

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE AGRARIAN REPUBLIC

THE TRANSATLANTIC
COMMERCE OF IDEAS
BETWEEN AMERICA AND
FRANCE (1750-1830)



Manuela Albertone

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE AGRARIAN REPUBLIC

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National Identity and the Agrarian Republic

The Transatlantic Commerce of Ideas between
America and France (1750–1830)

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*For
Antonello,
Giulia and Giorgio*

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Modern Economic and Social History Series General Editor's Preface

Economic and social history has been a flourishing subject of scholarly study during recent decades. Not only has the volume of literature increased enormously but the range of interest in time, space and subject matter has broadened considerably so that today there are many sub-branches of the subject which have developed considerable status in their own right.

One of the aims of this series is to encourage the publication of scholarly monographs on any aspect of modern economic and social history. The geographical coverage is worldwide and contributions on the non-British themes will be especially welcome. While emphasis will be placed on works embodying original research, it is also intended that the series should provide the opportunity to publish studies of a more general thematic nature which offer a reappraisal or critical analysis of major issues of debate.

Derek H. Aldcroft
University of Leicester

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Introduction

The aim of this volume is to outline how, from the mid-eighteenth century to the first decades of the nineteenth, the political implications of the economic analysis carried out in France were received in America. It will show how this reaction offered an original re-examination of French ideas and a significant contribution to the development of an American national consciousness marked by anti-British sentiment. During this time a distinctive vein of French culture, unlike British empiricism, was characterized by a political rationalism derived from the study of economics.

In the confrontation between Thomas Jefferson's Republicans and Alexander Hamilton's Federalists, the ideologists of agrarian democracy – from Jefferson to Benjamin Franklin, to George Logan and John Taylor – found in the early scientific analysis of economics, grounded in the central role of agriculture and formulated by Physiocracy, strong theoretical validation for their plans for economic development. These were developed as an alternative to the British model, and were founded on a belief in the existence of truths in nature that regulated interpersonal relations and were best discerned through the application of the principle of evidence. Through their dealings and personal contact with Physiocratic milieus, both Franklin and Jefferson became deeply convinced of the primacy of agriculture and also of their own sense of national identity. They thus became protagonists in the interchange of ideas between France and America, and I have sought to identify what was new in this with regard to the specific cultures of the two countries.

Franklin was acquainted with François Quesnay, the Marquis of Mirabeau and Du Pont de Nemours, and was close to La Rochefoucauld and Barbeu Du Bourg, while Jefferson met with Condorcet and, after returning to America, enjoyed a valuable correspondence with Du Pont de Nemours until the old Physiocrat's death in 1817. It was Du Pont who collaborated with Jean-Baptiste Say to produce *Bonhomme Richard*, a French edition of Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*. The circuitous intersecting careers of these men make it possible to trace the evolution and transformation of the Physiocratic tradition through the course of the long eighteenth century.

I do not intend to offer here a comprehensive history of French economic thought. Instead, I will identify the insights, the spread of texts and the individual relationships that make it possible to follow the circulation of ideas that contributed to setting out a specific pathway in the development of American identity, in the movement of different cultures into different contexts.¹ In addition

¹ Beyond our specific area of research, suggestions might be found in the recent studies on communication and translatability between different cultures. Cf. Peter Burke and

to the intentions of the authors of the texts in question,² attention is focused on the reception in America of the current of French economic thought that, starting out from the Physiocrats, travelled a course of evolution that passed beyond the turn of the eighteenth century to arrive at the *Idéologues*. The accent is therefore placed not on influences, but on original contributions – on an intellectual relationship that, being far from passive, involved a cultural exchange that stimulated the development and refinement of ideas.³

Such a perspective regards Physiocracy not as a collection of fixed dogmatic principles, but as a set of thoughts in constant motion in the minds of people and through time. This progressive movement can be discerned in the link between economics and politics and in the political importance of the Quesnay group's project. Thus the mutually enriching dialogue between certain exponents of Physiocracy and their American contacts, be it direct or long-distance, offers an original contribution to the political reinterpretation of Physiocracy that has characterized studies in recent decades.

Long the preserve of scholars of economics, and subjected only to a strictly economic interpretation of their ideas,⁴ the Physiocratic writers are now at the heart of studies in which historians and economists are in dialogue with one another, to their mutual benefit. Apart from the received wisdom concerning the interconnectedness of economics and politics in Physiocratic thought,⁵ we have now acquired a mature understanding of Physiocracy as a political response to the French context in which it originated.⁶

Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, eds, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, eds, *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), and in particular the essay by Sacvan Bercovitch, "Discovering America: A Cross-Cultural Perspective."

² Cf. Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory*, no. VIII (1969): 3–53; James Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

³ Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Hans Robert Jauss, *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

⁴ Ronald L. Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962).

⁵ Cf. Catherine Larrère, *L'invention de l'économie au XVIIIe siècle: Du droit naturel à la physiocratie* (Paris: PUF, 1992).

⁶ In search of the founding moment of the Physiocracy's political discourse, Gino Longhitano has proposed an original reconsideration of the *Tableau économique* as a political text (Victor Riquetti de Mirabeau and François Quesnay, *Traité de la monarchie*, ed. Gino Longhitano (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999). Cf. also Keith M. Baker, "Representation," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture: The Political Culture of the Old Regime*, ed. Keith M. Baker (Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1987), 469–92. Contributions towards a political rereading of Physiocracy have been made by Italian historians. Cf. those presented during the first meeting of the Italian specialists

Yet even as different analyses and perspectives are presented,⁷ there still remain unresolved questions confirming the complexity of a subject that has attracted prolonged investigation. What is meant by Physiocracy? Were the Physiocratic authors intimately tied to traditional society or did they express modern ideas? And did the implications of their ideas speed the fall of the Old Regime, as Alexis de Tocqueville first concluded?⁸ How did economics and politics relate in Physiocratic thought, and which was given first place? The pages that follow take their place in the body of work concerning the political ramifications of Physiocracy, and examine the questions that arise when looking through an American lens. From this perspective, it is hoped that this research, which seeks to take into consideration both political and economic viewpoints (as previous emphasis on the political reading has sometimes failed to do) will add something new.

The American reading of Physiocracy, the personal relationships of certain Republican exponents with Physiocratic circles, and the channels used to disseminate texts by Physiocratic authors and those close to them all not only bear witness to the political implications and the proactive value of the French economists' theories regarding economic development, even beyond the context in which they were elaborated, but also reveal how these theories were received by their contemporaries. Beginning from these aspects, it is possible to understand how the weight of Physiocracy was not exhausted in the period of Quesnay's 'writing workshop', and how the names of Franklin, Jefferson and Logan can be added to those close or belonging to the Physiocratic movement.⁹ When, in

in Physiocracy organized by the Luigi Einaudi Foundation in Turin 2003, published together in "Fisiocrazia e proprietà terriera", ed. Manuela Albertone, special issue, *Studi settecenteschi*, 24 (2004).

