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Indice

Dissenso, libertà civile, autogoverno: riscoprire Richard Price

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Senza “nobili, vescovi e re”. Richard Price, tra dissenso e autogoverno</i> Thomas Casadei..... | 9 |
| <i>«Una benedizione veramente sacra e inestimabile».</i> <i>La libertà civile negli scritti politici di Richard Price</i> Serena Vantin | 33 |
| <i>L'importanza di essere onesti: il dissenso politico di Richard Price</i> Paola Chiarella | 55 |
| <i>Richard Price and a transnational framework of dissent</i> Patrick Leech | 81 |

Saggi

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>La polemica sul deposito. Hegel e la positivizzazione del diritto</i> Tommaso Gazzolo..... | 105 |
| <i>La volontà particolare e il suo diritto.</i> <i>La teoria hegeliana della moralità attraverso la critica di K. M. Kahle</i> Corrado Bertani | 131 |
| <i>Judith Shklar</i> Francesca Rigotti..... | 163 |

Note

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Los derechos de las mujeres: historia de una exclusión</i> Francisco Javier Ansuátegui Roig | 183 |
|---|-----|

I confini del sapere giuridico e il ruolo del giurista

Jacopo Volpi.....205

Los deberes en la edad de los derechos

Andrés García Inda227

**DISSENSO, LIBERTÀ CIVILE,
AUTOGOVERNO:
RISCOPRIRE RICHARD PRICE**

RICHARD PRICE AND A TRANSNATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF DISSENT

Patrick Leech

Abstract

Richard Price's *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776), *Observations of the Importance of the American Revolution* (1785) and *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1790) were important interventions in the English political debate linking the radicalism of the American independence movement and the early events of the French Revolution. His work can thus be interpreted within the framework of the notion of an «Atlantic Revolution» connecting these events. Although Price rarely left his house in Newington Green in north London his relations with a number of influential figures such as Lord Shelburne, Abbé Morellet, Benjamin Franklin, Ann-Robert Turgot, Honoré Riqueti Count Mirabeau, and Joan Derk Van der Capellen testify to the importance of looking at Price himself as well as the texts he produced as acting within in this transnational framework.

Keywords

Richard Price, Atlantic Revolution, dissent, Lord Shelburne, Benjamin Franklin,

1. Richard Price and a transnational framework of dissent

Eric Hobsbawm's appreciation of Thomas Paine, written many decades ago now, turned on his exceptional ability to become the epitome of his age, «the voice of everyman», not in one country but two. As Paine himself wrote to George Washington, «a share in two revolutions is living to

some purpose»¹. In America, his *Common Sense* (1776) was one of the clearest statements of the motivations behind the American Revolution, whereas the *Rights of Man*, published in Britain in two parts in 1791 and 1792 spoke for the young French Revolution and was a founding text for nineteenth-century radicalism in Britain.

Without detracting from the exceptionally transnational character of Paine's writings and militancy², it would be wrong to associate the transnational nature of the political dissent that characterised the late eighteenth century with a single figure. What we may call «the transnational interpretation of the revolutions» of this period was put forward many years ago by R.R. Palmer and Jacques Godechot with their identification of a common «Democratic» or «Atlantic» Revolution whose local articulations were to be found not only in America and France but in Switzerland, England, Ireland, the Low Countries, Ireland and elsewhere³. The notion of an Atlantic space as a useful focus for the development of oppositional or revolutionary thought and action in this period has been taken up and amplified by Janet Polasky and Jonathan Israel and finds support in Bernard Bailyn's broader focus on a more general

¹ Cited in E.J. Hobsbawm, *Thomas Paine*, in *Uncommon People. Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1998, p. 2; Italian translation in Id., *Gente non comune. Storie di uomini ai margini della storia*, Rizzoli, Milano 2000, pp. 11-15. Hobsbawm's article on Thomas Paine first appeared in *The New Statesman* in 1961.

² See in this regard, in particular the study on Paine's activity in France, C. Lounissi, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2018, and, on the cosmopolitan nature of Paine's republicanism, T. Casadei, *Tra ponti e rivoluzioni. Diritti, costituzioni, cittadinanza in Thomas Paine*, Giappichelli, Torino 2012, pp. 244-250.

³ R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution. A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1959; J. Godechot, *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century, 1770-1799*, The Free Press/Collier-Macmillan, New York and London, 1965.

Atlantic history⁴. However, this *transnational frame* has never achieved a wider mainstream historiographical consensus⁵, perhaps because of what the sociologist Ulrich Beck has termed a general «methodological nationalism» which continues to underpin the research programmes of many disciplines and which gives a primary focus to national and not transnational contexts⁶.

At first glance, the life and thought of the dissenter and radical Richard Price would indeed seem to merit a primarily national, British focus rather than a transnational one. The principal context of his thought had national contours, the outcome of his upbringing, studies and activity within the broad area of English dissent⁷. Price was born in Wales,

⁴ J. Polasky, *Revolutions without Borders. The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2015; J. Israel, *The Expanding Blaze. How the American Revolution Ignited the World, 1775-1848*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2017; B. Bailyn, *Atlantic History. Concepts and Contours*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2005. See also M. Albertone and A. de Francesco (eds.), *Rethinking the Atlantic world. Europe and America in the age of the democratic revolutions*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2009; A. Di Lorenzo and M. Ferradou, *The Early 'Republic of France' as a Cosmopolitan Moment*, in «La Révolution française», 2022, 22, <<https://journals.openedition.org/lrf/6311>>.

