britain should follow the American example and become a republic. Richard Price in 1787 rejected the accusation of republicanism in this sense as 'a very groundless suspicion' and added,

'What I here say of myself I believe to be true of the whole body of British subjects among Protestant Dissenters.' He regarded 'our mixed form of government' as 'better adapted than any other to this country, and in theory excellent'. [52] In a mixed form of government, each element – King, Lords and Commons – fulfilled its legitimate function. The call for the 'purification', or 'restoration', of this constitution was socially cautious. It was in tune with a political climate in which calls for moral reform were far more widespread than political demands. In Britain, the 1780s was marked by Whig and radical division, by the revival of a new form of Toryism led by Pitt and by the growing strength of evangelicalism in the church.

Among French reformers, by contrast, respect for the English mixed form of government diminished. Admiration for the English constitution and English letters had been widespread during the time of Montesquieu and Voltaire, but the effect of the American Revolution and British defeat was to bring to the fore currents of thought never impressed by the English model of constitutional freedom. The writings of the Physiocrats in the 1760s provided one powerful source of criticism of mixed government. However contentious their proposal of a legal despot standing above the contending interests and imposing laws of 'natural order', many agreed with their assumption that only a unified source of power could withstand the entrenched interests of the aristocracy. There was also growing agreement with their belief that the dilution of power entailed in mixed government, with its

attendant evils of privilege, corruption and disorder, was pushing Britain into decline.[53] The decline in the prestige of mixed government also reinforced an egalitarian and anti-aristocratic strand of criticism in France. The entrenched assumption common to so many forms of early modern republicanism of the need for a virtuous aristocracy gave way to a more radical questioning of the aristocracy's political and economic *raison d'être*. Writing in 1786, Condorcet observed that 'the spectacle of the equality that reigns in the United States and which assures its peace and prosperity, can also be useful to Europe. We no longer believe here, in truth, that nature has divided the human race into three or four orders, like the class of solipeds, and that one of these orders is also condemned to work much and eat little.'[54]

Finally, the success of the Americans led to a renewal and modernisation of republican thought. By the late 1780s, the idea that republics were largely confined to the ancient world and were suitable only in small homogeneous city states – still unchallenged in Britain – was no longer universally accepted in France. In particular, the Société Gallo-Américaine argued that the republicanism of the United States should be adopted in Europe, while from 1787 the inner core of the future Girondins – the group gathered around Brissot and Clavière – blamed the aristocracy for the crisis of the French state and called for the creation of a modern commercial republic freed from the hierarchy of rank.

Paine visited Paris several times in the 1780s and, through

Benjamin Franklin and the Société des Amis des Noirs, was acquainted with both Condorcet and Morellet and the group around Brissot. This together with his American experience also explains why Paine's radicalism was so different from that of his British contemporaries.[55] As Richard Whatmore has recently demonstrated, the difficulty of situating Paine's thought largely disappears once it is seen that his principal sources of inspiration were American and French, rather than English.[56] Paine had criticised mixed government as far back as *Common Sense* in 1776.

Almost alone among British radicals in the 1780s and 1790s, Paine was openly contemptuous of the supposed virtues of the English mixed constitution. 'In mixed governments there is no responsibility: the parts cover each other till responsibility is lost; and the corruption that moves the machine, contrives at the same time its own escape.' English government was without popular origins; it had begun with the conquest and remained a 'despotism' which the vaunted liberties of Parliament had done little to mitigate. Subjects were left with nothing more than the right of petitioning, but so far as Parliament itself was concerned, 'though the parts may embarrass each other, the whole has no bounds'.[57]

Secondly, and again in line with the French, Paine was openly hostile to the aristocracy. In Paine's opinion, what was required in Britain was not the restoration of a 'balanced constitution', but 'a revolution in the system of government'. 'Conquest and tyranny, at some earlier period, dispossessed man of his rights, and he is now recovering them.' The aris-

tocracy arose out of governments founded on conquest. They 'are not the farmers who work the land, and raise the produce, but are the mere consumers of the rent; and when compared with the active world are the drones, a seraglio of males, who neither collect the honey nor form the hive, but exist only for lazy enjoyment'.[58]

But in at least one crucial respect Paine remained closer to his American experience than to the working assumptions of his French allies. This concerned the meaning of the word republic. For as far back as *Common Sense*, to Paine this meant a society without a monarchy or hereditary succession. 'Monarchy and succession have laid (not this or that kingdom only) but the world in blood and ashes.'[59] In France, at least until 1791, there was little support for a republic in this sense. In the 1780s, Condorcet had thought of himself as a republican in the same sense as his mentor, Turgot. Being a republican meant governing in the interests of the public good, which was quite possible under the aegis of an enlightened monarch. For, as he stated in his observations on the American Revolution in 1786, 'in terms of public happiness, a republic with tyrannical laws can fall far short of a monarchy'.[60]

In this and in other respects, the American model was not thought by most radicals to be transferable to Europe. First, it was argued, America was not really a large modern state comparable to European monarchies, but a federation of small republics. Secondly, its population – slaves aside – lived in conditions of relative equality and ease without the

burden of a hereditary aristocracy and a feudal past. Finally, limitless access to land and agricultural self-sufficiency meant that America was not cursed with the extremes of wealth and poverty found in European commercial societies.

Up until the early years of the Revolution these remained basic but largely academic points of difference between Paine and his French friends. Whatever the ultimate destiny of the French nation, few before the summer of 1791 wished to question the credentials of the new 'King of the French'. But on 21 June 1791, the unanticipated happened. Louis fled Paris with his family, leaving a note reneging upon everything to which he had formally assented since the fall of the Bastille. Two days later, on 23 June, he was captured at Varennes and brought back to Paris. Now the question of the monarchy became an immediate practical issue. Faced with the double dealing of the king, Paine's closest associates, Condorcet, Brissot, Clavière and others, came round to his position. They founded a journal, *Le Républicain*, which argued that national unity necessitated a republic and Louis's expulsion.

The position adopted by Paine, Condorcet and others was challenged by the Abbé Sieyès in an article published in *Le Moniteur* on 6 July 1791. For Sieyès, who followed Hobbes on the question of sovereignty, the essential question was: who possesses the final power of decision-making. A monarch was better suited than a senate, weighed down 'under a multitude of Reports of Committees', to make 'the

individual decision'. The choice to be made was not therefore between republic and monarchy, but between what he called monarchy and 'polyarchy'. Was the executive to be appointed by a monarch or a national assembly? Ought the apex of the state be considered as a 'platform' or as a 'point'? 'Polyarchy', Sieyès feared, was likely to lead to the formation of a new irresponsible senatorial aristocracy or of an elective mode 'sometimes accompanied with a civil war'.[61]

These questions, rather than the objections of Burke, set the agenda of *Rights of Man: Part Two*, which Paine composed in the autumn and winter of 1791–2. This was what also accounted for both Paine's radical reshaping of Smith's account of commercial society and his dramatic proposals to end poverty through a programme of social insurance and redistributory taxation. One chapter was explicitly addressed to Sieyès, but its title – 'Of the Old and New Systems of Government' – really defined the book as a whole. Paine's aim was to build his case for a republic without a monarch upon the example of America, 'the only real republic in character and in practice'. But in order to make that case, he had to demonstrate how American conditions could be made applicable to Europe, and in the first instance England.[62]

Sieyès had assumed that without a single and coherent locus of decision-making, order might break down into chaos. Paine in response argued that a 'great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of government', and that 'the mutual dependence and reciprocal

interest which man has upon man, and all parts of the community upon each other, create the great chain of connection which holds it together'. In order to minimise the importance of Sieyès' objection, Paine made use of a radically simplified reading of Smith. The 'unnatural and retrograde order' which Smith blamed for the bellicose interstate politics of mercantilism, Paine simply equated with the rule of the aristocracy and the legacy of conquest. On the other hand, Smith's 'natural progress of opulence', which had wondrously continued 'beneath the long accumulating load of discouragement and oppression', only awaited the removal of 'government on the old system'. 'Old' government supported itself 'by keeping up a system of war'; the 'New System of Government' was not the product of conquest, but 'a delegation of power for the common benefit of society'.[63]

It was 'the old system of government' which was responsible for the 'hordes of miserable poor with which old countries abound'. The poverty of the poor was mainly the result of the taxation exacted by 'the old system of government' for the purpose of waging war. Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* argued that the advantages of living in modern civilised societies could easily be observed by comparing the situation of 'an industrious and frugal peasant' in Europe with that of 'many an African king, the absolute master of the lives and liberties of ten thousand native savages'. But, according to Paine, under existing conditions this was not true: '[A] great portion of mankind, in what are called civilised countries, are in a state of poverty and wretchedness,

far below the condition of an Indian.'[64] Only when the old system of government had disappeared could the full potential of 'civilisation' be realised.