⁷ Of fundamental importance for an interpretation of Physiocracy that is attentive to the political implications of the economic theory and to the continuity of a discourse that went as far as the French Revolution and beyond are the works of Philippe Steiner (Cf. Philippe Steiner, *La "science nouvelle" de l'économie politique* (Paris: PUF, 1998); Loïc Charles and Philippe Steiner, "Entre Montesquieu et Rousseau: La physiocratie parmi les origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française," *Etudes Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, no. 11 (1999): 89–159; Philippe Steiner, "Wealth and Power: Quesnay's Political Economy of the Agricultural Kingdom," *Journal of History of Economic Thought*, 24/1 (2002): 91–109). A different interpretation, centred mostly on Quesnay and Mirabeau, which sees Physiocracy essentially as the expression of a theodicy and a catastrophic vision, is given by Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). On an unusual recent interpretation on the role mental processes, imagination and passions paid in the physiocratic authors cf. Liana Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981; first edition 1856), book III, ch. III.

⁹ On the idea of the writing workshop as the original structure of Quesnay's links with the French court, significant contributions have been made by Christine Théré and Loïc

his *Report on Manufactures* (1791), Hamilton made it clear that the impact of the Physiocratic theory on politics was still seen as a threat (beyond the years of momentum it enjoyed in France under Quesnay's exclusive group), Logan responded with the forthrightness of a political attack made under the banner of Physiocratic principles. It is also possible to follow, through the enduring relationship between Jefferson and Du Pont de Nemours, which was interrupted only by Du Pont's death, the full length of the intellectual journey of the elderly Physiocrat, heir to that 'European party of reform'¹⁰ that he tried to export across the Atlantic. Although Du Pont remained faithful to the principles on which he had been nurtured, he updated his ideas in the light of the tumultuous events of his world and the progress of post-Physiocratic French economic culture – a culture that could ably converse with Americans, as this work will show – firm in the belief, shared by his American correspondent, that from Adam Smith to Jean-Baptiste Say the science of political economy owed a debt to Quesnay.

The strong interest among today's historians in how the science of economics emerged in the eighteenth century as a modern political language, shared by different national realities, allows us to revisit the roots of modern European identity and better appreciate its unity in diversity.¹¹ This work also shows how political economy became a weapon in the service of the two democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century. In this context, European political and economic culture was both nourished and challenged by the emergence of the American national identity. Such a wide-ranging line of research transcends the confines of Europe.

Franklin met the Marquis de Mirabeau for the first time in 1767, and Jefferson was in contact with the *Idéologues* and Say up to the last years of his life, and was aware of the specific nature of French economic theory and of a continuity beyond the distinctions made by its protagonists that I have attempted to trace over a period of many years. With a few exceptions, historiography has paid little attention to the impact of French economic culture on American thought, focusing instead on its links with Britain, whose contribution I have taken pains not to underestimate. Nevertheless, the attention paid to the political and social dimension of French

Charles, "The Writing Workshop of François Quesnay and the Making of Physiocracy," *History of Political Economy*, 40/1 (2008): 1–42; Christine Thérè, Loïc Charles, "From Versailles to Paris: The Creative Communities of the Physiocratic Movement," *History of Political Economy*, 43/1 (2011): 25–58.

¹⁰ The first to speak about the Physiocratic movement as a "European reformist party" was the Italian historian Mario Mirri, "Per una ricerca sui rapporti fra 'economisti' e riformatori toscani: L'abate Niccoli a Parigi," *Annali dell'Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, 2 (1959): 55–115. On the international dimension of Physiocracy, cf. Bernard Delmas, Thierry Demals and Philippe Steiner, eds, *La diffusion internationale de la physiocratie, XVIIIe–XIXe* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1995).

¹¹ Cf. John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade, International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

economic thought – in contrast to the British approach, which had more to do with wealth creation – was a factor that enabled a radical reconsideration by the ideologists of American agrarian democracy, providing them with arms for their political struggle and helping them to define their national identity.

Asking to what extent French economic culture contributed to the development of national identity in eighteenth-century America involves addressing many questions at the heart of contemporary historiographic debate: the connection between politics and economics, the idea of republic, the foundations of representation, the role of Europe in the Atlantic world, and the interaction between national histories and global context.

My intention here is to follow the two-way transatlantic passage of ideas: French economic theory, based on the primacy of agriculture and developed in absolutist France as a model of economic progress, alternative to and competing with the British one, arrived in the United States where it was enriched by American democratic republicanism. It then returned to France where, through the common search for a stable republican system, it made a contribution to French post-Physiocratic thought that was then seeking in political economy a means of consolidating the revolutionary achievements. From this perspective, these pages intend to re-establish France at the heart of transatlantic culture, after the Anglocentric imprint left by the past few decades of research.¹²

As a work of intellectual history, this book also seeks to enrich an Atlantic history that has thus far seen mainly as one of empires and trade,¹³ by making the transatlantic circulation of ideas a core theme. The century of cosmopolitanism and enlightenment gave rise to the democratic revolutions of America and France, leaving succeeding centuries with a legacy of original political thought. This did not belong to one country in particular, but was a product of the meeting of several cultures, which can be apprehended only in the interaction between different realities beyond national boundaries. In this sense, the long eighteenth century turns out to be a privileged vantage point from which to respond to the stimulating ideas coming from the contemporary historiography of post-national studies.¹⁴ In particular, the research methodology adopted makes it possible to

¹² A critical reconsideration of the interpretation of the Atlantic world dominated by an Anglocentric perspective even on the level of intellectual history is offered by the essays collected within the volume Manuela Albertone and Antonino De Francesco, eds, *Rethinking the Atlantic World: Europe and America in the Age of Democratic Revolutions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹³ Cf. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds, *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500–c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492–1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

reconstruct how American national identity, conceived as an expression of society in economic terms, emerged through a cosmopolitan way of thinking focused on the uniqueness of the new state.¹⁵

This approach of intellectual history has been adopted in order to highlight the practical needs of men seeking to make changes to the world in which they lived, and to place them in context.¹⁶ In other words, my aim is to take note of the channels through which ideas were transmitted, and the real needs that prompted people to perceive, and to act in accordance with, the connection between agriculture and politics. French economic thought suggested the actions that Americans needed to take and gave those actions theoretical sanction. A similar concern linked President Jefferson and the *Idéologues*, all of whom were working to consolidate their revolutionary accomplishments by using the social dimension of political economy as an instrument for institutionalizing democracy. From the Physiocrats to Jefferson's Republicans it is therefore possible to follow a winding course of thinking on the agrarian class, which was seen as the social fulcrum in the movement towards modernization. These ideas began in France with the overturning of the Old Regime society of orders, and they contributed to the shaping of democracy, first in America and then in France itself. It is hoped that this way of looking at things will enhance the historiography of eighteenth-century revolutions.