⁵ Israel, *The Expanding Blaze*, cit., pp. 7-13. As an example of the persistence of the national frame, see the position expressed by Jonathan Clark in his study of Thomas Paine: «The American Revolution [...] did not in any strong sense of ideological inspiration or innovation lead into the early stages of the French Revolution, [...] the French Revolution can hardly now be conceived of as, in the broadest terms, the ideological offspring of the American» (J.C.D. Clark, *Thomas Paine. Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2018, p. 451).

⁶ U. Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Condition. Why Methodological Nationalism Fails*, in «Theory, Culture & Society», XXIV (2007), 7-8, pp. 286-290.

⁷ For general treatments of Price's life and work, see C.B. Cone, *Torchbearer of Freedom: The Influence of Richard Price on 18th Century Thought*, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington (KY) 1952; D.O. Thomas, *The Honest Mind. The Thought and Work of Richard Price*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1977; C. Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman, Studies in the Transmission, Development, and*

educated at the dissenting Coward's Academy in London and lived and preached all his life in east London at Newington Green. His biography clearly distinguishes him not only from such figures as Paine, who spent long periods spent in America and France and collaborated closely with the French journalist and revolutionary Nicholas de Bonneville⁸. but also from his friend and collaborator, the fellow dissenter and scientist Joseph Priestley, who also visited France and who towards the end of his life emigrated to America⁹.

This should not lead us to underestimate, however, transnational aspects of Price's work. His pamphlet *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776), which first brought Price to notoriety, was a strenuous defence of the American cause in the events leading to the War of Independence, as was his later *Additional Observations* (1777) and *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (1785). His reputation in the new American republic was such that the American congress invited him to cross the Atlantic and advise them on matters of public finance and policy, an invitation which he declined¹⁰. His *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1790), as is well known, gave rise to one of the most heated and protracted pamphlet wars in Britain, but less well remembered is that its voice of support for the young French Revolution was feted throughout France. On his death in 1791 tributes to Price

Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1959, pp. 327-338; and the edition of Price's principal political writings (*Political Writings*, ed. D.O. Thomas, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991). There is now an excellent edition of Price's major works in Italian translation: *La libertà civile. Scritti politici*, a cura di Paola Chiarella, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2021.

⁸ J. Keane, *Tom Paine. A Political Life*, Bloomsbury, London 1995, pp. 433-437; C. Lounissi, *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution*, cit., pp. 178, 259, 294-300, 310.

⁹ R. Schofield, *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley. A Study of His Life and Work from 1773 to 1804*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania 2004, pp. 318 ff.

¹⁰ Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, cit., p. 260

flooded in to the Revolution Society in London from Paris, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Auxerre and Aix La Rochelle. The Friends of the Constitution of the Jacobins of Clermont-Ferrand put him on the same footing as Mirabeau:

Vous avez perdu Price, nous venons de perdre Mirabeau ! Le chagrin que cause à votre Société la mort du Grand Price, a re-ouvert la playe qu'a faite à nos cœurs la mort de Mirabeau¹¹.

A full consideration of the wider transnational intellectual framework of Price's ideas is beyond the scope of this paper and would require an attentive analysis of its connections to the interrelations of political and religious dissent in European thought¹², of its place within the articulation of this dissent in the American revolution¹³, and the relations between the English radical tradition and the French Revolution¹⁴, as well as the somewhat neglected area of the place of his writings on public finance and insurance within the development of social policy¹⁵.

¹¹ Cited in *ivi*, 341.

¹² See, for example, Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1978.

¹³ See for example, B. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1967.

¹⁴ See for example, R. Hammersley, *The English Republican Tradition and eighteenth-century France. Between the Ancients and the Moderns*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2010; A. Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1979; M. Butler (ed.), *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984; S. Blakemore, *Intertextual War. Edmund Burke and the French Revolution in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and James Mackintosh*, Associated University Presses, London 1997. See also L.M. Crisafulli Jones (ed.), *La Rivoluzione francese in Inghilterra*, Liguori, Napoli 1990.

¹⁵ Price's first published intervention on the subject of insurance was his *Observations on Reversionary Payments* (1773), heralded by Franklin as «the foremost Production of Human Understanding that this Century has afforded us!» (cit. in Thomas,

Connections between currents of thought are crucial in evaluating the overall place of a thinker in a wider historical and geographical context. But such analyses can tend towards a certain abstraction. This paper, instead, will attempt to sketch some ways in which Price, although rarely moving from his study in Newington on the northern outskirts of London, participated in a real set of human and social relations which may be considered in some sense part of the personal embodiments of the Atlantic revolution. For at least some of the textual interrelations in Price's work were substantiated also through personal meetings or correspondence. What follows will attempt to trace some of Price's relations with a number of interlocutors who, although often perceived in terms of their own national context, can also be seen as members of a loose transnational network sharing a common radical perspective on the political developments of the late eighteenth century: William Petty (Lord Shelburne), André Morellet, Benjamin Franklin, Ann-Robert Turgot, Honoré Riqueti Count Mirabeau and the Dutch patriot Johan Van der Capellen.