Like Condorcet, Paine strongly associated progress with universal education and the transition from superstition to reason. Monarchy could not be part of the new order according to Paine, because the monarchy, the aristocracy and the hereditary principle were associated with ignorance. 'Kings succeed each other, not as rationals, but as animals. Can we then be surprised at the abject state of the human mind in monarchical countries when the government itself is formed on such an abject levelling system?' Perhaps, somewhat tongue in cheek, Paine inverted the conventional argument which associated the republic with small states and the ancient world, by arguing that the modern principle of representation, unknown to the ancients, was perfectly suited to a large commercial republic, or to what Sieyès would have called a 'polyarchic' form. For only this form could take proper account of the complexities of the modern division of labour 'which requires a knowledge … which can be had only from the various parts of society'. 'It is an assemblage of practical knowledge, which no individual can possess', and therefore as ill-adapted to monarchy as to ancient 'simple' democracy. This was principle of American 'representation ingrafted upon democracy'. 'What Athens was in miniature, America will be in magnitude.'[65]

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the possibility of a republic like that of the United States depended upon

a rough equality and moderate differences of wealth. In Europe, Sieyès' spectre of civil war and a new aristocracy could be prevented if measures were taken to remove the power of the aristocracy or prevent the emergence of a new aristocracy in its place. Together with aristocracies went the manipulation of a factional and ignorant poor. In England, Paine noted, primogeniture was 'one of the principal sources of corruption at elections'.[66] This was why both Condorcet and Paine attached as much importance to universal education and redistributive taxation as they did to the provision of social security. Together, intervention in these three areas would create the material and mental conditions in which a modern republic could flourish in Europe. The more conservative plan proposed by Sieyès would mean not only the retention of the monarchy, but also the continuation of a distinction between 'active' and 'passive' citizenship as a way of keeping the poor at bay.

But according to Paine, this was not the way to ensure the security and stability of the republic. Similar restrictions of the franchise after 1795, as Paine argued in *Agrarian Justice* in 1797, led to Babouvist and royalist plots. The plan he proposed to the Directory in *Agrarian Justice* was designed to consolidate support for the revolution and preserve the rich from depradation. The argument was similar in *Part Two* of the *Rights of Man*: the social measures were designed to ensure that 'the poor as well as the rich, will then be interested in the support of government, and the cause and apprehension of riots and tumults will cease'.[67] His thinking

in this area had no doubt been helped, not only by the general proposals of Condorcet, but also by the particular deliberations of the Comité de Mendicité under the chairmanship of the duc de La Rochefoucauld, in which relief was treated as an aspect of citizenship. A summary of their proceedings compiled in 1792 by Bernard d'Airy declared that 'every man has a right to subsistence through work, if he is able-bodied; and to free assistance if he is unable to work'. Assistance was no longer to be regarded as a 'favour', but as a 'duty' and a 'national responsibility'.[68] In France, given the hostility of much of the clergy to the new régime, it had been seen as a matter of political urgency to secure the loyalty of the poor to the new order by removing welfare from the control of the church.

This, then, was the reasoning which lay behind what the British critics perceived as the most threatening and subversive message of the French Revolution. Without a corrupt and powerful aristocracy to bribe the poor and without a priesthood to inhibit their powers to reason, but with an educated citizenry able to both adjust to the changing pattern of the economy and take seriously its civic responsibilities, a new era would begin. As Paine read Smith, the growth of commerce had brought 'the old system of government to its present crisis: if commerce were permitted to act to the universal extent it is capable, it would extirpate the system of war and produce a revolution in the uncivilised

state of governments'. 'The present age will hereafter merit to be called "the Age of Reason", and the present generation will appear to the future as the Adam of a new world.'[69]

The first attempt to plan a world without poverty took shape, not as a response to problems of industry, but as part of an ambition to transplant the conditions of success of the young American republic to European soil. Although it was presented as a plan to overhaul the English tax system and abolish the Poor Rate, it was elaborated as part of a debate in France about what should happen after the king had gone back on his acceptance of the Revolution.[70] What was intended was not a welfare state, but the assembling of political conditions in which an informed citizenry could govern itself according to reason.

The proposals put forward by Condorcet and Paine built upon two major intellectual and institutional advances of the second half of the eighteenth century, together with a major shift in the radical stance towards the aristocracy. It was a programme which employed 'the calculus of probabilities' to make possible a programme which dispensed with the Poor Law and broke down the traditional notion of poverty into a number of predictable problems to be expected in the lifecycle of the average citizen. It made use of Smith's focus on investment rather than consumption as the crucial feature in the development of commercial societies to suggest how individuals could exert greater control over the course of their lives. It also enabled a sharpening of some of the anti-aristocratic implications of Smith's

argument, in particular an implicit distinction between this system of war and 'the civil state', that is, the operation of the parish and the judicial system – all areas which Hegel would characterise as belonging to the sphere of 'the police' in civil society rather than to the political state as such.

Finally, the proposals of Condorcet and Paine appeared as the culmination of a growing trend from the 1740s to incorporate the poor within civil society, perhaps as a result of four decades of economic growth and relative prosperity. This meant treating them as entitled to education, high wages and 'the decencies' of life. The emphasis was upon the commonality of mankind – the narrow differences which Smith discerned between the prince and the street porter – on the humanity of the poor and their capacity to participate in the culture of their more fortunate contemporaries. To consider them as fellow citizens, as they were commonly being considered in revolutionary countries, was no more than a logical next step in the process. But from the mid-1790s this trend was brought to an abrupt halt as British public opinion was made aware of the true extent of the political, social and religious radicalism of the French Revolution.

# II

# THE REACTION IN BRITAIN

> The effigy of Thomas Paine was, with great solemnity, drawn on a sledge from Lincoln Castle to the gallows, and then hanged, amidst a vast multitude of spectators. After being suspended the usual time it was taken to the Castle-hill and there hung on a gibbet post erected for that purpose. In the evening a large fire was made under the effigy, which … was consumed to ashes, amidst the acclamations of many hundreds of people, accompanied with a grand band of music playing 'God Save the King'.

It has been estimated that in the winter of 1792–3, effigies of Paine were burnt in 300 or so towns and villages in England and Wales. The intensity of the reaction was an indication of the magnitude of the felt threat. His *Rights of Man* was one of the bestsellers of the century; 250,000 copies had been sold by 1793. A London merchant wrote to Henry Dundas, the Home Secretary:

> Payne is a dangerous book for any person who does not share in the spoil to be left alone with and it appears that the book is now made as much a standard book in this country, as Robinson Crusoe & the Pilgrims Progress, & that if it has not its effect today, it will tomorrow.[2]

The Evangelical and abolitionist leader William Wilberforce was equally anxious. William Hey of Leeds had informed him that 'immense pains are now taken to make the lower class of the people discontented, and to excite rebellion. Paine's mischievous work on "the Rights of Man" is compressed into a sixpenny pamphlet, and is sold and given away in profusion.' Wilberforce replied to Hey that he did not fear 'a speedy commotion', since 'almost every man of property in the kingdom' was 'a friend of civil order' and 'if a few mad-headed professors of liberty and equality were to attempt to bring their theories into practice, they would be crushed in an instant'. But he still feared 'a gathering storm' ahead. He was anxious that the country might provoke the 'judgements of an incensed God'. For what incurred his 'deepest gloom' was 'the prevailing profligacy of the times, and above all, that self-sufficiency, and proud and ungrateful forgetfulness of God, which is so general in the higher ranks of life'. He was therefore thinking of 'proposing to the Archbishop of Canterbury to suggest the appointment of a day of fasting and humiliation'.[3]

Alarm about the French Revolution had first been sounded by Burke. His *Reflections on the Revolution in*

*France* of 1790 began life as a response to Richard Price's 'Discourse on the Love of Our Country' delivered at the meeting house in the Old Jewry on 4 November 1789. The purpose of Price's 'Discourse' was to commemorate the revolution of 1688 and to welcome the beginnings of the revolution in France. Although Price spoke of 'the right to chuse our own governors, to cashier them for misconduct, and to frame government for ourselves' as one of the achievements of the 1689 Revolution Settlement, he did not move beyond existing radical demands for a balanced constitution within a framework of 'mixed government'. In practice, this meant a programme of parliamentary reform and a reiteration of the Dissenters' campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act. Price's assumption was that France would follow the pattern set in 1688 and democratically enlarged in the American Revolution of 1776. He concluded his address, '[A]fter sharing in the benefits of one Revolution, I have been spared to be a witness to two other Revolutions, both glorious'; and he reiterated the *nunc dimittis* – the words of the aged priest Simeon on the occasion of the first presentation of Christ in the Temple – 'Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.'[4]

Burke fiercely contested the assumption that 1688 gave the people the right to 'cashier' their governors. In a calculated move to jolt Price's address away from the consensual terms of constitutionalist rhetoric, he compared Price's use of the *nunc dimittis* with that of the Reverend Hugh Peters at the trial of Charles I in 1648. Price's 'sally' differed 'only in place and time,

but agrees perfectly with the spirit and letter of the rapture of 1648'.[5] In a powerful invocation of the silent majority, he also sowed suspicion about the Dissenters and other French sympathisers as true representatives of British opinion.

> Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field.

Burke was deeply sceptical of the capacity of a government based upon 'the rights of man' to create happiness. Human distress was largely the result of individual moral failure, not of the imperfection of institutions. Nor did the leaders of this revolution inspire confidence. Unlike 1688, the Revolution in France was led by persons without legislative experience, disgruntled lawyers and malcontent 'men of quality'. In place of the ancient nobility – 'the Corinthian capital of polished society' – and in place of a church which preached obedience to the sovereign power, this Revolution was sweeping away deference to social rank, only to usher in a tyrannical democratic majority and establish a new nobility of money-lenders and stock speculators. Finally, and most seriously, without any real awareness of the consequences of their actions, the revolutionaries thought their confiscations of the lands and possessions of

the church had put into question all established rights of property in France.

When Burke's *Reflections* first appeared, most thought its stance farfetched. Even as the Revolution became more extreme, few were prepared to share Burke's lament for the passing of 'the age of chivalry' or his defence of the *ancien régime*. But his attack on Price and his friends as a potential Jacobin fifth column was picked up in the provincial press where it helped to re-ignite Tory and Anglican hostility towards the pretensions of the Dissenters, resulting in some places in crowd actions, most notoriously in Birmingham, where the house of Joseph Priestley was destroyed on Bastille Day 1791.

Burke's approach was partially vindicated by the publication of the two parts of Paine's *Rights of Man* in 1791 and 1792. Here was proof that the aim of French revolutionaries was not to create a new form of 'mixed government', but to establish an egalitarian republic. Moderate reformers hastened to distance themselves from Paine's programme. The veteran campaigner for political reform Christopher Wyvill, in his *Defence of Dr Price*, deplored 'the mischievous effects' of Paine's approach in exciting 'the lowest classes of the People to acts of violence and injustice' and was especially incensed by the social proposals contained in the second part of the *Rights of Man*. In April 1792 he therefore proposed that the London Constitutional Society dissociate itself from a programme which held out to the poor 'annuities to be had out of the superfluous wealth of the Rich'.[6]

The reservations of moderates did little to stem the phenomenal spread of Painite ideas in 1792. Well-supported democratic associations were established in twenty major towns, with 'divisions' or 'tythings' formed in the surrounding countrysides. In the summer of 1792 the government decided to prosecute the *Rights of Man* in response and issued a proclamation against seditious writing. In December of that year, it even set forth a royal proclamation summoning the militia to counter 'the radical invasion'. Governmental action was in turn massively reinforced by the initiative of John Reeves in forming loyalist associations to counteract sedition. After a few months 1,500 associations had been formed.

Such was the background to the Paine burnings of 1792–3. They were often organised by loyalist associations, both to demonstrate the extent of their local support and to intimidate radicals in surrounding areas. Loyalists also put pressure on town officials and local employers to discriminate against the employment of radicals, compelled publicans to deny radicals the hire of public rooms and prosecuted prominent activists. By 1794, Britain was at war with France and events in France were taking an ever more bloodthirsty turn. Loyalist propaganda dwelt more and more insistently upon 'the bloody *bonnet rouge*, the piked head, and the guillotine'. They had been able to assemble a mass movement which, though uneven on the ground, was able to push radicals into retreat.[7]

In London, Norwich and Sheffield, radicals still dared to

defy the increasingly repressive climate. In 1795, two leading members of the London Corresponding Society, Thomas Hardy and Horne Took, were acquitted of treason by a London jury, and the king was jeered by crowds as he proceeded through Hyde Park. But 1795 was a turning point. After the Treasonable Practices and Seditious Meetings Acts ('the Gagging Acts'), open defiance ceased. Activists found it increasingly difficult to act or assemble, even in radical strongholds, without suffering legal or financial persecution.

Loyalist pressure was not simply a matter of control over the streets, it also narrowed the scope of intellectual debate and misrepresented its contents. The situation was worst in Scotland, where in a notorious series of sedition trials of 1793–4, radicals were transported for sentences of seven to fourteen years simply for 'exciting disaffection to government'. Political hysteria also reached the academy. Dugald Stewart, Adam Smith's best-known disciple and first biographer, delivered his 'Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith' to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1793.[8] On the evidence of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith was an unqualified supporter of high wages, far more tolerant of combinations of labourers than of masters. Indeed, Malthus chided him for confusing 'the happiness of nations' with 'the happiness and comfort of the lower orders of society which is the most numerous class in every nation'.[9] He was not a critic of the Poor Laws except of the vexations caused to the poor by removals under the Law of Settlement, nor

is there any record of his opposing whatever relief measures might be necessary in cases of famine or high prices, since the problem simply did not arise. He was not in favour of primogeniture, and nor did he favour an established church.

In the fiercely counter-revolutionary atmosphere of Scotland at the time, it is perhaps not surprising that Stewart should have minimised the importance of Smith's political preferences. In so doing, however, he initiated a distinction between political economy and politics which was to have long-lasting effects, while his politically bloodless re-reading of Smith provided one of the sources of political economy's reputation among radicals and romantics as 'the dismal science' with 'a heart of flint'. Stewart admitted that Smith's 'speculations', along with those of 'Quesnai, Turgot, Compomanes, Beccaria and others, have aimed at the improvement of society'. But, he hastened to reassure his audience, 'such speculations' … have no tendency to unhinge established institutions, or to inflame the passions of the multitude. The improvements they recommend are to be effected by means too gradual and slow in their operation, to warm the imaginations of any but of the speculative few; and in proportion as they are adopted, they consolidate the political fabric, and enlarge the basis upon which it rests.'[10] Stewart even obscured the undeniable fact that Smith identified with the religious scepticism of Hume, let alone the yet more uncomfortable fact that Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was at that time much studied by the Philosophe

party among the French Revolutionaries as offering a non-Christian moral theory.[11]

But worse was to come, and in 1794 he himself was obliged to disown his former acquaintance with the Philosophe party. Two Scottish law lords asked him to retract a small reference to Condorcet in his *Philosophy of the Human Mind* and to renounce 'in an open and manly manner … every word you had ever uttered in favour of doctrines which had led to so giant a mischief'. From 1 February 1793, Britain was at war with France, a war originally advocated primarily by the Girondin party. Perhaps it was the association of Condorcet with the Girondins which had led Stewart temporarily to concur with Burke's judgement on the fall of Brissot in the summer of 1793:

> His faction having obtained their stupendous and unnatural power, by rooting out of the minds of his unhappy countrymen every principle of religion, morality, loyalty, fidelity and honour, discovered, that when authority came into their hands, it would be a matter of no small difficulty for them to carry on government on the principles by which they had destroyed it.[12]

Stewart complied with the request and accordingly expressed regret for 'mentioning with respect the name of Condorcet'.[13]

The discussion of Paine's ideas was scarcely less febrile. Despite the widespread anxiety expressed by magistrates

about the appeal of Paine's ideas on taxation and social insurance, those proposals were barely discussed. Instead, as Greg Claeys has concluded from an examination of 600 contributions to the pamphlet debate on the Revolution, Paine was simply treated as a 'leveller', as an advocate of economic equality.[14]

This also meant that there was relatively little discussion of the one significantly redistributive element in Paine's programme: the proposal to employ progressive taxation to end the practice of primogeniture. Such a measure, Paine hoped, would lead to the break-up of great estates and the dismantling of the large concentrations of aristocratic power and wealth which had been assembled through feudal devices like primogeniture and entail. Paine's criticism of primogeniture was very similar to that of Smith, which had been made largely on the basis of utility.[15] A minority of more perceptive or scrupulous critics took account of Paine's specific aim but questioned the assumption that the egalitarian conditions of an agrarian yet non-feudal society like America's could be transplanted across the Atlantic. They did not think it possible to form a commercial republic in Europe more egalitarian than those of Venice or Holland.