Within the expansive discussion initiated nearly 40 years ago by John Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment*, opposition to the 'country ideology' offered by a 'new republicanism' heedful of democratic participation¹⁷ is now an accepted branch of research – to which this book will hopefully provide a further contribution – centred firmly on the link between political economy and republic, particularly in relation to French economic culture.¹⁸ Alongside this established form of investigation,

¹⁵ On the idea of the nation-state, cf. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*.

¹⁶ Cf. Jean-Claude Perrot, *Une histoire intellectuelle de l'économie politique (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècle)* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1992); Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ John Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); cf. Judith Shklar, "Montesquieu and the new Republicanism," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 265–79.

¹⁸ Cf. Richard Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution: An Intellectual History of Jean-Baptiste Say's Political Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); James Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Paul Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce: Globalization and the French Monarchy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jesús Astigarraga, *Luces y Republicanismo: Economía y política en las "Apuntaciones al Genovesi" de Ramón de Salas* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios políticos y constitucionales, 2011); Richard Whatmore, *Against War and Empire: Geneva, Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

this work will undertake the study of agrarian democratic republicanism, a line of enquiry that has been largely unexplored within the complexity and pluralism of eighteenth-century thought. A modern republicanism, of an economic kind and with its roots set in the political rationalism of the Physiocratic tradition, which is followed in its movements and changes, is here investigated through the encounter of two diverse cultures. During the creation of the American democracy, political economy, as it matured beyond Physiocracy, indicated how the republic was not only the right choice, but the only rational one too: for the ideologists of agrarian democracy the encounter with French economic thought marked a foundational moment for the republic.¹⁹

Chapter 1 goes to the roots of agrarianism seen as an American characteristic that existed before the creation of the new state and before agrarian democracy was placed at the heart of republican ideology. It focuses on the *Letters from an American Farmer* by the Norman nobleman St John de Crèvecoeur, who had migrated to America before the revolution, and who wrote, in a literary form and with his native sensibility and culture, of his life as an American farmer amid the continent's geographic splendour. This contribution from a Frenchman, made at the time of the emergence of American national identity, is examined through the relationships, social circles and biographical events that made their mark on the imagination of an author strongly influenced by the encounter between his homeland and America.

In the context of eighteenth-century international economy, Chapter 2 outlines the ideal of agrarian ideology, seen as a set of American characteristics, and the nature of the republic–democracy–agriculture correlation, during the advent of an analysis that was at once economic and political. In the clash between Republicans and Federalists, the new social hierarchy founded on the farmer, protagonist in a decentralized system of political participation, was at the heart of the attack on the Whig tradition's principle of deference, through which the Jeffersonians brought the representative republic to its full democratic maturation. In the shift from the Puritan ethic to the lay principle of happiness, enshrined by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, the central role of religion in preparing the ground for an economic analysis and a philosophy of agriculture based on the notion of a

¹⁹ Key reference points for a modern interpretation of American republicanism are the works by Joyce Appleby and Isaac Kramnick, which however focus more on the individual dimension than the democratic. See Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); Isaac Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited," *The American Historical Review*, 87 (1982): 629–54. With regards to these works, a position searching for balance between the modern individualist interpretation of these authors and the classical republican interpretation is offered by Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). Cf. Cathy D. Matson and Peter S. Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990).

natural order and a beneficent wealth-creating land came to the fore through the emblematic figure of Pastor Samuel Williams.

Chapter 3 reconstructs, through the progression of ideas, personal contacts and plans of action, the encounter between Jefferson and Physiocracy's political rationalism, which sprang from the economic bedrock of society and the natural and universal character of economic laws. When he arrived in France in 1784 Jefferson had already developed a belief in agrarianism that was intimately associated with his ideas on education, which recognized the pedagogic value of agriculture. His pragmatism made him distance himself from the rigidity of the principles of Physiocratic theory, but its political implications did not escape him, and he remained convinced, albeit modifying his ideas over a long period, of the land's capacity to produce wealth. In France, alongside the *Américanistes*, his sense of belonging to his home nation increased. In the early stage of the French Revolution, while in contact with thinkers influenced by the Physiocratic tradition, Jefferson formulated the principle of constitutional revision, starting from the idea that 'the earth belongs to the living'. And on Jefferson's return to America, this principle became a weapon in his political struggle, and it remained part of the heritage of the eighteenth-century revolutions' democratic ideology of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*.

The engagement with Physiocracy of the first American economist, Benjamin Franklin, was pivotal to the to-and-fro of ideas between America and France. Chapter 4 demonstrates how, from his earliest assumption of a mercantilist and populationist position, the land was at the heart of Franklin's economic thought. His meeting with Quesnay and the Marquis of Mirabeau, in the days of Physiocracy's height, was a turning point that marked an accelerated development in his economic thinking, which became anti-British by reason of his rejection of Britain's economic model. The exchange was mutual, since Franklin remained a tireless proponent of the Physiocratic tradition in both France and Britain. For Franklin, who created the myth of the middle class in an agrarian society and later became the symbol of America, by dint of the success in France of *Bonhomme Richard*, the prime importance Physiocracy accorded to consumption in the countryside and the widespread wellbeing of an agrarian economy was attractive. It represented the point of convergence that led to a mutual interchange: a view to be considered in contemporary historical investigations of luxury and consumption in the eighteenth century, which hitherto have centred mainly on urban societies.²⁰

The agrarian model as an instrument of open political warfare is considered in Chapter 5, through the reflections and direct action of two ideologists of agrarian democracy, George Logan and John Taylor, respectively the emblematic

²⁰ Cf. John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds, *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993); Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer culture in Europe 1650–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Maxine Berg, ed., *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

representatives of intellectual circles in the North and South. Logan was an authentic American Physiocrat who used Physiocratic principles in his opposition to Federalist policies (for which he was openly denounced by Hamilton). Quakerism, passion for the French Revolution and economic science fused in him to form a vocation for democracy. For Taylor, who represented the ideals of southern landowners, republic and agriculture were also inseparable and served the political conflict. For him, too, agriculture was not merely a science, but a practical commitment that he discharged as an agronomist and propagator of agrarian knowledge. He read Smith and the Physiocratic authors, discussed Turgot, and learned from Malthus and Say. His original theory of the separation of powers to be applied to guarantee the powers of states was, in its particular American expression, an unprecedented implementation of the economic fundamentals of political rationalism.