2. The Earl of Shelburne and Abbé Morellet: the Bowood Circle

Richard Price first emerged into the political limelight with his pamphlet *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776) in support of the position of the American colonists in refusing to submit to the demands of the British state. How did Price come to write a pamphlet supporting the American Revolution?⁹ His criticism of government policy towards the American colonies and of its intention to tax them without conceding corresponding political representation was a position Price shared with many Whig politicians, including Edmund Burke, Charles James Fox and others. The particular political milieu from which Price emerged, however, was specifically that of the circle of William Petty, 2nd

The Honest Mind, pp. 139-140). For Price's importance to the growth of life insurance and actuarial policy, see *ivi*, pp. 135-140, 214-230.

Earl of Shelburne, later the Marquis of Lansdowne (1737-1805), and this circle had a particularly transnational focus. Shelburne became, briefly, Prime Minister in 1782-83, and is known for overseeing the peace treaty with the new United States, but for a considerable period both before and after this period in office he entertained a variety of national and international radicals and dissenters both at Bowood House in Wiltshire and at his London residence in Berkeley Square¹⁶.

Price's collaboration with Shelburne was substantial and regular, from their first meeting in 1771 right up until Price's death in 1791. In 1771, Caleb Rotherham wrote in a letter to his fellow dissenting minister Theophilus Lindsey¹⁷ that on 6 July «Lord Shelburne paid a friendly visit to Dr Price and entered into a free conversation with him for two hours. He professed a warm regard to the Dissenters as friends of liberty &c, and promised, if he ever came to power, to exert himself in supporting their rights»¹⁸. Their collaboration over the years saw Price preparing papers for his patron about toleration and freedom of worship but also the financial policies of government and in particular national debt¹⁹. The importance of this specific area of collaboration is illustrated in Price's extended reference to Shelburne at the end of his *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* with regard to possible financial agreements with the colonies which, he proposed, could stave off rebellion, quoting Shelburne's own views, «as nearly as I have been

¹⁶ For Shelburne, see N. Aston, and C. Campbell Orr (eds.), *An Enlightenment Statesman in Whig Britain. Lord Shelburne in Context 1737-1805*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2011.

¹⁷ On Theophilus Lindsey, see A. Nicholson and G. Ditchfield, *Theophilus Lindsey (1723–1808), Unitarian minister and theologian*, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, retrieved 7 Dec. 2022 from <<https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy.unibo.it/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-16722>>; D. Hay, *Dinner with Joseph Johnson. Books and Friendship in a Revolutionary Age*, Chatto & Windus, London 2022, pp. 56-62 and passim.

¹⁸ Cited in Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, cit., p. 145.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 147.

able to collect them». It is further substantiated by a reference which sends the reader to the Appendix entitled «Account of the National Debt and Appropriated Revenue»²⁰.

His proximity to Shelburne, however, went beyond these specific areas and constituted a real personal bond. It was Price, for example, who suggested his fellow dissenter Joseph Priestley to Shelburne as the custodian of his extensive library²¹. On the death of Price's wife in 1786 Shelburne (now the Marquis of Lansdowne) wrote to Price with his condolences and inviting him to visit at any time at Bowood going so far as to say that he and Lady Lansdowne would «treat you as a father»²².

This connection, of course, was a national rather than a transnational one. But the Bowood Circle of Shelburne in the 1780s in some respects had a cosmopolitan focus: it brought together a number of people playing parts in the shared transnational dissent and reform movements of the late eighteenth century, in particular those seeking to enhance the peace between France and Britain through free trade agreements, many of whom Shelburne had encountered on his trip to France in 1771²³. Shelburne's contacts included, for example, a number of international Enlightenment figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Ann Robert Turgot, Guillaume-Chrétiene de Lamoignon de Malesherbes and Abbé André Morellet²⁴.

²⁰ R. Price, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty*, Thomas Cadell, London 1776, p. 39, appendix 41-47. Price had submitted this summary to Shelburne for his approval before publishing it. See Price, *Political Writings*, cit., p. 72.

²¹ Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, cit., p. 147.

²² *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Second series XVII (1903)*, pp. 350-351. The *Proceedings* for this year contain transcripts of a number of letters to and from Richard Price covering the period 1767-1790.

²³ See in particular R. Whatmore, *Shelburne and Perpetual Peace: Small States, Commerce, and International Relations within the Bowood Circle*, in Aston and Campbell Orr, *An Enlightenment Statesman in Whig Britain*, cit., pp. 249-273.

²⁴ Aston and Campbell Orr, *An Enlightenment Statesman in Whig Britain*, cit.