The majority, however, insisted on interpreting Paine as if he were advocating the return of the ancient republic or the reversion to some primitive community of goods. They did so by treating his argument as if it were based solely upon an appeal to 'natural rights'. Critics referred overwhelmingly to the argument that Paine had put forward in

Part One of the *Rights of Man* – an argument which took natural rights back to the state of nature and Adam and Eve – in order to refute Burke's denial of the right of the people to move beyond the parliamentary settlement of 1688. Presenting this point as if it were the premise of an argument for economic equality, Loyalists argued that all rights were civil; that there had been no natural equality and no rights in the state of nature; that Adam had not been equal with his sons; and that the society described in Genesis was most likely to have been a monarchy. Social hierarchy was therefore a natural development and it was appropriate that sovereignty should reside not in the people, but in the legislature. All this was designed to underpin their main contention that the assumption of equality which informed Paine's vision of society was incompatible with the opulence which characterised a commercial society like that in Britain.

The particular accusations flung at Paine in this debate seem even stranger when set alongside English Poor Law practice at the time.[16] For while many of the critics of the French Revolution argued that inequality was inseparable from the benefits of commercial society and feared the consequences of leading the poor to imagine that they possessed a right to relief, the reality was that a right to relief was already firmly inscribed within the existing Poor Law system. This reality, legal as well as moral, was stated by a legal expert in 1793: '[T]he right to receive a compensation for their labour, adequate to their necessary wants, while they have a capability of labour is certainly due to them; and

the right of maintenance from the more opulent classes of society when that capability to labour is passed, is another debt which owes them.' 'The occupation of the labourer,' he maintained, 'subjects him to acute illness, chronic disorders, and at length to old age, decrepitude, and impotence.' 'Without the aid of his more opulent neighbours, or what is infinitely to the credit of this nation, without the interference of the Godlike laws of his country, this useful class of our countrymen would sink in the arms of famine or despair.'[17]

Nor were these rights new. The practice of local tax-based relief had been in existence since the time of the Henrician reformation as a systematisation of parish charity. That process had resulted in 1572 in an act enabling justices of the peace to provide relief by means of a parochial tax, codified in 1597–8 and set out in permanent form in the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601. Although it was not the main intention of the act, the right to relief was strongly reinforced by the Act of Settlement of 1662. For, although an applicant for relief who did not comply with statutory residence requirements could be removed from a particular parish, his or her removal could only be to another parish where they possessed such an entitlement. Therefore, vexatious though the operation of the Law of Settlement undoubtedly often was, it institutionalised the duty of relief within the parochial system.

Tax-based local relief had been practised in other parts of Europe in the sixteenth century, but only in England did

it survive in an elaborated form through to the eighteenth century; and only in the period after 1750 did the singularity and extent of the English Poor Law become a matter of repeated comment.[18] One of the hardships created by the system, as noticed by continental observers, was the lack of any administrative mechanism to spread the very uneven burdens placed upon rich and poor parishes. François, the 18-year-old future duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, chair of the Comité de Mendicité in the early years of the French Revolution, remarked upon this inequality of local tax burden on a fact-finding visit to East Anglia in 1782. Recording his impressions of Yarmouth, he commented, 'The poor rate is alarming: 10 shillings in the pound. I have never managed to understand the explanation of so exorbitant a tax.'[19]

A more common complaint within England itself was not so much the distribution, but the *level* of the tax, which rose steadily from the 1760s. From then onwards, calls for its abolition became increasingly frequent. The poor rate, it was argued, was a tax upon the industrious to support the idle, and the case of industrious Scotland without a Poor Law was often cited to prove that such a law was unnecessary (though the counter-case of Ireland, also without a Poor Law, demonstrated that simple correlations were inconclusive). Interestingly, however, in the decade after the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789, rate-based expenditure increased even more rapidly than before.

In part, this was a response to years of exceptional and

visible hardship like 1795; in part, to the fear of revolution. Magistrates were empowered to set levels of relief outside the workhouse supplementing the inadequate wages of working men with families, particularly in years of scarcity. This resorting to a 'rate in aid of wages' – the so-called Speenhamland System – was to become a stock item in an endlessly repeated Victorian horror story about the bad old days before the New Poor Law. But it was mainly justified at the time on prudential grounds. Nor was it confined to extravagant local authorities. Central government also appeared keen to ensure generous scales of relief. In a proposed Poor Law Bill of 1796, Pitt referred approvingly to 'the labouring poor' and urged, 'Let us … make relief, in cases where there are a number of children, a matter of right, and an honour instead of a ground for opprobrium and contempt. This will make a large family a blessing and not a curse.'[20] Pitt opposed Whitbread's proposal for a minimum wage. But his own bill included a gamut of proposals for the alleviation of the condition of the poor – family allowances, a rate in aid of wages, money to purchase a cow, schools of industry for poor children, reclamation of waste land, a relaxation of the Law of Settlement and measures to assist the provision of insurance against sickness and old age.[21] It is clear that politicians and magistrates, whatever the pronouncements of their propagandists, had kept one eye on the suggestions emanating from the Comité de Mendicité in France.

The debate between Whitbread and Pitt was between two politicians, both of whom were attempting to devise

measures in the spirit of Smith to alleviate the economic hardship of the 'labouring poor' in the mid-1790s. But even those followers of Smith who opposed such measures were against any drastic change in the practice of relief. Frederick Eden, in his *State of the Poor*, disliked the measures proposed by both Whitbread and Pitt. He thought that a right to employment or maintenance might deter industriousness. But it would be an even greater mistake to remove such 'rights'. The 'poor' or 'the labouring classes' were a new class created by freeing the people from bondage to the soil and through the rise of manufacture. Earlier there had been no 'poor', only 'slaves'. Freed from dependence upon feudal lords, however, they still expected help when incapacitated by sickness or old age. Like other legislation set in place in an earlier age to meet different circumstances, the Poor Laws should be reformed, not abolished.

Seen in this context, Paine's detailed proposals do not seem so outlandish. He was merely attempting to shift the emphasis from cure to prevention. As he himself put it, comparing his proposals in *Agrarian Justice* to the practice of the English Poor Laws:

> It is the practice of what has unjustly obtained the name of civilisation (and the practice merits not to be called either charity or policy) to make some provision for persons becoming poor and wretched only at the time they become so. Would it not, even as a matter of economy, be far better to adopt means to prevent their becoming poor? This can

> best be done by making every person when arrived at the age of twenty-one years an inheritor of something to begin with.[22]

But by 1797, the year in which Paine made this proposal, the climate of opinion had begun to change fundamentally and in such a way that, within a few years, the mid-90s poverty proposals of Paine and Pitt alike had been consigned to oblivion.

Whether radicalism collapsed or went underground, as Edward Thompson argued in *The Making of the English Working Class*, is still a matter of historical debate. But of the magnitude of the shift in public opinion there can be no doubt. Disenchantment with the failures and shock at the sanguinary excesses of the Revolution were compounded by a more general welling-up of wartime patriotic sentiment. Never more so than in the years 1797 and 1798, when it was fanned by mutinies in the fleet, scares about French invasion and rebellion in Ireland. The impact of these events was manifest in the falling-out of former political allies, in political re-alignments, in a far greater intolerance of atheism and free thought, in a great intensification of the new evangelical religious culture which had been growing since the 1780s, and finally in what R. H. Tawney in a different context once described as 'a new medicine for poverty'.