The channels through which French economic ideas were spread in America, in an interweaving of science, education and politics, are described in Chapter 6. From outside the ideas and actions of the American agrarian ideologists, this work attempts to identify the various ways in which public opinion was influenced. The free and autonomous agricultural societies, which sought to influence economic policies, were all, despite their dissimilarities, institutionalized forms of public participation based on economics. In different ways Jefferson, Logan and Taylor were active in these societies, handing on their knowledge of economics. As hubs of intellectual sociability, a number of societies and circles, encouraged by the cosmopolitan circulation of ideas, were at the same time centres of discussion about agricultural experiments, political action and the training of farmers. The formation of a popular public opinion in favour of giving agriculture a central position was carried out by almanacs, of which Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* was the standard of comparison. The chapter also looks at the penetration of economic science into American academia, including the creation of the first professorships in political economy in the early nineteenth century and the publication of university handbooks, among which was the 1821 American edition of Say's *Traité d'économie politique*, the first European text annotated for educational use and one of the first such books to be made widely available. The American academic culture, in which Smith, Malthus and Ricardo all feature, continued to display an interest in French economic culture as well, thus taking sides against British classical economics.

Chapter 7 examines the three-way interrelation between France, Britain and America, through which the economic and political rationalism of the Physiocratic school circulated, sometimes by way of indirect channels, and reached America having been enriched by democratic tensions, which made a decisive impact on the development of American economic and political culture. Certain key figures among the British Dissenters were pivotal, and Franklin was a link between French and British circles. Condorcet and Turgot were important focal points in the radicalization of the political implications of French economic thought, which later spread to Britain, and the hopes of 1789 France and the myth of America

were shared by different groups within British radicalism. The roundabout routes by which ideas flowed between France and Britain resulted in the remodelling of personal and intellectual relationships in which religion, economics and politics fed radical transatlantic thought. Jefferson derived great benefit from his correspondence with Paine, Priestley, Price and Cooper, and during his successful presidential campaign received strong support from British radicals who migrated to the United States in the 1790s.

Finally, in Chapter 8 the link between economics and politics, the overall characteristic of the reciprocal exchange of ideas between France and America, is traced through the long eighteenth century to beyond the dawn of the nineteenth. The contacts between Jefferson and the elderly Du Pont, who chose America as a land of freedom, Destutt de Tracy, Say and the *Idéologues*, and the strategy of orchestrated publication of translations organized by Jefferson in order to acquaint America with post-Physiocratic French theories that were opposed to Ricardo, were all important factors in the sharing of democratic and republican ideas between France and America which was driven by a belief in the social and political value of economic science.

Chapter 1

What is an American?

St John de Crèvecoeur Between Agrarian Myth and National Identity

The Origins of Agrarian Ideology

When describing his life as a farmer to an English guest in his home, James, the protagonist of *Letters from an American Farmer*, asked himself and the European: ‘Where is that station which can confer a more substantial system of felicity than that of an American farmer, possessing freedom of action, freedom of thoughts, ruled by a mode of government which requires but little from us?’¹ With this language and imagery, St John de Crèvecoeur – who introduced himself to Abbé Raynal (to whom he dedicated his book) as a ‘simple tiller of the soil’ – marked the beginning of American literature and national consciousness.² Written in eighteenth-century epistolary style, the twelve letters that made up the book were presented as an American farmer’s replies, couched as essays, to questions posed by an imaginary cultured English visitor keen to know more about life in

¹ John Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. S. Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 25. From hereon references will always be made to this modern edition, which is of the second English edition (*Letters from an American Farmer: describing certain provincial situations, manners, and customs, not generally known; and conveying some idea of the late and present interior circumstances of the British Colonies in North America. Written for the information of a friend in England, by J. Hector St. John, a farmer in Pennsylvania* (London: T. Davies, L. Davies, 1782)).

² In 1759, at the age of 24 and having enrolled in the French army in Canada, where he worked as a cartographer, Crèvecoeur moved to the colony of New York, where he specialized as a surveyor. In 1765 he was naturalized as a British colonial subject and changed his name to John Hector Saint John. In 1769 he married the daughter of a loyalist New York family, and settled in a property at Pine Hill, in Orange County, New York, becoming an owner-farmer. In the following decade he began work on the *Letters*, until the Revolution broke out. Suspected of loyalist sympathies, he decided to return to France. Between 1779 and 1780 he was imprisoned under the charge of espionage by the British, his house was destroyed and his wife killed. In 1781 he was the guest of the brother of Turgot, a friend of the family and an expert in agronomic issues. Under the recommendation of Mme d’Houdetot, who introduced him into French intellectual circles and to Franklin, he was appointed French consul to New York, serving between 1783 and 1792. Having returned to France, he lived on the margins of the Revolution and died in 1813.

the colonies. The *Letters* appeared in London during the final year of the conflict that led to the birth of the United States. The intention of the British publishers, Thomas Davies and Lockyer Davis – who in 1781 had published an extract from Book XVIII of Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes* entitled *Révolution de l'Amérique* – was to serve the Whig cause of promoting reconciliation between the colonies and the mother country.³ To that end, it was decided to publish only the letters that depicted American life in a favourable light, leaving out the more critical ones included in the material that Crèvecoeur had brought with him when he left America to return to France, a part of which he had sold to publishers in London.⁴

The work enjoyed immediate success, far beyond the publishers' hopes.⁵ The *Monthly Review* recognized in it the philosophical spirit of the age, while the *Journal de Normandie* and the *Journal de Paris* praised it for the passion it inspired for a fertile and free land like America. The *Courier de l'Europe* declared that the *Letters*, alongside Raynal's *Histoire*, might play a role in the abolition of slavery, which the emancipated colonies would enforce.⁶ Although suspected

³ On the discussion regarding Crèvecoeur's role in the final decision on the work's structure see David Robinson, 'Crèvecoeur's James: the Education of an American Farmer', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 80/4 (1981): 552–70.

⁴ A large part of the manuscripts, which reveal hostility towards the Revolution, was discovered in France and published in 1925 with the title, *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America*, ed. Henri L. Bourdin, Ralph H. Gabriel and Stanley T. Williams (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925). However, it is only recently that the critical edition of the 22 manuscripts not included in the *Letters* has appeared, having been purchased by the Library of Congress in 1986: John Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *More Letters from an American Farmer: An Edition of the Essays in English Left Unpublished by Crèvecoeur*, ed. Denis D. Moore (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1995).

⁵ The work was also published in Ireland in the same year (Dublin: J. Exshaw, 1782) and by 1784 there were already four English-language editions in circulation (Belfast: J. Magee, 1783) and (London: T. Davies, 1783). The American edition was not published until 1793, by Mathew Carey in Philadelphia. Crèvecoeur himself undertook the translation into French (*Lettres d'un cultivateur américain, écrites à W. S. Ecuyer, depuis l'année 1770, jusqu'à 1781. Traduites de l'Anglois par ****, 2 vols. (Paris: Cuchet, 1784), which was in fact an enlarged version dedicated to Lafayette, in which he openly sided with the American cause, inserting new anti-British letters. Another three-volume edition was published in 1787 (*Lettres d'un cultivateur américain adressées à Wm S...on Esqr. Depuis l'Année 1770 jusqu'en 1786, traduites de l'Anglois*, 3 vols. (Paris: Cuchet, 1787), with material left out of the English edition but made up of sixteen letters, four more than the original, enriched by his experiences as consul. The French edition, which clearly shows the influence of *philosophes* circles, is less compact and lacks the literary incisiveness of the more agile English text. This analysis will therefore refer mainly to the English edition, in which the Crèvecoeur's original ideas can be found, as this was received by American culture.