It is worth pausing, for a moment, to consider the relation between Price and Morellet, who as member of Baron d'Holbach's salon in the 1770s, translator of Cesare Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764) into French and collaborator of Benjamin Franklin, occupies a strategic place as a sort of bridge between writers of the radical Enlightenment and the revolutionary period²⁵. Morellet cannot be considered in any way a close contact of Price, although they would appear to have met briefly in 1772 through Shelburne²⁶. During his stay in London, Morellet followed the debates over religious reform in the English parlia-

²⁵ For the salon of Baron d'Holbach, see A.C. Kors, *D'Holbach's Coterie. An Enlightenment in Paris*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1976. For the notion of the «radical Enlightenment», see the work of Jonathan Israel: *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001; *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006; *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012. The English translation of Beccaria's work was promoted by John Wilkes, probably after meeting Morellet at d'Holbach's salon (see R. Loretelli, *The first English translation of Cesare Beccaria's On Crimes and Punishments. Uncovering the Editorial and Political Contexts*, in «Diciottesimo Secolo», II (2017), pp. 1-22). Morellet's translation of Beccaria's work into French, the lingua franca of Europe at the time, also functioned to facilitate other translations, for example into Spanish (see R. Tonin, *El tratado Dei delitti e delle pene de Cesare Beccaria y sus dos primeras traducciones al castellano*, Unipress, Padova 2011). As well as working on a French translation, never published, of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Morellet translated several articles by Franklin, Jefferson and others. See N. Celotti, *Les paratextes d'oeuvres traduites de sciences humaines et sociales : un espace à explorer. Regard posé sur les premières traductions en langue française de An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations d'Adam Smith*, in «TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction», XXXIV (2021), 1, pp. 127-153; and D. Medlin, *André Morellet, translator of liberal thought*, in H. Mason (ed.), *Miscellany/Mélanges*, in «Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century», 1978, 174, pp. 189-202.

²⁶ D. Medlin and A.P. Shy, *Enlightened Exchange: The Correspondence of André Morellet and Lord Shelburne*, in *British-French Exchanges in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by K.H. Doig and D. Medlin, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge 2007, pp. 34-82; Cone, *Torchbearer of Freedom*, cit., 58-59.

ment and was aware of Price as one of the principal figures behind the movement for greater tolerance, as he reported in a letter to Turgot²⁷. On the same trip Morellet visited Shelburne in Bowood House and the two remained in close contact: Morellet acted as guide and host to Shelburne's son when he arrived in France in 1784 and attributed his election to the Académie Française to the English aristocrat's influence²⁸.

The contact between Morellet and Price, however, remained mostly indirect and through Shelburne. On his return to Paris, Morellet wrote to Shelburne asking him to be remembered to the «bon docteur Price» and communicating that he had «engagé un homme de mes amis à traduire pour notre usage son traité des annuités»²⁹. A short time afterwards, Morellet mentioned to Shelburne that he had put Price in touch with a M. de Voglie, hoping that by means of an interpreter they would be able to «causer ... sur des objets qui les intéressent l'une et l'autre»³⁰ and later wrote that he had sent him a copy of his own work on the Italian scientist and promoter of vaccine, Ferdinando Galiani (1728-1787)³¹. When Price's *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* came out, Shelburne sent a copy to Morellet in Paris³². In another letter to Shelburne, Morellet contested some of Price's statistics in relation to his views on population, although he added that in any case Price's work

²⁷ A. Morellet, *Lettres d'André Morellet*, ed. by D. Medlin, J. David et P. Leclerc, Tome I, 1759-1785, Voltaire Foundation, Oxford 1991, pp. 164-165 (Morellet to Turgot, 22 May 1772).

²⁸ D. Medlin, «Introduction», in Morellet, *Lettres*, cit., p. xl. For the relations between Shelburne and Morellet, see D. Medlin and A.P. Shy, *Enlightened Exchange*, cit.; R. Eagles, 'Opening the Door to Truth and Liberty': Bowood's French Connection, in Aston and Campbell Orr, *An Enlightenment Statesman in Whig Britain*, cit., pp. 197-214; and R. Whatmore, *Shelburne and Perpetual Peace*, cit., pp. 260-261.

²⁹ Morellet, *Lettres*, cit., p. 195 (Morellet to Shelburne, 25 February 1773). The «traité des annuités» which Morellet refers to was, in all probability, Price's *Observations on Reversionary Payments* (1773).

³⁰ Morellet, *Lettres*, cit., p. 202 (Morellet to Shelburne, 26 April 1773).

³¹ Ivi, p. 227 (Morellet to Shelburne, 25 November 1774).

³² Medlin and Shy, *Enlightened Exchange*, cit., p. 41.

deserved commendation³³. Shelburne wrote to Price in 1784 that he was «in daily expectation of seeing the Abbé Morellet here [Bowood]» and that «it would give Lady Shelburne and me great pleasure if you could spend some days with him here»³⁴. The two met again in 1784: Morellet wrote to Shelburne in December of that year that he had dined with Benjamin Vaughan and Price, «qui m'a fait beaucoup d'amitié et avec lequel je me suis fort bien entendu»³⁵. Despite this encounter, and although their mutual friends and contact were numerous, their direct and epistolary contact would seem to have remained limited.

3. Benjamin Franklin: science and politics

Although the American scientist and ambassador Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was also connected to the Bowood Circle, Shelburne was not the intermediary between him and Richard Price. Price had met Franklin during the latter's first stay in England from July 1757 to August 1763, probably as members of the same group which later became the Club of Honest Whigs and which met fortnightly in St Pauls' Churchyard and later in the London Coffee House³⁶. Their friendship was consolidated during Franklin's subsequent stay in England from 1764 to 1775, common interests being electricity, financial and religious reform and above all the situation of the American colonists. On 3 April 1769, Price sent Franklin a short work he had written on the population

³³ Cone, *Torchbearer of Freedom*, cit., p. 131.

³⁴ *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, cit., p. 321 (Shelburne to Price, 7 October 1784).