Although religious themes were never absent from the debate about the Revolution, in the first half of the 1790s they remained subordinate. Burke, in *Reflections*, was excep-

tional in warning of 'the spirit of atheistical fanaticism … in all the streets and places of public resort in Paris' and in arguing that the new ecclesiastical establishment in France was intended only to be 'temporary', and 'preparatory to the utter abolition, under any of its forms, of the Christian religion'.[23] The loyalist response to Paine largely focussed upon a defence of the existing constitution and upon the primitivist implications of his conception of rights. Pitt's old Cambridge tutor, George Pretyman-Tomline, now a bishop, in his *Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Lincoln* of 1794, spent nine pages outlining the necessity of the Christian principles of subordination and restraint to the functioning of society, but only six lines on the religious basis of political obligation.[24] At the end of the *Rights of Man* Paine congratulated himself that in the whole work, 'there is only a single paragraph upon religion'. But, as it happened, that paragraph did touch the core of what was at issue between the supporters and opponents of revolution. His argument was that 'every religion is good that teaches man to be good'.[25] The case for the perfectibility of man, and hence for the elimination of poverty, stood or fell on the question of whether human nature was inherently imperfect ('original sin') and therefore whether restraints needed to be placed upon man's activity. The need to clear away such impediments to the possibility of perfectibility was strongly argued by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1794:

> We must get entirely clear of all the notions drawn from

> the wild traditions of original sin: the eating of the apple, the theft of Prometheus, the opening of Pandora's box and other tales too tedious to enumerate, on which priests have erected their tremendous structures of imposition, to persuade us, that we are naturally inclined to evil. [26]

But as revolutionary hopes gave way to disenchantment and the war acquired the dimensions of a struggle for national survival, the Christian element in the attack on notions of perfectibility became increasingly pronounced; sin and the vanity of human illusions about perfection were themes that the opponents of the Revolution were happy to throw back at its supporters. In one of the tracts of the leading Evangelical activist Hannah More, *The History of Mr Fantom, the New-fashioned Philosopher*, in answer to Mr Fantom, who has 'a plan … for relieving the miseries of the whole world', Mr Trueman objects:

> But, sir, among all your abolitions, you must abolish human corruption before you can make the world quite as perfect as you pretend. You philosophers seem to me to be ignorant of the very first seed and principle of misery – sin, sir, sin. Your system of reform is radically defective; for it does not comprehend that sinful nature from which all misery proceeds. You accuse government of defects which belong to man, and, of course, to man collectively. Among your reforms you must reform the human heart.[27]

For supporters of the Revolution, like Mary Wollstonecraft, the only excuse for the ferocity of the Parisians was that, under the monarchy, they had lost all confidence in the laws. As she stated in 1794, 'When justice, or the law is so partial, the day of retribution will come with the red sky of vengeance, to confound the innocent with the guilty. The mob were barbarous beyond the tiger's cruelty: for how could they trust a court that had so often deceived them, or expect to see its agents punished?'[28] But for its opponents, the Revolution became an example of what happens when Christian restraint upon the passions is removed. The need to restrain the poor and to inculcate in them the religious duty of submission to providence had already become prominent in the work of Sarah Trimmer, Hugh Berinton and others in the 1780s as a response to the Gordon Riots and the growth of pauperism. On the division between wealth and poverty, God's ordinance was treated by Christians, whether radical or conservative, as beyond human questioning. According to the Gospel of St Matthew, as Christ sat in the house of Simon the Leper, a woman came and poured a precious ointment over his head. The disciples strongly objected to 'this waste'. But Christ responded, 'Why trouble ye the woman for she hath wrought a good work upon me? For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.'

However unfortunate, the presence of the poor was inescapable. They formed a constituent part of the Christian cosmos.[29] For the good Christian, poverty was not a condi-

tion to be remedied, but the spur to the exercise of humility, the practice of charity and the striving for grace. John Wesley, when contemplating the horrors of poverty, found comfort in the promise of the Resurrection. Richard Price also considered that this life was only to be judged within the framework of the eternal. However full of temptations and tribulations the earthly journey, what mattered was the heavenly destination. In this sense, the path of the simple poor man might be easier and more straightforward than that of the pampered rich. But the argument was pressed with even greater insistence in the face of the revolutionary threat. According to William Wilberforce's *Practical View* of 1797:

> In whatever class or order of society Christianity prevails, she sets herself to rectify the particular faults, or, if we would speak more distinctly, to counteract the particular mode of selfishness, to which that class is liable … Thus, softening the glare of wealth, and moderating the insolence of power, she renders the inequalities of the social state less galling to the lower orders, whom also she instructs, in their turn, to be diligent, humble, patient: reminding them that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences; that the present state of things is very short; that the objects about which worldly men conflict so eagerly, are not worth the contest; that the peace of mind which Religion offers to

> all ranks indiscriminately, affords more true satisfaction than all the expensive pleasures which are beyond the poor man's reach.[30]

Christianity exposed the false promise of perfectibility. As Hannah More admonished 'women of rank and fortune' in 1799: '[T]he Gospel *can* make no part of a system in which the absurd idea of perfectibility is considered applicable to fallen creatures; in which the chimerical project of consummate earthly happiness (founded on the mad pretence of loving the poor better than God loves them) would defeat the divine plan, which meant this world for a scene of discipline, not of remuneration.'[31]

The strength of Christianity in the eyes of its defenders was not merely that it reconciled the poor to their subordination, but that through its conceptions of sin and redemption, punishment and atonement, it enforced morality in all classes of society and thus held society together, especially a commercial society in which self-interest was so much to the fore. According to Wilberforce again,

> Christianity in every way sets herself in direct hostility to selfishness, the mortal distemper of political communities. It might indeed be almost stated as the main object and chief concern of Christianity, to root out our natural selfishness, and to rectify the false standard which it imposes on us; with views, however, far higher than any which concern merely our temporal and social well-being.[32]

The point was also made polemically by Hannah More. The irreligious appeared to believe that a simulacrum of morality was as good as the thing itself. Hadn't that been the teaching of Mandeville? The half-understood implications of this 'philosopher's' idea were dramatised in the behaviour of William, Mr Fantom's manservant. Reprimanded by his master for serving guests at table while drunk, he replied 'very pertly', 'Sir, if I do get drunk now and then, I only do it for the good of my country, and in obedience to your wishes.' After being scolded 'in words not fit to be repeated', William again retorted: 'Why, sir, you are a philosopher … and I have often overheard you say to your company, that private vices are public benefits; and so I thought that getting drunk was as pleasant a way of doing good to the public as any, especially when I could oblige my master at the same time.'[33]

In the course of the 1790s, the Christian riposte to the Revolution and its English supporters also acquired an increasingly aggressive edge. If religion held society together, the irreligious were no longer an unfortunate but harmless minority, they became those who aimed at society's dissolution. Once again, Burke was one of the earliest and most consistent exponents of this view. Already in *Reflections* he referred to a 'literary cabal' which had 'formed something like a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion', and drew attention to a supposed conspiracy of the Bavarian *illuminati* (illuminist freemasons). Thereafter, he became ever more convinced that the events in France were

a 'revolution of doctrine and theoretick dogma' designed to 'get rid of the clergy, and indeed of any form of religion', and that 'a system of French conspiracy' was 'gaining ground in every country'. 'Atheists', he remarked in 1791, were no longer like 'the old Epicureans, rather an unenterprising race'. Lately they had grown 'active, designing, turbulent and seditious', the 'sworn enemies to kings, nobility and priesthood. We have seen all the academicians at Paris, with Condorcet, the friend and correspondent of Priestley, at their head, the most furious of the extravagant republicans.'

He elaborated his interpretation most fully in 1796 in 'His Letters on a Regicide Peace'. Britain was at war with 'an armed doctrine' built upon regicide, Jacobinism and atheism. The origins of this revolution had been brought about by two sorts of men: the philosophers and the politicians. 'The philosophers had one predominant object, which they pursued with a fanatical fury, that is, the utter extirpation of religion.' Between them, the philosophers and the politicians had been responsible for 'a silent revolution in the moral world' which 'preceded the political and prepared it'.[34]

In the early 1790s, few followed Burke in believing that the Revolution had been the result of a philosophical plot to destroy Christianity. James Mackintosh, the leading Whig intellectual, protested in 1791 that 'the supposition of their conspiracy for the abolition of Christianity, is one of the most extravagant chimeras that ever entered the human imagination'. He argued that 'it was not against religion, but

against the Church that their *political* hostility was directed'; 'their purpose was accomplished when the Priesthood was disarmed'.[35] Attitudes changed dramatically in 1797 with the publication of alleged proofs by the Abbé Barruel in France and by John Robison in England that either the *philosophes* or the freemasons and *illuminati*, or some combination of the two, had brought about the Revolution and engineered the fall of the monarchy. During the sitting of the Assembly of Notables in 1788, according to Robison, the German *illuminati* with the assistance of allies like Mirabeau and Philippe duc d'Orléans, sent a delegation to France. Their aim was to abolish the laws which protected property, establish universal liberty and equality, 'and as necessary preparations for all this, they intended to root out all religion and ordinary morality … *This was all that the Illuminati could teach*, and THIS WAS PRECISELY WHAT FRANCE HAS DONE.'[36] According to popular versions of these arguments, the philosophers believed that religion had first to be overthrown before it was possible to bring down the monarchy. The fact of the publication of Paine's *Age of Reason* in 1796, an attack on the morality, textual consistency and historical veracity of the Bible, seemed to prove that irreligion, sedition and support for the national enemy were closely linked. Paine's declaration at the beginning of the book of his belief in God and hope of an afterlife cut little ice.[37] Loyal and patriotic support for 'mixed government' and for the existing hierarchy of ranks was now extended to encompass an allegiance to the Church of England.