⁶ Cf. *Monthly Review* (June, August, October 1782) LXVI, 401–405, LXVII, 140–46, 273–77; *Journal de Normandie* (11 August 1787), reproduced in Bernard Chevnard, 'St. John de Crèvecoeur à New York en 1779–1780', *Annales de Normandie*, 33/2 (1983): 162; *Courier de l'Europe*, *Gazette anglo-française*, XIII, no. 31 (Friday 18 April 1783):

of being loyal to the British, Crèvecoeur was nonetheless castigated for harming British interests, as the *Letters* encouraged emigration at a difficult time for Britain; such was the reaction of Samuel Ayscough, who in his *Remarks* also observed that the author's writing style confuted the French philosopher's attempts to portray himself as an American farmer.⁷ Extracts from the *Letters* were in fact used as advertisements to boost emigration with the lure of great opportunities.⁸ However, Filippo Mazzei, like Ayscough, reckoned the idyllic pen portraits of American life to be exaggerated and unreliable, while Brissot, who pointed out the ambiguity of Crèvecoeur's neutral position at the start of the Revolution, nonetheless did not hesitate to emphasize the value of the *Letters*, defending them against attacks from Chastellux, who was critical of the Quaker communities being outlined as a social model in the description of the island of Nantucket.⁹

Crèvecoeur's work reconciled Romantic tastes with rational Enlightenment rigour by means of Rousseauian percipience in which the human being, free

245–47; *Journal de Paris*, no. 38 (Monday 7 February 1785), 158, and no. 41 (Thursday 10 February 1785), 172.

⁷ Samuel Ayscough, *Remarks on the Letters from an American Farmer; or a detection of the errors of Mr. J. Hector St. John; Pointing out the pernicious Tendency of these Letters to Great Britain* (London: John Fielding, 1783): 8–10. Defending himself from Ayscough's accusations, Crèvecoeur publicly upheld his dual nationality in the *Courier de l'Europe*, declaring possession of more original copies of his work than were in the hands of the British editors. This would seem to confirm his active role in the editorial selection (*Courier de l'Europe*, *Gazette anglo-française*, vol. XIII, no. 9, 37 (9 May 1783), 296).

⁸ Cf. Manasseh Cutler, *Description du sol, des productions etc. de cette portion des Etats-Unis située entre la Pennsylvanie, les rivières de l'Ohio et du Scioto et le lac Erié, traduite d'une brochure imprimée à Salem en Amérique en 1787* (Paris, 1789): 22–29. Crèvecoeur himself, in a letter to the Duke of La Rochefoucauld, written during Crèvecoeur's mission to New York, spoke of the opportunities opened by the Ohio Company, referring to the third volume of the French edition of the *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain*: 'The beginnings of this new Establishment seemed to me so interesting that I've collected all the pieces and all the anecdotes, so that one day we can see how the development of the weakest circumstances, in a country such as this, is rapid and surprising' (letter by Crèvecoeur to La Rochefoucauld, New York, 10 December 1787, Archives Municipales de Mantes-la-Jolie, Fonds Clerc de Landresse, Correspondance entre J. Hector de Crèvecoeur et le duc de La Rochefoucauld).

⁹ Cf. Filippo Mazzei, *Recherches historiques et politiques sur les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique septentrionale*, 4 vols. (Colle-Paris: Froullé, 1788): IV, 99–101; Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *Mémoires (1754–1793)*, ed. Claude Perroud, 2 vols., (Paris: Picard, [1910]): II, 48–52; Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *Examen critique des voyages dans l'Amérique septentrionale de M. le marquis de Chastellux* (London, 1786): 16–20, and also the article in *L'Analyse des papiers anglois*, vol. 2, 11 April 1788, 368. Cf. Bernard Chevignard, 'Une Apocalypse sécularisée: Le Quakerisme selon Brissot de Warville et St. John de Crèvecoeur', in *Le Facteur religieux en Amérique du Nord: Apocalypse et autres travaux*, ed. Jean Béranger (Bordeaux: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1981): 49–68; Robert Darnton, *George Washington's False Teeth* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003): 119–36.

and unconstrained, found fertile soil on the American continent. The ideal of an agrarian society of independent freehold farmers, set out by this provincial French nobleman (who belonged to a family related to Mme d'Houdetot), became the first test of the ideas of the *philosophes* carried out *in loco* by an American (albeit one educated in Europe) and was the expression of a 'practised utopia'.¹⁰ Considered by Washington to be the standard work to refer to for an understanding of the American situation and by Jefferson to be a learned presentation of the best aspects of New World society, the *Letters* confirmed the validity of the American model as an alternative to European realities: 'and all the benefits attached to the land, to the constitution and customs of the thirteen United Provinces ... all the happiness that a man can procure through an agreeable independence, hard work, the dedication of a beloved family, the enjoyment of a secure and lawful property'.¹¹

This was how the *Correspondance littéraire* reviewed the 1784 French translation, demonstrating the interest in America, among the French, as a political, economic and social ideal, which, starting from the clash between the colonies and the mother country, took the shape of a programme of change inspired by the American experience of democracy rather than the British model. Crèvecoeur's *Letters* also presented colonial society as a unique experience – the antithesis of European privileges and hierarchies – and, even before the colonies split from Britain, linked the image of the farmer as independent landowner to the idea of democracy.¹² As a French-born naturalized American, Crèvecoeur transposed his own experiences as a colonial farmer into the main character of his book. Far from

¹⁰ Cf. Bernard Chevignard, 'Les souvenirs de Saint John de Crèvecoeur sur Madame d'Houdetot', *Dix-huitième siècle*, 14 (1982): 243–62; Bronisław Baczko, *Lumières de l'utopie* (Paris: Payot, 1978).

¹¹ *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, etc.*, ed. Maurice Tourneux, 15 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1880), vol. XIV (January 1785), 88. Cf. Washington to Richard Henderson, 19 June 1788, in George Washington, *Writings*, ed. John Rhodehamel (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1997): 688; Jefferson to La Vingtrie, 12 February 1788, in Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–): vol. XII, 586.