³⁵ Morellet, *Lettres*, cit., p. 547 (Morellet to Shelburne, 12 December 1784). Benjamin Vaughan was Shelburne's «close friend and secretary» (Whatmore, *Shelburne and Perpetual Peace*, cit. p. 260). See also M. Davis, *Vaughan, Benjamin (1751–1835), diplomatist and political reformer*, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2015, retrieved 2 January 2023 from <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-28123>>.

³⁶ Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, cit., pp. 142-144.

and health of «great Towns» and in particular London, asking him to communicate his findings to the Royal Society, of which Franklin was a member, if he thought them «of any importance». Subsequently Franklin acted as one of Price's sponsors for his membership of the Society, granted on 5 December 1775³⁷.

This request from Price was included in the first letter between the two to survive of a correspondence which continued until Franklin's death in 1790, over 50 of which survive in the Franklin Papers. The letters are dominated by issues concerning the American colonists and the progress of the war, but also cover a variety of other topics including public finance, proposals for a sinking fund, political and religious reform, and hot air balloons. Many letters introduce the «bearer» of the letter as a person to be recommended, thus aiding the flow of reliable informants and collaborators between Britain and America. Their correspondence also gives glimpses of Price's standing in Europe long before his sermon defending the French Revolution. In 1767, for example, Franklin wrote to Price that the Bibliothèque des Sciences et des Beaux Arts of Paris had published a complimentary review of the translation of his *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (1758) seeing in it «une méditation profonde, une parfait connaissance de la Religion» and «un Esprit vraiment philosophique»³⁸. Some years later Franklin noted that he had been asked by the publisher of the Société Typographique of Lausanne his opinion on Price's *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty*³⁹.

It was Benjamin Franklin who conveyed to Price, in December 1778, the invitation of the American Congress to the dissenting minister to

³⁷ *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Yale University Press/The American Philosophical Society, Digital Edition by the The Packard Humanities Institute; <<https://franklinpapers.org/agree;jsessionid=node0pjgi2rjhy6cydwqt4kkm7yt330531463.node0ü>>, accessed 30 December 2022 (Price to Franklin, 3 April 1769). On Price's admission to the Royal Society, see Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, cit., pp. 134-135; Cone, *Torchbearer*, cit., pp. 37-38.

³⁸ *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, cit., (Franklin to Price, 22 October 1767).

³⁹ Ivi (Jean-Pierre Béranger to Franklin, 1 March 1778).

make the journey to America so that they could «receive his assistance in regulating their finances» promising him «if he shall think it expedient to remove with his family to America and afford such assistance, a generous provision [...]». Price, however, declined the offer claiming that due to his «advanced age» (he was 56) he could not «move from a country to which he has been so long connected»⁴⁰. The closing letters of the correspondence attest again to a personal intimacy that goes beyond scientific and political collaboration. In 1785 Price wrote informing Franklin of the situation of his wife who «continues Sadly depress'd and crippled by the Palsy»⁴¹. After her death in 1776, he wrote that he felt himself a «foresaken creature», receiving in return Franklin's condolences. In a subsequent letter, Price said that he considered Franklin's friendship «one of the distinctions of my life»⁴².

If Price's correspondence with Franklin indicates a personal relation, it is worth noting that his surviving correspondence indicates that he had regular exchanges with a number of other founding fathers and American luminaries in this period such as Thomas Jefferson, Charles Chauncy, Eza Stiles, John Winthrop, Edward Wigglesworth, and others⁴³. Jefferson in particular was a valued correspondent as the successor to Benjamin Franklin as American Ambassador to Paris in 1775. On receiving a copy of Price's *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (1785), Jefferson wrote to Price thanking him and assuring him that it would «be reprinted in America and produce much

⁴⁰ Ivi, the American Commissioners (Benjamin Franklin, Arthur Lee, John Adams) to Price, 7 December 1778; Price to the American Commissioners, 18 January 1778.

⁴¹ *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, cit. (Price to Franklin, 5 November 1785).

⁴² Ivi, Price to Franklin, 26 January 1787; Franklin to Price 18 May 1787; Price to Franklin 26 September 1787. Despite this correspondence, which attests to some intimacy between the two, there is no mention of Richard Price in Walter Isaacson's biography of Franklin (*Benjamin Franklin. An American Life*, Simon and Shuster, New York 2003).

⁴³ See *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, pp. 262- 377. See also Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, cit., pp. 148-149.

good there» and in a later letter related to Price in detail the course of political events in Paris and Versailles in July 1789⁴⁴.

4. Ann Robert Jacques Turgot and support for the American revolution

Price's pamphlet in support of the American revolution, the *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776) came to the attention, as we have seen, of the political and editorial antennae of the Société Typographique of Lausanne. It was also read and appreciated by the physiocrat and reforming finance minister under Louis XVI, Ann Robert Jacques Turgot (1727-1781), to whom Price had sent a copy through Benjamin Franklin. On 22 March 1778, Turgot wrote to Price thanking him for the volume and for the slight modification Price had made in the second edition of the work, from which he had cut the erroneous note that he had made indicating that Turgot had left his ministry due to a «want of address»⁴⁵.