Alongside the sharper attack upon the patriotism and good faith of the radicals in the later 1790s there developed a noticeably harsher stance towards the poor. Once again, Burke helped to set the trend. In the 'Letters on a Regicide Peace', he had already attacked 'the pulling jargon' of the 'labouring poor' as if their condition was in itself to be pitied, as opposed to those who through sickness, disability or old age were unable to work. This was 'trifling with the condition of mankind' and forgetting that it was 'the common doom of man that he must eat his bread by the sweat of his brow'.[38] In the posthumous publication of what might originally have been intended as a memorandum (evidently unheeded) to Pitt on how to deal with the near-famine food prices of 1795, Burke argued vehemently against government intervention. Labour was 'a commodity … an article of trade'. 'It is not in breaking the laws of commerce, which are the laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God, that we are to place our hope of softening the Divine displeasure to remove any calamity under which we suffer, or which hangs over us.' 'To provide for us in our necessities is not in the power of government.' Burke railed against this 'political canting language'. 'Charity to the poor' was 'a direct and obligatory duty upon all Christians'. 'But let there be no lamentation of their condition … Patience, labour, sobriety, frugality, and religion, should be recommended to them; all the rest is downright *fraud*.'[39] What was most remarkable about this document was that by the time

Burke's executors brought it out in a posthumous edition in 1800, his insistence upon absolute non-interference with market mechanisms, even in virtual famine conditions, was interpreted without quibble as an exposition of Smith's views on the topic.[40]

Exactly why Burke's view came to be assimilated so rapidly and unproblematically with that of Smith is unclear. But it was certainly in part the result of Malthus's *Essay on Population*, which had appeared in 1798. The full title of Malthus's work was *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr Godwin, M. Condorcet and Other Writers*. This *Essay*, with its famous juxtaposition of population which 'when unchecked, increased in geometrical ratio' with 'subsistence for man' whose increase was only 'in an arithmetical ratio', was an exercise in natural theology. Not everyone considered that revolutionary visions of the end of poverty and inequality could simply be countered by the undigested mixture of Genesis and political economy found in the late Burke, or the unrelieved emphasis upon sin, atonement and the transitoriness of earthly life of the Evangelicals. For such readers, the *Essay* offered a more reasoned account of the impossibility of 'a society, all the members of which should live in ease, happiness and comparative leisure; and feel no anxiety about providing the means of subsistence for themselves and families'.[41]

Malthus came from a family well versed in enlightened speculation. His father had once entertained Rousseau and

Hume; and he himself had received part of his education at the famous Warrington Academy under the guidance of the prominent Unitarian and champion of 'rational dissent', Gilbert Wakefield. In 1784 he had entered Jesus College, Cambridge, which was at the time another renowned centre of theological liberalism. Although Malthus seems always to have been destined for the church, among his Cambridge friends were to be found those who were both radical and unorthodox, in particular his tutor, William Frend, to whom he remained close into later life. In 1787, Frend publicly renounced the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England and espoused Unitarianism; and in 1793, he was expelled from the university for political radicalism.[42] It is also indicative of the milieu within which Malthus moved that the *Essay* itself was published (anonymously) by the radical Joseph Johnson, who was also the publisher of Godwin and Wollstonecraft. The *Essay* was said to have been prompted by discussions between Malthus and his father about the utopian views set forth by William Godwin in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* of 1793 and *Enquirer* of 1797. At the time, Malthus was a moderate Foxite Whig who opposed Pitt's coercion of British radicals and disliked Burke for his abandonment of the Foxite cause. Even after 1800, he remained a 'friend of peace' – one reason why he was attacked so vehemently by the Romantics, especially Coleridge and Southey. In later life, he continued to support the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, Catholic emancipation and moderate franchise reform of the kind put forward in 1832. [43]

The substantive content of Malthus's account was determined by its Christian form, that of a theodicy designed to explain the necessary presence of evil in a world created by an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God.[44] But there was nothing traditional about the theodicy Malthus constructed, and its impact spread far beyond the ranks of Christian believers. According once more to Dugald Stewart, principal intellectual heir to Smith and prominent Edinburgh Whig, the 'reasonings' of the *Essay*, 'in so far as they relate to the Utopian plans of Wallace, Condorcet and Godwin, are perfectly conclusive, and strike at the root of all such theories'.[45]

Until the end of the seventeenth century, theodicies were composed almost entirely out of the materials of revealed Christianity, especially Paul's reading of the Fall and Augustine's depiction of the hereditary transmission of sin to the posterity of Adam. Sin was a 'depravity' both of reason and of will conveyed through the act of generation, which was inherently sinful because mired in 'concupiscence'. That God saved some to receive the gift of 'final perseverance', and so be saved from eternal damnation, was entirely a matter of God's grace. Earthly life was a state of 'trial' and 'probation' spent in a perpetual striving to escape from the all-pervasive mesh of sin and corruption.

The hold of this grim doctrine, heavily underscored in Lutheran and Calvinist theologies and propagated uncompromisingly in the religious wars of the seventeenth century, loosened perceptibly after 1700. Confronted by a growing

challenge from free thought, by enlightened notions of justice and by the beginnings of a historical and developmental approach to the Bible, the harsh edges of Augustinian and Calvinist doctrine yielded to a theology appealing as much to reason as to revelation. This was especially the case in eighteenth-century Britain, where the 1688 Settlement and a latitudinarian stance on questions of religious doctrine were designed to put to sleep the bloody conflicts of the previous century. Cambridge was the most important centre of this new liberal theology. It built upon Newton's vision of an orderly cosmos and evidence found in nature of the power, wisdom and goodness of God. Evil in the world was no more than the minimum necessary to accomplish God's purposes. It was from within this tradition of natural theology running from John Ray to Edmund Law and William Paley that Malthus composed his *Essay*.[46]

In *Political Justice*, William Godwin, himself a former dissenting minister, depicted the approach of a world in which evil, together with private property, government and punishment, would wither away. Godwin looked forward to a prospect described by Benjamin Franklin, in which mind would become omnipotent over matter and death itself might be abolished. According to Godwin, there was no original sin, nor any inherent differences between men. Man was an intellectually and morally progressive being; moral and political improvement ('perfectibility') followed from the increase of knowledge.

Pondering the depiction of 'luxury' by Mandeville and

its defence by Hume, Godwin conceded that without 'the spectacle of inequality', which provoked 'the persevering exertion' of the Barbarians, 'leisure which served the purpose of literature and art' would not have been possible. But, he went on, 'though inequality were necessary as the prelude to civilisation, it is not necessary to its support. We may throw down the scaffolding when the edifice is complete.' It was therefore only mistaken ideas of self-interest, not inherent drives or passions, which diverted man from 'benevolence'. As knowledge, and hence virtue, increased, man would become increasingly dependent upon reason alone. Both private property and marriage as forms of monopoly would be voluntarily relinquished and, since 'the pleasures of intellect' would be preferred to 'the pleasures of sense', sexual pleasure would eventually fade away.[47]

Malthus's natural theology aimed to refute Godwin, not by citing Scripture, but by 'turning our eyes to the book of Nature, where alone we can read God as he is'. One of Godwin's principal errors was to treat man as if he were a 'wholly intellectual' creature and could therefore be moved to give up private property through 'benevolence'. Malthus responded that it was to 'the established administration of property, and to the apparently narrow principle of self-love, that we are endebted … for everything … that distinguishes the civilised from the savage state'. It was not the unaided processes of mind which spurred men into action, but 'the wants of the body' that roused 'the brain of infant man into sentient activity'. If Godwin's commonwealth were brought

into being and those 'stimulants to exertion, which arise from the wants of the body were removed from the mass of mankind, we have more reason to think they would be sunk to the level of brutes, from a deficiency of excitements, than that they would be raised to the ranks of philosophers by the possession of leisure'. No sufficient change had taken place in 'the nature of civilised man' to suggest that he might 'safely throw down the ladder' by which he had risen to his present 'eminence'.[48]

The progress of man from savagery to civilisation was not the product of the unaided and inherent activity of mind. The creation of mind was not the cause but the effect of a struggle of cosmic dimensions, in which 'the world, and this life' could be seen as 'a mighty process of God … for the creation and formation of mind; a process necessary, to awaken inert, chaotic matter into spirit'. And 'necessity' (the principle of population) provided the means by which man, 'as he really is, inert, sluggish, and averse from labour', was compelled into activity by God. 'The savage would slumber for ever under his tree unless he was roused from his torpor by the cravings of hunger, or the pinchings of cold.' Indeed, in this new and decidedly heterodox version of Christianity, original sin was no longer the product of *activity* – the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden – but of *passivity*: 'The original sin of man, is the torpor and corruption of the chaotic matter, in which he may be said to be born.'[49]