¹² From the 1960s there has been a revisionist reading of the *Letters*, since the consolidation of the interpretation that sees them as a symbol of the American dream and the optimism of the agrarian myth. Cf. D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1923): 20–33. Revisionist perspectives have reviewed the work pessimistically, as an expression of the first criticisms of the contradictions in American society. Among the many studies, cf. Elayne A. Rapping, 'Theory and Experience in Crèvecoeur's America', *American Quarterly*, 19/4 (1967): 707–18; James C. Mohr, 'Calculated Disillusionment: Crèvecoeur's Letters Reconsidered', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 69 (Summer, 1970): 354–63; Thomas Philbrick, *St. John de Crèvecoeur* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970); Steven Arch, 'The Progressive Steps of the Narrator in Crèvecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer', *Studies in American Fiction*, 18 (1990): 145–58; Nathaniel Philbrick, 'The Nantucket Sequence in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*', *New England Quarterly*, 64 (1991): 414–32.

nursing anti-British sentiments, he was not – as a Frenchman possessing a strong American national awareness even before the Revolution – an opponent of the British, but simply different from them.¹³

The idea of an agrarian democracy that solidified American identity took shape between the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth as an alternative to the hierarchical societies of the old continent. From the Revolution onwards the economic debate was closely linked to politics, and revolutionary thinkers saw the need to reconcile the economy with Republican principles: Jefferson's ideology rested on an economic interpretation of politics in which the notion of political economy reinforced the Republican concept of the interconnectedness of politics, economics and society. As opportunities arose through the creation of the new State, so the clash between Republicans and Federalists in the 1780s and 1790s led the Jeffersonians to outline a politico-economic vision centred on the farmer as a politically active and economically dynamic producer working in the setting of commercial agriculture, and an extended decentralized participatory democracy aimed at defending the rights of the Confederation's thirteen member states. The Federalists counter-proposed a hierarchy with democratic origins, founded on a strong central power that would promote a development programme based on trade and financial interests; this followed the British system and was considered by the Republicans to be incompatible with personal freedom and the traditional autonomy of the individual American states. As the battle against protectionism was waged in the name of economic freedom – which meant battling against privilege and the merchant aristocracy – a social hierarchy based on the farmer appeared to be anti-British.¹⁴

Written before the birth of the new state, the *Letters from an American Farmer* helps us to understand how Jeffersonian values became American characteristics. It shows the origins of the agrarian myth to be a peculiarly American phenomenon that existed before independence and before Republican ideology posed agrarian democracy at its base, making the projects of agricultural development and democratic participation inseparable one from another – an occurrence that

¹³ In 1787 Crèvecoeur, with Brissot, Clavière and Bergasse, founded the *Société Gallo-Américaine*, which aimed at intensifying political and commercial relations between the two countries and symbolized the role of France in countering British commercial power.

¹⁴ Cf. Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Cathy D. Matson and Peter S. Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990). The works of Joyce Appleby, which demonstrate a rare attention to the contribution of French economic-political culture, is fundamental. See Joyce Appleby, 'What is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 39 (April 1982): 287–309; Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Crèvecoeur detailed in his novel, in spite of his British loyalism. Crèvecoeur was the first to express in literature a fundamental American attribute: the ability to question one's own identity. He did this as an American who, with Rousseauian sensibility and introspection, asked himself the questions that Europeans asked about America, in the knowledge of the differences and peculiarities that divided the old and new worlds.¹⁵

In the third and most famous of the *Letters*, 'What is an American?' Crèvecoeur defined in economic terms the change that had produced the American national identity, giving rise to a new social hierarchy based on land: 'On it is founded our rank, our freedom, our power as citizens, our importance as inhabitants of such a district ... this is what may be called the true and the only philosophy of an American farmer'.¹⁶ Thus, from the figure of the farmer there emerged a new social stratification, in the name of which were repudiated the principles of dignity and hierarchy, based on tradition and custom, linked to the notion of deference and characteristic of European societies.¹⁷ The social model represented by smallholders in the American interior, midway between the sea and the forests defined a new class, unknown in Europe:

The simple cultivation of the earth purifies them; but the indulgences of the government, the soft remonstrances of religion, the rank of independent freeholders, must necessarily inspire them with sentiments very little known in Europe among a people of the same class. What do I say? Europe has no such a class of men.¹⁸

The idea that the earth guaranteed personal independence was therefore at the root of a new social hierarchy founded on agrarianism, justifying the exercise of rights of citizenship and the belief that agriculture was the most dignified activity, and capable of ensuring national prosperity.¹⁹

¹⁵ On the decentralized perspective of American thought in relation to European debates, and on provincialism as a creative and critical value in the founding fathers' thought, cf. Bernard Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew: The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

¹⁶ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 27.

¹⁷ Cf. my essay, Manuela Albertone, 'Gerarchia sociale, repubblica e democrazia: la figura del 'farmer' nell'America del XVIII secolo', in *Il pensiero gerarchico in Europa XVIII–XIX secolo*, ed. Antonella Alimento and Cristina Cassina (Florence: Olschki, 2002): 83–109.

¹⁸ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 45–6.

¹⁹ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 43, 54.

Between Economics and Botany

In the first part of the *Letters* we read that, 'It is from the surface of the ground, which we till, that we have gathered the wealth we possess'.²⁰ Years later, in his *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie* of 1801, Crèvecoeur restated his belief that manufacturing was dependent on agriculture and declared himself in favour of a land tax. A vague concept of expectations was also discernible in his hope that Americans would follow Europe's example of improving agriculture, set on the immense base of nature, for only then 'are the products of the earth sufficient to pay for these improvements'.²¹

Vernon Parrington, who has placed Crèvecoeur among the founders of American literature, defined his thought as Physiocratic, supported by warm humanism and convinced agrarianism.²² Crèvecoeur dedicated his work to Raynal, and he had read at least the first two editions of the *Histoire des deux Indes* and probably even the third,²³ and had thereby assimilated a synthesis of European,

²⁰ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 16. Crèvecoeur continued to express his conviction that agriculture would remain the underlying activity of the American economy for several generations to come, a concept later taken up by Jefferson in the *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (New York: W.W. Norton, 1954): 165.

²¹ John Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'état de New York, par un membre adoptif de la Nation Onéida: Traduit et publié par l'auteur des Lettres d'un Cultivateur Américain*, 3 vols. (Paris: Crapelet, Maradan, an IX-1801), II, 332, 351–52. The work came out of the original plan to add an extra volume to the 1787 French edition of the *Letters from an American Farmer* and was dedicated to Washington, who was likened to Napoleon. Cf. Percy G. Adams, 'The historical value of Crèvecoeur's "Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans New York"', *American Literature*, 25/2 (May 1953): 155–68; John Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain, écrites à W.S. Ecuyer, depuis 1770, jusqu'à 1781*, II, 278.

²² Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*, 3 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1927–1930): I, 142.