Turgot's acclamation of Price was warm: he was «almost the first of the writers of your country, who has given a just idea of liberty, and shown the falsity of the notion so frequently repeated by almost all Republican Writers, that liberty consists in being subject only to the laws, as if a man could be free while oppressed by an unjust law»⁴⁶. The strength of the endorsement of Price's view and Turgot's own support for the revolt of the American colonies, as well as, no doubt, the authoritative nature of the support from the renowned ex-Comptroller-Generale de la Finance in France, led Price to include the letter, both in French and

⁴⁴ *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, cit., p. 325. Jefferson to Price, 1 February 1785 and 12 July 1789.

⁴⁵ R. Price, *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*, Thomas Cadell, London 1785, p. 107.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 111. For a discussion of Price's thought in relation to the concept of liberty, see S. Vantin, «Una benedizione veramente sacra e inestimabile». *La libertà civile negli scritti politici di Richard Price*, in this issue.

in translation into English, in his later *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (1785)⁴⁷. He did this despite the request for confidentiality with which the letter closed in consideration, as Turgot said, of the «freedom with which I have opened myself to you, sir, upon these delicate matters»⁴⁸. Price had written to Franklin asking him if, after the death of Turgot in 1781, there was «any family that Turgot may have left» who could be contacted to waive this desire for confidentiality, Franklin replying that the closest contacts of Turgot had communicated to him that «the whole letter may well be printed»⁴⁹.

The interest of the British radicals in the figure of Turgot continued with the translation of the *Vie de Turgot* (1786) written by the French philosopher, mathematician and Girondin, the Marquis of Condorcet, which was printed by the dissenting publisher and friend of Price, Joseph Johnson in 1787. The translation was the work of another radical of the Shelburne circle, Benjamin Vaughan (1751-1835), also a contact of Price⁵⁰, who, it has been argued, was the anonymous translator of Turgot's own key work, the *Reflexions sur la formation et la distribution des richesses* (1770)⁵¹. The translation of the biography of Turgot was probably commissioned by Lord Shelburne himself, and the extent to

⁴⁷ See Appendix to Price's *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*, cit., pp. 88-127. The Appendix was prefaced by an «Advertisement» by Price justifying its inclusion as it contained «observations in which the United States are deeply concerned» and because he was sure that «the eminence of M. Turgot's name and character will recommend it to their attention» (p. 87). The letter has been translated into Italian by Paola Chiarella (*La libertà civile*, cit., pp. 201-211).

⁴⁸ Price, *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*, cit., p. 126.

⁴⁹ *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, cit., Price to Franklin, 12 July 1782; Franklin to Price, 2 August 1784.

⁵⁰ See note 34 above.

⁵¹ See G. De Vivo and G. Sabbagh, *The First Translator in English of Turgot's Reflexions sur la formation et la distribution des richesses: Benjamin Vaughan*, in «History of Political Economy», XLVII (2015), 1, pp. 186-199. Turgot's work was completed in 1766 but not widely circulated and only became more generally available with the 1788 edition. The English translation was not published until 1793.

which Price himself was involved in the translation and promotion of Turgot's work is indicated in the fact that Shelburne thought it worthy of note in a letter to Price: «I have been so much struck with Mr Turgot's *Life* that I have sent it to a friend [possibly Benjamin Vaughan] to get it translated and published»⁵². Benjamin Vaughan's brother, Samuel, also a correspondent of Price, were landowners in the West Indies and divided their time between Philadelphia and London, illustrating the connectedness of this Atlantic space⁵³.

5. Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Count Mirabeau: «magpie cosmopolitanism»

When the Friends of the Constitution of the Jacobins of Clermont-Ferrand, as we have noted, compared the loss of Richard Price to English radicalism with the French Revolution's loss of Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Count Mirabeau (1749-1791), the comparison was not wholly gratuitous. Both were heavily involved in the propagation of reformist ideas in the years leading up to the French Revolution, although the journalistic activity of Mirabeau was soon to be overshadowed by his active role in the early revolution. Indeed, their activity in the same radical circles bestriding London and Paris meant that it is probable that they actually met when Mirabeau, armed with a recommendation from Franklin, visited London in 1784.

Franklin had written to Price according to their customary manner, that «the bearer [of the letter], Count Mirabeau, who much respects

⁵² *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, cit., p. 358 (Shelburne to Price, 29 November 1786).

⁵³ The Price correspondence in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* include one letter from Samuel Vaughan to Price on 4 November 1786 (ivi, pp. 354-56), writing in reply to a letter from Price and commiserating with him on the ill health of Price's wife. A fundamental characteristic of this eighteenth-century Atlantic space was, of course, slavery, but a discussion of this issue in relation to Price would go far beyond the confines of this paper.

your Character, has desired a Line of Introduction to you». Mirabeau was, said Franklin, «an excellent Writer, and has prepared for the Press a small Piece, much admired by the best Judges here, on the Subject of hereditary Nobility, which he proposes to get printed in England»⁵⁴. Price subsequently wrote to Franklin's son, William Temple Franklin, then in London, inviting him to tea and asking him, if possible, to bring Mirabeau with him⁵⁵.