This life was therefore no longer a state of 'trial' or 'pro-

bation' in which the Christian should accept his allotted rank with cheerfulness and humility; it was rather a state of 'universal exertion' whose strong and constantly operative … stimulus was 'the superiority of the power of population to the means of subsistence … Had population and food increased in the same ratio, it is probable that man might never have emerged from the savage state.' Inequality formed part of this divine scheme. 'If no man could hope to rise, or fear to fall, in society; if industry did not bring with it its reward, and idleness its punishment, the middle parts would not certainly be what they now are.' It was for the same reason that 'the passion between the sexes' was 'necessary' and would remain 'nearly in its present state'. 'The principle, according to which population increases, prevents the vices of mankind, or the accidents of nature, the partial evils arising from general laws, from obstructing the high purpose of the creation.' Such a law could not operate 'without occasioning partial evil'. But evil in this eccentric theodicy was a sort of good: 'Evil exists in the world, not to create despair, but activity.'[50]

Despite its title, Malthus's direct criticism of the social insurance programmes of Condorcet and Paine was cursory. Not more than ten out of nearly 400 pages were devoted to Condorcet's proposals; and in the first edition, Paine was not even mentioned. The treatment was assertive, lacking in detail and, at best, loosely targeted, because it appeared to have been tacked on to an argument devised to refute the differing claims and assumptions of Godwin.

Condorcet – and in the second edition, Paine – presented no theodicy. They could only be conjoined with Godwin insofar as they also subscribed to 'the great error under which Mr Godwin labours throughout his whole work … the attributing almost all the vices and misery that are seen in civil society to human institutions'. Malthus dismissed these institutional causes of misery as 'mere feathers, that float on the surface'.[51]

In other respects, the differences between Godwin and Condorcet or Paine were fundamental. Paine and Condorcet accepted self-interest as the basis of society and government and pushed Adam Smith's 'natural progress of opulence' in an egalitarian direction. They criticised monopolies and excessive concentrations of private property in the land, but not the principle of private property itself. Like Smith, they considered security of property a source of progress and independence. They praised commercial society as an advance upon the feudal past, shared Smith's confidence in capital investment and rejected ascetic and moralistic attitudes towards luxuries. By contrast, Godwin thought private property a source of injustice, dependence, greed and egoism. Like Rousseau and Price, he associated commerce and luxury with inequality and depopulation, and his picture of commercial society was that of Mandeville rather than Smith. Commercial society was, however, only a transient phase in the progress towards a truly egalitarian civilisation, where the main stimulus to activity would be 'love of distinction' and ultimately a purely impersonal love of justice.

According to Malthus, Condorcet's proposals might appear 'very promising upon paper', but 'applied to real life they will be found to be absolutely nugatory'. The provision of cheaper credit institutions for the poor, he believed, would place 'the idle and negligent' on the same footing as 'the active and industrious', and would necessitate 'an inquisition' to examine claims which would be 'little else than a repetition upon a larger scale of the English poor laws'. It would be 'completely destructive of the true principles of liberty and equality'. But these were no more than elaborations of his basic objection: that the existence of a social insurance fund would remove 'the goad of necessity' from 'the labour necessary to procure subsistence for an extended population'. 'Were every man sure of a comfortable provision for a family, almost every man would have one; and were the rising generation free from the "killing frost" of misery, population must readily increase.'[52]

In essence, the attack on Condorcet was little more than the specification of a larger but generally unavowed object of attack, the stance towards labourers adopted by Adam Smith himself. Smith accepted as a truism that 'the demand for men, like that for any other commodity, necessarily regulates the production of men; quickens it when it goes too slowly and stops it when it goes too fast'. But this did not mean that the poor only worked when pushed by 'necessity'. Among the reasons Smith gave for his support for high wages was that the labourer was likely to be encouraged 'by the comfortable hope of bettering his condition'.

'Where wages are high, accordingly, we shall always find the workmen more active, diligent and expeditious, than where they are low.' Conversely, as he argued about the dissenting clergy in *The Wealth of Nations*, 'fear is in almost all cases a wretched instrument of government, and ought in particular never be employed against any order of men who have the smallest pretensions to independency'.[53] Smith never employed the notion of 'indolence' in connection with the labouring poor – this he reserved for depictions of the landed classes and the established clergy.[54]

Condorcet and Paine had only reiterated Smith in expressing their confidence in the natural progress of opulence upon the labourer's hope of bettering his condition. Smith made no reference to the 'goad of necessity', nor did he suggest any essential difference of mentality between rich and poor. On the contrary, he assumed an equality of 'natural talent'. The differences between the philosopher and the street porter were 'much less than we are aware of' and were, for the most part, the effect rather than the cause of the division of labour. Persons from all classes desired respect, 'to be taken notice of with sympathy', to be decently attired and to be able to appear without shame in public.[55]

In Malthus's *Essay* there was a palpable shift. In his opinion, 'the labouring poor, to use a vulgar expression, seem always to live from hand to mouth. Their present wants employ their whole attention, and they seldom think of the future. Even when they have an opportunity of saving, they seldom exercise it; but all that is beyond their present

necessities goes generally speaking, to the ale house.' His polemic against the Poor Laws was also premised upon an assumption of the lack of any discernible desire among the poor to preserve their self-respect. The poor who went to the ale house would save and not drink 'if they didn't know they could rely on parish assistance for support in case of accidents'. The labourer would behave differently if he were assured that 'his family must starve, or be left to the support of casual bounty'. Unlike Smith's poor, who were brought within the norms of civil society by sympathy, neighbourhood, custom and education, Malthus's poor, even when they knew better, were governed by 'their bodily cravings' – 'the cravings of hunger, the love of liquor, the desire of possessing a beautiful woman'.[56]

Soon after the *Essay* originally appeared, clerical friends evidently pointed out to Malthus its unsoundness as an exercise in Christian homiletics. He had ascribed 'misery' not to the Fall and the original 'depravity of man', but to the laws of nature. He had had nothing to say either about the Incarnation or about the Resurrection. Man was made in 'the image of God', how then could he be 'inert' and 'sluggish'? Worse still, Malthus's God, despite his omnipotence and omniscience, apparently made mistakes: 'the works of the Creator', Malthus maintained, were 'not formed with equal perfection'. Finally, in God's cosmic struggle to create mind, imperfect specimens, rather than await the Day of Judgement, appeared to return to 'the inertia of matter': a solution nearer to Seneca than to the New Testament.[57]

In the second edition of the *Essay*, which appeared in 1803, Malthus recast his 'principle of population' along more orthodox Anglican lines. Ideas about the divine process of the creation of mind were replaced by more orthodox conceptions of the world as a state of trial, and by foregrounding the prudential check in the shape of deferred marriage. Malthus's theodicy therefore appeared to converge with the more conventional anti-Jacobin emphasis upon Christianity's capacity to induce restraint. In this way he was also able to produce a Christian conception of an individually attainable way out of poverty and a sustainable improvement in the standard of life for the lower classes. According to Waterman, merely as a result of self-love, individuals defer marriage to achieve 'a *target* income'; this restricts the supply of labour, raises its price and thereby brings about an unintended and beneficent outcome. Marriage and private property turn out to be the most effective institutions in harnessing self-love to the goals of benevolence. [58]

In recent years, historians have also revised the received interpretation of Malthus in other respects.[59] They have emphasised Malthus's moderate reformism and his association of prudence among the lower classes with education and civil and political liberty in the second and subsequent editions of the *Essay*. They have also recognised his achievement as a pioneer in the understanding of the operational constraints of the early modern economy. Malthus himself observed that 'the histories of mankind that we possess, are histories only of the higher classes'; and he argued for

enquiries into 'the observable differences in the state of the lower classes of society, with respect to ease and happiness, at different times during a certain period'.[60] According to the foremost historian of English demography, A. E. Wrigley, 'there is now a substantial body of evidence supporting Malthus's view of the relationship between rates of population growth, real wage changes, and the operation of the preventive check during the centuries immediately before his birth'. And this achievement has been underlined by Wrigley's own researches, which have confirmed the reasonableness of the concern, found both in Malthus and in the work of his great contemporary, the political economist David Ricardo, about declining marginal returns to land. As Wrigley explains it,

> The key point is simple. Land was a necessary factor in all forms of material production to a degree not easily recognised in a post-industrial revolution setting. Almost all raw materials were either vegetable or animal: even where mineral raw materials were employed, they were capable of conversion into a useful form only by burning a vegetable fuel. Much the same was also true of the sources of mechanical and heat energy: human and animal muscle and wood fuel were the preponderant means by which raw materials were converted into useful products and transported to places convenient for their subsequent use or consumption. Therefore, the productivity of the land set limits to the scale of industrial activity no less than to