²³ Dating the *Letters* with precision is a controversial affair. Howard C. Rice maintains that *Letters* two to eleven were written between 1770 and 1774 (Howard C. Rice, *Le Cultivateur Américain: Etude sur l'oeuvre de Saint-John de Crèvecoeur* (Paris: Champion, 1932): 54–7, 229–30). Robert de Crèvecoeur (*Saint John de Crèvecoeur, sa vie et ses ouvrages 1735–1813* (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1883): 297) put the first version between 1780 and 1781. More recently Bernard Chevignard has advanced the theory that the text may have been written between 1779 and 1780. (See Bernard Chevignard, 'St. John de Crèvecoeur in the looking Glass: "Letters from an American Farmer" and the Making of a man of Letters', *Early American Literature*, 19/2 (Fall 1984): 173–90.) In any case, in 1781 Crèvecoeur was already fully installed in French *philosophes* circles and, furthermore, was in contact with the editor Davis (who in that year published the *Révolution de l'Amérique*); therefore by this time he was almost certainly acquainted with the third edition of Raynal's *Histoire philosophique*. A letter to Jefferson written on 18 May 1785

particularly French, Enlightenment culture.²⁴ The valorization of agriculture bound to the image of America as a land of freedom that emerges from the *Histoire*, for Crèvecoeur bore witness to the great favour that the picture of rural community life in America enjoyed in France, in the framework of a conviction that agriculture was the real wealth of the state and that every resource not coming from the earth was inescapably artificial and unstable, both materially and morally.²⁵ The *Histoire*'s extolment of smallholdings, which Crèvecoeur made a social nonpareil, was the expression of widespread agrarianism. At the same time, it revived ideas from the Marquis de Mirabeau's *L'Ami des Hommes*, a complex and not always consistent work, through which Physiocratic themes were filtered, even through those reflections that lacked the rigour of the French *Économistes*.²⁶

The idea that agriculture was a science was nevertheless present in Crèvecoeur:

I intend my children neither for the law nor the church, but for the cultivation of land, I wish them no literary accomplishments; I pray heaven that they may be one day nothing more than expert scholars in husbandry: this is the science which made our continent to flourish more rapidly than any other.²⁷

As a science, agriculture followed the laws of nature that, over and above the pervasive Rousseauian sensibility of the *Letters*, signified an order, the rules of which found expression in the American agricultural landscape, delineated by the rationality of cultivation: 'Every disposition of the fields, fences, and trees,

also supports the theory that he began the text after his arrival in Europe (Jefferson, *The Papers*, VIII, 155).

²⁴ Cf. David Eisermann, 'La "Raynalisation" de l'"American Farmer": la réception de l'"Histoire des deux Indes" par Crèvecoeur', in *Lectures de Raynal: L'Histoire des deux Indes en Europe et en Amérique au XVIIIe siècle: Actes du Colloque de Wolfenbüttel*, ed. Hans J. Lüsebrink and Manfred Tietz, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth-Century, no. 286 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991): 329–39.

²⁵ Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 4 vols. (Geneva: J. Pellet, 1780), IV, book XIX, 611. Cf. Michèle Duchet, *Diderot et l'Histoire des deux Indes, ou l'écriture fragmentaire* (Paris: Nizet, 1978); Paul Benhamou, 'La diffusion de l'*Histoire des deux Indes* en Amérique (1770–1820)', in *Raynal: De la polémique à l'histoire*, ed. Gilles Bancarel and Gianluigi Goggi (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000): 301–12.

²⁶ Marquis de Mirabeau, *L'Ami des Hommes, ou Traité de la population*, 6 vols. (Hambourg: Chrétien Hérault, 1760–62): I, 80–81. On the influence of Mirabeau's *L'Ami des Hommes* on the *Histoire des deux Indes*, in particular the first three parts praising small properties and preceding his adhesion to physiocracy, cf. Gianluigi Goggi, 'Filangieri e "L'Ami des hommes" di Mirabeau', *Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 10/2 (May–August 1981), 188–214.

²⁷ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 214.

seemed to bear the marks of perfect order and regularity, which, in rural affairs, always indicate a prosperous industry'.²⁸

The subject of the eleventh letter – an imaginary visit by a Russian nobleman to the celebrated Pennsylvanian botanist John Bertram – is examined through the lens of natural history; seen in this way, nature, the laws of which can be interpreted and applied universally, implied the order of systematic botany. The attention paid to the natural landscape was moreover aimed at preserving the harmony created by the adaptation of men and plants to America's environmental conditions. Crèvecoeur also meant to use this argument to refute the degeneration theories on which European opinions about a natural American inferiority rested. These views found expression even in Raynal, despite his *Histoire* associating them with the evils of colonialism.²⁹

'Men are like plants. The goodness and flavour of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grow. We are nothing but what we derive from the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit'. More than echoes of Montesquieu, these thoughts about nature and its laws had an economic determinism that was the basis of Crèvecoeur's optimism; they expressed not so much a bucolic idyll as an awareness that only respect for economic conditions would generate prosperity, which was destined to turn into misery should they fail.³⁰

Knowledge of botany and natural history was an essential requirement of the educated farmer, represented by the protagonist, James, who boasted, notwithstanding his simulated simplicity of mind and dismissal of academic culture, of his grasp and mastery of American farming techniques.³¹ Attentiveness to the natural history in the *Letters* is indispensable to an understanding of the fundamentals of American agrarianism.

In the fourth and fifth letters, in which the organizational model of the island of Nantucket is outlined, Quaker society is described in terms of natural history, as characterized by the topography of land, its produce and its customs, placed outside of time and history: 'I want not to record the annals of the island of Nantucket; its inhabitants have no annals, for they are not a race of warriors'.³² The perception

²⁸ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 174.

²⁹ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 42–3.

³⁰ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 45. This is one of the keys to interpreting the tension between the positive outlook of the early letters and the pessimism of the last, in which the protagonist is overwhelmed by the events of the Revolution (cf. Robinson, 'Crèvecoeur's James').

³¹ Cf. the whole of the first letter, in which the protagonist introduces himself to the English traveller as a simple farmer, guided by nature, 'this is the only line I am able to follow: the line which nature has herself traced for me'. (Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 11–23).

³² Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 85. Cf. Pamela Regis, *Describing Early America: Batram, Jefferson, Crèvecoeur and the Rhetoric of Natural History* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992).

of the American that Crèvecoeur sought to convey was deliberately timeless and distinguished by an attachment to the land. This was in line with an agrarianism outside of politics, which predated Jefferson's position and Republican ideology while being close to both because, like them, it did not adopt an historic approach.³³ Similarly, the account of how James fled land and home to take refuge among tribes of American Indians when confronted by the violence of the Revolution served to illustrate the desire to lay the foundations of the community in original nature, outside of the historical context.