The volume mentioned by Franklin, *Considerations sur l'Ordre de Cincinnatus* (1784) has a particular history. A Society of the Cincinnatus in America was founded in the spring of 1783 to celebrate officers, both American and not, who had distinguished themselves in the War of Independence. The Society, however, had been the object of considerable criticism because of the hereditary nature of this membership: it was intended to be passed down to the sons of these officers. This introduction of a hereditary principle was attacked in an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Considerations on the Society or Order of Cincinnati* (in fact written by a judge from South Carolina, Aedanus Burke)⁵⁶. Franklin was so incensed by this betrayal of revolutionary ideals that he considered translating it into French himself, but as this would have been unseemly for the American Ambassador to France, gave the work instead to the emerging radical journalist Mirabeau⁵⁷. The latter published an amplified translation of this work into French in 1784, printing it in London once again with the bookseller Joseph Johnson to avoid the censors⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, cit., Franklin to Price, 7 September 1784.

⁵⁵ Ivi (Price to William Temple Franklin, 25 September 1784).

⁵⁶ *Considerations on the Society or Order of the Cincinnati*, Robert Bell, Philadelphia 1783.

⁵⁷ W. Doyle, *Aristocracy and its enemies in the age of revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 2009, pp. 122-123. See also D. Echeverria, *Franklin's Lost Letter on the Cincinnati*, in «Bulletin de l'Istitut Français de Washington», 1953, 3, pp. 119-126.

⁵⁸ *Considérations sur l'ordre de Cincinnatus, ou imitation d'un pamphlet anglo-américain, par le comte de Mirabeau*, Joseph Johnson, London 1784.

This modified and augmented version was then translated back into English by Mirabeau's friend and collaborator Samuel Romilly⁵⁹.

This work by Mirabeau has been described by one historian as «the first overt and direct attack on the principle of nobility in Europe itself»⁶⁰. Interestingly, for our purposes, given the importance that was being given to Price's own *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*, Mirabeau applied to Price, successfully, to include in the English translation of his *Considerations*, both Turgot's letter to Price and an «abstract» of Price's pamphlet. Mirabeau's «abstract» was followed by some «Detached note on Price's Work» taking up 60 pages and concluding the volume⁶¹. Price acknowledged his debt to Mirabeau for his «support and kind civility» as well as the «translation of these Observations into French» in the *Advertisement* to his own pamphlet, published in the same year⁶². Mirabeau's «magpie cosmopolitanism»⁶³, then, was instrumental in linking a series of works in English and in French which were illustra-

⁵⁹ See H. Braithwaite, *Romanticism, Publishing and Dissent. Joseph Johnson and the Cause of Liberty*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York 2003, p. 93. For a discussion of the translation activity of Mirabeau, Romilly and others, see P. Leech, *Cosmopolitanism, dissent, and translation. Translating radicals in eighteenth-century Britain and France*, Bologna University Press, Bologna 2021, pp. 91-101.

⁶⁰ Doyle, *Aristocracy and its enemies in the age of revolution*, cit., p. 137. Richard Whatmore sees Mirabeau's *Considerations* also as a key text in the movement led by Shelburne to promote free trade between Britain and France (*Shelburne and Perpetual Peace*, cit., p. 271).

⁶¹ *Considerations on the order of Cincinnatus; to which are added, as well several original papers relative to that institution, as also a letter from the late M. Turgot, comptroller of the finances in France, to Dr. Price, on the constitutions of America; and an abstract on Dr. Price's Observations on the importance of the American Revolution; with notes and reflections upon that work. Translated from the French of Mirabeau*, Joseph Johnson, London 1785.

⁶² Price, *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*, cit., p. vii.

⁶³ S. Schama, *Citizens. A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1989, p. 342. See also P. Leech, *Mirabeau: French Revolutionary and Cosmopolitan Translator*, in «Storia e Politica», XII (2020), 1, pp. 5-22.

tive of the new spirit of reform which was bringing together radicals and revolutionaries in America, England and France.

6. Joan Derk Van der Capellen tot den Pol and the Dutch patriot movement

The fame of Price's original pamphlet in support of the revolt of the American colonies had also reached Holland. During the conflict with the American colonies, the British government was obliged to recall the Scotch brigade in service in the Dutch Republic, but this had been approved only in the teeth of strident opposition on the part of some supporters of the American revolt in the Dutch Stadt⁶⁴. One of these, Joan Derk Van der Capellen tot den Pol (1741-1784), took the opportunity, towards the end of 1777, of writing directly to Price that he was «so much interested in the affairs of the United Colonies» and had «so much regard for the illustrious Author of the *Observations on Civil Liberty*, and of the *Additional Observations*» that he wished to «be acquainted with a man who has deserved so well from his country and from mankind in general». He had justified his own contrary vote in the Dutch diet with a memorial in the press, and after a series of attacks on him in the newspapers, had been «delighted ... to see your incomparable *Observations on Civil Liberty* make their appearance, since I was persuaded that I could not better justify my sentiments and my conduct with regard to this point than in giving a translation of them». He then had the satisfaction, he reported to Price, of seeing his translation go through two editions in less than a year despite the contemporary appearance of a French edition⁶⁵. He had followed this, he continued, with a further translation of Price's *Additional Observations*, including in the volume a number of other works justifying the American revolt: some letters of Benjamin Franklin and extracts from the latter's *Political*

⁶⁴ Godechot, *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century*, cit., p. 57.

⁶⁵ A translation into French was published in Rotterdam in 1776, and one into German in Braunschweig in 1777 (Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, cit., p. 150).