> the level of food consumption. Each of these two great consumers of the products of the land was necessarily in competition with the other for the use of a factor of production whose supply could not be expanded.[61]

But however salutary these correctives, they cannot entirely dispel the criticisms his original antagonists directed at Malthus. In the first place, it was not true that Condorcet (or for that matter, Godwin) had not considered the difficulty posed by population. Condorcet believed that if a time were to come when 'the number of men shall surpass the means of their subsistence', that time would be 'extremely distant'. Malthus countered that 'this constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery, has existed ever since we have had any histories of mankind, does exist at present and will for ever continue to exist'. But he never wholly explained why that should be the case when so much of the globe's surface still remained uncultivated. This was Godwin's original response and it was an objection repeated by Hazlitt, Coleridge and Southey whatever the other changes in their subsequent political positions.[62]

Condorcet himself stated that if at some remote point the limits of population might be reached, 'the progress of reason will have kept pace with that of the sciences, and the absurd prejudices of superstition will have ceased to corrupt and degrade the moral code by its harsh doctrine instead of purifying and elevating it' – a veiled reference to contraception, plainly discussed in an unpublished manu-

script on the tenth epoch. Malthus referred to Condorcet's removal of the difficulty 'in a manner, which I profess not to understand', while also accusing him of advocating 'promiscuous concubinage' which it was widely believed at the time 'would prevent breeding'. His objection to either of these solutions was moral. 'To remove the difficulty in this way will, surely, in the opinion of most men, be, to destroy that virtue, and purity of manners, which the advocates of equality, and of the perfectibility of man, profess to be the end and object of their views.'[63]

Finally, even if Malthus were correct about the general 'oscillation' between prosperity and indigence produced by the population principle in the early modern world, he did not establish any close correlation between those oscillations in England and the history of the Poor Laws. Despite the existence of these laws since Tudor times, England had increased in prosperity at least after 1688. Malthus himself noted a happy conjuncture between 'character' and 'prudential habits' in the period before 1750. Furthermore, as Malthus was to admit in 1817, the Poor Laws had not lowered the age of marriage.[64]

Historians generally suggest that Malthus 'softened' his position in the second edition of 1803 and adopted a more optimistic assessment of the chances of improvement in the condition of the poor. But this is only half true. On the question of social security and the rights of the poor, Malthus not only adopted a harsher tone, but presented an alarmist, even apocalyptic scenario. For the first time, he

discussed Paine's *Rights of Man* which, according to him, had done 'great mischief among the lower and middling classes of people in this country'. After objecting in reasonable terms that Paine underestimated the differences between Britain and America, he attacked Paine's tax proposals, not only as ruinous but as a short path to tyranny, aided by a mob composed of the 'redundant population' – 'of all monsters the most fatal to freedom'. The habit of attributing distress to the nation's rulers or to the character of political institutions, he now considered to be 'the rock of defence, the castle, the guardian spirit of despotism'. Its prevalence was particularly dangerous in a year of near famine prices such as 1800–1. The example of the French Revolution which had 'terminated in military despotism', showed how dangerous it was when 'any dissatisfied man of talents has power to persuade the lower classes of people that all their poverty and distress arise solely from the iniquity of government'.[65]

It was the thought of the 'mischief' done by Paine that led Malthus to assert in far more emphatic and unequivocal terms than anything he had written in the first edition that

> there is one right which man has generally been thought to possess, which I am confident he neither does, nor can possess – a right to subsistence when his labour will not fairly purchase it. Our laws indeed say that he has this right, and bind the society to furnish employment and food to those who cannot get them in the regular market, but in so

> doing, they attempt to reverse the laws of nature; and it is in consequence to be expected, not only that they should fail in their object, but that the poor who are intended to be benefited, should suffer most cruelly from this inhuman deceit which is practised upon them.[66]

And he continued the thought in a notorious passage which his opponents never allowed him to forget, even though he withdrew it in the third edition of 1806 and in all subsequent editions:

> A man is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he does not work upon the compassion of some of her guests.[67]

The position adopted by Malthus in important ways exemplified not only how fear of the French Revolution changed the terms of the debate about poverty, but also about the polity as a whole. In the eighteenth century, as Mark Philp has written, the primary fear had been of arbitrary executive rule and the pretensions of the crown.[68] As a result of the Revolution, the crown began to acquire a widespread and unheard-of popularity and something of

the respectability it eventually achieved in the Victorian era.[69] At the same time, while the 'mixed constitution' was endowed by Burke with a sanctity which subsequent reform movements came tacitly to accept, there had developed a deeper and more lasting fear of the mobilisation of the masses. Malthus summed up the change quite precisely in 1803:

> As a friend to freedom, and an enemy to large standing armies, it is with extreme reluctance that I am compelled to acknowledge that, had it not been for the organised force in the country, the distresses of the people in the late scarcities, encouraged by the extreme ignorance and folly of many among the higher classes, might have driven them to commit the most dreadful outrages, and ultimately to involve the country in all the horrors of famine … Great as has been the influence of corruption, I cannot yet think so meanly of the country gentlemen of England as to believe that they would thus have given up a part of their birth-right of liberty, if they had not been actuated by a real and genuine fear that it was then in greater danger from the people than from the crown.[70]

In the longer term, the debate on the French Revolution, as Greg Claeys has shown, led to a general retreat from the language of rights on the part of moderate Whigs and the adoption of a language of 'commerce, manners and civilisation'. Natural rights were henceforth left to the working

classes and thoughts of a republic confined to a small minority of ultra radicals.[71] What Malthus added to this basic political shift was a new way of thinking about poverty and inequality, quite as momentous as the proposals of Condorcet, Paine and Godwin, which provoked it, and with far more immediate effect. The poor were no longer those 'ye have … always with you', a constant presence recalling to us the vanity of earthly ambition and false pride and an unceasing reminder of our duty to practise the Christian duty of charity; the political and cultural significance of Malthus's shift towards an emphasis upon 'prudential restraint' was that poverty could be avoided. But if it could be avoided, it should no longer be condoned. 'Dependent poverty', as Malthus remarked in the first edition of the *Essay*, 'ought to be held digraceful'.[72]

Like Paine, Malthus wished to do away with the existing Poor Laws. Like Godwin, he supported independence of judgement, but 'independence' was no longer counterposed to dependence upon a bloated aristocracy or upon the sinecures, monopolies and vested interests of a corrupt state. It now meant the individual's independence of all forms of parish authority, especially the alleged tyranny of overseers enforcing the Law of Settlement, and the ability to depend upon one's own individual resources.[73] Henceforth, reformers, at least of the 'philosophical' kind, whatever their continuing criticism of the aristocracy or the rich, felt obliged also, or perhaps even primarily, to couple progress with the possibility of overcoming the 'indolence' of the 'working classes'.

John Stuart Mill might claim that only from the time of the 1798 *Essay* 'has the economical condition of the labouring classes been regarded by thoughtful men as susceptible of permanent improvement', but this new awareness came at the cost of projecting on to the 'labouring poor' a new form of moral pedagogy which, not surprisingly, encountered strong resentment.[74] Cobbett and other representatives of the 'working classes' denounced it as a spurious justification for a scheme to remove the *existing* rights of the poor. The presence of a Tory Romantic strand in Chartism becomes more understandable.

Such a scheme proved particularly offensive when harnessed to a new and up-to-date justification of inequality. Inequality was no longer synonymous with a God-ordained hierarchy of ranks, but manmade and thus the result of indolence or economic incompetence. Malthus had no desire to defend the 'present great inequality of property' as 'either necessary or useful to society'. But he only wished to 'prove the necessity of a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers'.[75] In other words, he was not prepared to defend traditional and hierarchical forms of inequality in the manner of Burke, but he was happy to defend the new form of inequality associated with commercial society, and indeed provide divine support for it.

The point was most eloquently put by his disciple and future Archbishop of Canterbury, John Bird Sumner. 'Inequalities of Ranks and Fortunes', argued Sumner in 1816, was the condition best suited to the development of human

faculties and to the exercise of virtue. Just as Newton had brought 'the mechanism of the natural world' under the operation of 'a single and universal law', so the moral realm was also subject to 'the operation of a single principle' – the principle of population. According to 'the Design of the Creator', therefore, existence on earth was 'a state of discipline in which the various faculties of mankind are to be exerted and their moral character formed, tried and confirmed, previous to their entering upon a future and higher state … Life, therefore, is with great propriety described as a race in which a prize is to be contended for.'[76]