Precedents for this focus on natural history were to be found in American travel literature, which gave detailed reports aimed at providing its primarily British readership with descriptions and information of colonial territories and their populations.³⁴ But Crèvecoeur used natural history in a novel way, as an alternative perspective to traditional values, pitting America's unique geography and agricultural reality against the veneration of the Ancients and the classics:

In Italy, all the objects of contemplation, all the reveries of the traveller, must have a reference to ancient generations, and to very distant periods, clouded with the mist of ages. Here, on the contrary, every thing is modern, peaceful, and benign. Here we have had no war to desolate our fields. Our religion does not oppress the cultivators. We are strangers to those feudal institutions which have enslaved so many. Here nature opens her broad lap to receive the perpetual accession of new comers, and to supply with food. I am sure I cannot be called a partial American when I say, that the spectacle, afforded by these pleasing scenes, must be more entertaining, and more philosophical, than that which arises from beholding the musty ruins of Rome.³⁵

³³ 'Let historians give the detail of our charters, the succession of our several governors, and of their administrations; of our political struggles, and of the foundation of our towns: let annalists amuse themselves with collecting anecdotes of the establishment of our modern provinces.' (Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 66). Cf. Jefferson to John Cartwright, Monticello, 5 June 1824, in Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings*, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, 20 vols. (Washington: T. Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903): XVI, 44.

³⁴ Robert Rogers, *A Concise Account of North America* (London: J. Millan, 1765); William Smith, *An historical account of the expedition against the Ohio Indians, in the year 1764* (Philadelphia: W. Bradford, 1765); William Stork, *An Account of East Florida, with A journal kept by John Batram of Philadelphia, botanist to His Majesty the Floridas* (London: W. Nicoll and G. Woodfall, 1766); James Adair, *The History of American Indians* (London: E. and C. Dille, 1775); Jonathan Carver, *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America in the years 1766, 1767, and 1768* (London: J. Walter, 1778).

³⁵ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 14–15.

Crèvecoeur's American agrarianism presented itself as modern and alien to the worship of the Ancients.³⁶ The ideal of economic self-sufficiency, which in Europe concerned only a few, in America assumed democratic importance and was fuelled by a Lockian conception of freedom, tied to the land and outside of history.³⁷ Far from being imbued with Arcadian values, the agrarianism of the *Letters* represented a modern agricultural system that not only involved the moral regeneration of the farmer, but also economic progress.³⁸ The landscape so admired by foreign visitors evinced a nature transformed, revealing 'the best husbandry as well as the most assiduous attention', and the presence of farmers well versed in agricultural techniques and committed to increasing land productivity by means that were more agronomic than Physiocratic. The rural landscape was not marked by large holdings, but rather by the highly similar situations of the landowners who held only as much acreage as they were able to cultivate on their own, keeping the remainder as common land, in keeping with Lockian principles.³⁹ Thus the description of the first Nantucket community offered a template for community agriculture, which stimulated competition between individual farmers.⁴⁰

Economic Thought and Agricultural Experimentation

Not only did Crèvecoeur conduct agricultural experiments on his American estate, but he also made significant contributions to both American and French agronomic

³⁶ By so doing Crèvecoeur placed himself outside the tradition that tied the pre-eminence of landowners to the classical model. On the protracted debate on classical Republicanism as a category of historic interpretation, a contribution has been made by John Pocock's postscript in the new edition of his *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³⁷ 'In the beginning all the World was America' (John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), *Second Treatise*, book II, ch. V, 319).

³⁸ Cf. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

³⁹ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 41, 113, 178–9. The same Lockian principle that land was originally man's common patrimony and that property was limited by the needs of the individual was developed by Franklin as a means to re-establish social hierarchies in a letter of 1783 (Franklin to Robert Morris, Passy, 25 December 1783, in Benjamin Franklin, *The Writings*, ed. Albert H. Smyth, 10 vols. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1905–1907): IX, 138; cf. John Locke, *Second Treatise*, book II, ch. V, par. 25. For Crèvecoeur the Lockian principle was at the foundation of the landowner's independence: 'I have never possessed or wish to possess anything more than what could be earned or produced by the united industry of my family. I wanted nothing more than to live at home independent and tranquil'. (Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 212).

⁴⁰ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 94–5.

literature. In his treatise on the potato,⁴¹ Antoine-Augustin Parmentier, an authority in the propagation of new agronomic interests in France, commended Crèvecoeur for having imported two new species of potato from New York and for having described how Americans cultivated it. In fact, it was by publishing a treatise on potatoes in the same year as the *Letters*, that Crèvecoeur sought to rebuild his image in society as a French intellectual, promoting the cultivation of the potato in his native Normandy and disseminating information about American methods.⁴²

Written with the encouragement of the brother of Turgot, the *Traité de la culture des pommes-de-terre* was published anonymously in Caen with a dedication to the Duke of Harcourt (like Turgot, a pioneer in the testing of new crops), dated 1st January 1782 and signed *Normano-Americanus*.⁴³ Crèvecoeur capitalized on his experience as a 'a Norman who spent thirty years among the people of America', to write what was essentially an agricultural manual. It gave a comprehensive description of different potato varieties, methods of cultivation, tools and various culinary uses of the plant, along with recipes. However, the book's objective was not exclusively agronomic, but touched on wider issues of political economy. Its standard of comparison was Britain, where the potato had been introduced for the feeding of the population and the rearing of livestock, proving to be invaluable as a dependable means of preventing famines and of increasing cereal exports by reducing their domestic consumption.⁴⁴ It pointed to Ireland as perhaps the best case in point. In Normandy the free trade in cereals had led to an increase in land values: 'this freedom has become a source of national prosperity, has made metals more common and increased manufacturing, etc.'. ⁴⁵ The introduction of the potato in place of buckwheat, which was prevalent in Norman agriculture, further stimulated rising production. The trust placed in free corn trade and in the upturn

⁴¹ Antoine-Augustin Parmentier, *Traité de la culture et les usages des pommes de terre, de la patate et du tapinambour* (Paris: Barrois, 1789), 42, 73, 109–10, 121, 237, 314.

⁴² 'Just as a bee, after traveling the distant fields, never comes into the hive without bringing back the portion of honey and wax that the republic demands of him; so any good citizen who travels must return a tribute of enlightened ideas, observations and acquaintances, commensurate with his intelligence' (John Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Traité de la culture des pommes-de-terre, Et des différens usages qu'en font les Habitans des Etats-Unis de l'Amérique* (Caen, 1782), 5–6).

⁴³ The work, which was 74 octavo pages long, soon became difficult to find. To the best of my knowledge, only two copies conserved at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Caen are available to researchers. Two handwritten letters from Crèvecoeur to the Marshal of Castries confirm the authorship of the work (New York, 1 February 1785: Archives Nationales, Affaires Etrangères, B¹ 909, 25v.), along with another to La Rochefoucauld (New York: 17 February 1787, Archives Municipales de Mantes-la-Jolie) in which he refers to his pamphlet on the potato.

⁴⁴ Crèvecoeur, *Traité de la culture des pommes-de-terre*, 10–11, 20. Crèvecoeur had authoritative support for his praise of the British agrarian model in the figure of Raynal (Raynal, *Histoire philosophique*, IV, book XIX, 606).

⁴⁵ Crèvecoeur, *Traité de la culture des pommes-de-terre*, 23.