Disquisitions along with a passage from Hutcheson's *System of Moral Philosophy*. He was particularly proud, Van der Capellen concluded, that with the translation of «this second piece» he had «so openly and in the quality of a magistrate, protected the cause of the Americans, which I shall ever consider as the cause of all mankind»⁶⁶.

Van de Capellen's translation and promotion of Price's work was followed by his own influential *Aan het Volk van Nederland (Appeal to the Dutch People)*, published anonymously in 1781, a pamphlet considered to have helped spark the patriot movement in the Netherlands, and which itself was immediately translated into French, German and English⁶⁷. The reforming patrician was singled out for praise by Mira-beau in his work supporting the Dutch patriot movement, *Aux Bataves sur le staudorderat* (1788), and Price's *Observations* in this translation was banned by the Dutch authorities in 1789⁶⁸.

7. Transnational frameworks and the Atlantic revolution

Price is perhaps known principally today for his *Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, the sermon delivered at the Old Jewry Meeting House on 4 November 1789 and the object of a fierce attack by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Price's *Discourse* was given to the Revolution Society as a celebration of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England, and constituted a radical interpretation of it not as the re-establishment of a constitutional monarchy af-

⁶⁶ *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, cit., pp. 313-18 (Baron Van der Capellen to Price, 14 December 1777). Cfr. Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, cit., pp. 293-94. A discussion of translation as a vehicle for the dissemination of radical ideas is beyond the scope of this paper, but recent work opening up this perspective has been path-breaking: see S. Perovic, *The Radical Translation Project. Some Challenges in Using Translation as an Approach to Revolutionary History*, in «Journal of the Interdisciplinary History of Ideas», X (2021), 19, pp. 5.1-5.32.

⁶⁷ Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, cit., p. 886; Polasky, *Revolutions without Borders*, cit., pp. 31-34.

⁶⁸ Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, cit., p. 859.

ter a period of arbitrary rule by a Catholic King, but as a moment in which the English people had acted on the principle that a people was able to «chuse our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for ourselves»⁶⁹. The sermon celebrated a supposed continuity linking this experience with the French Revolution, and Price was thankful that he had «lived to see Thirty Millions of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice; their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects». The link between the three revolutions (English, American and French) was made explicit: «After sharing in the benefits of one Revolution, I have been spared to be a witness to two other Revolutions, both glorious»⁷⁰.

Leaving aside Burke's ferocious reply, which argued instead for the Glorious Revolution as a temporary side-stepping of the otherwise overriding constitutional principle of a hereditary monarchy⁷¹, it is worth noting that Price's intervention was clearly not only a celebration of an English political tradition but a positioning of this experience within a broader, transnational framework. Once again, his political analysis was substantiated by personal contacts. His knowledge of the situation and events in France came directly from letters written to him from Thomas Jefferson, writing from Paris on 12 July 1789, for example, that «the States [Estates General] then are in quiet possession of the powers of the nation, and have begun the great work of building up a constitution»⁷². Price also had a direct correspondence with the Protestant cleric and revolutionary, deputy in the National Assembly, Rabaut de St Etienne

⁶⁹ *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, London, 1789, p. 34. Cfr. M. Viroli, *For love of country: an essay on patriotism and nationalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995, pp. 96-100.

⁷⁰ *Ivi*, p. 49.

⁷¹ E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1799], ed. C.C. O'Brien, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, pp.85-109.

⁷² *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, cit., p. 372 (Jefferson to Price, 12 July 1789).

(1743-1793)⁷³. The extent of Price's commitment to a truly transnational conception of revolutionary activity can be witnessed in his reply to Jefferson on 3 August. The French Revolution was one «that must astonish Europe; that shakes the foundations of despotic power; and that probably will be the commencement of a general reformation in the governments of the world which hitherto have been little better than usurpations on the rights of mankind, impediments to the progress of human improvement, and contrivances for enabling a few grandees to suppress and enslave the rest of mankind»⁷⁴.

The notion of an «Atlantic Revolution» or a «radical cosmopolitan project»⁷⁵ in the late eighteenth-century gives a frame for the transnational resonance of Price's work. Price spent almost all his life in London, with only brief excursions outside the city, for example to Bowood House in Wiltshire. But it would seem from this brief glance at Price's correspondence and acquaintances that the threads linking Price's thought to those involved in articulating dissenting religious, political and economic positions in the 1780s were also to be found in his personal links. This paper has tried to bring to light some of these personal ties rather than discuss in detail the ideas themselves. Research paths often follow disciplinary hypotheses and interests, and Price has been discussed principally in terms of his political philosophy (in particular in relation to Burke). But it seems useful also to unearth and prioritize the personal links through which these threads are articulated. If Price's thought, elaborated in his study in Newington Green in what is now north London, reached Amsterdam, Paris and Philadelphia, this was also because of his personal correspondence and active participation in what today would be called a transnational network.

⁷³ Cone, *Torchbearer of Freedom*, cit., p. 179.

⁷⁴ Cited in Israel, *The Expanding Blaze*, cit., p. 268.

⁷⁵ A. Di Francesco and M. Ferradou, *The Early 'Republic of France' as a Cosmopolitan Moment*, cit., 7. For Price's work in this context, see P. Chiarella, *L'importanza di essere onesti: il dissenso politico di Richard Price*, in this issue.