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Thomas Paine's Continental Mind

Anglais de naissance
Américain d'adoption
Français par décret
— Plaque commemorating Thomas Paine, 10 Rue de l'Odéon, Paris

Adopted by America and decreed a citizen by France, Thomas Paine left his native England at the age of thirty-seven and spent most of the rest of his life off the British isle. He was a cosmopolitan whose concern for the "rights of men" propelled him across borders through a run of canny transformations, from excise officer to celebrated author to French revolutionary. One of the clearest testaments to Paine's cosmopolitanism is the fact that each of the countries in which he lived disowned him once its nationalist movement got under way. Forced out of England, imprisoned in France, and written out of the histories of the United States, Paine succumbed to the fate of most cosmopolitans, like his contemporaries the English Macaronis and his short-lived allies the Girondists, trading in his cosmopolitan credentials for alien status.[1] Prior to the seismic shift that tilted this landscape in the direction of national culture, however, Paine, like those other cosmopolitans, fashioned himself as a man of the world. His style was cosmopolitan, notwithstanding the fact that his plain-spoken prose and untidy appearance have often been viewed as the antithesis of cosmopolitan sophistication. To conceive of cosmopolitanism as a style or as a *lifestyle*, as David Simpson has put it, one must acknowledge that cosmopolitanism is not always ecumenical. Its democratic grandeur expresses itself as a political disposition, an Enlightenment vision marked by a respect for other cultures and a concern for human rights. Paine shared this vision, but in ways that have yet to be fully appreciated he also partook of the style of cosmopolitanism, its gestures and mannerisms and slips of the tongue, its posture of knowing, an ennui at odds with what Simpson calls cosmopolitanism's "ethic of openness and curiosity" (54). Paine's writing rarely exhibits ennui, but it does embody a distinctly British style of cos-

mopolitanism, a style that bespeaks the authority of time spent on "the continent."

Throughout his American Revolutionary oeuvre—particularly his historic pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776) and his wartime *American Crisis* papers (1776–83)—Paine uses this term to refer to North America and the colonies in general. However, both the attributes he assigns to the continent and the history of the word itself suggest that Paine's use of the term is shaped by something other than a descriptive imperative. To put it in a nutshell, the continent imagined by Paine bears an unlikely resemblance to the European continent. In one of the most lyrical passages of *Common Sense*, a pamphlet whose fame arguably owes more to its style than to its ideas, Paine praises the "continental minds" of those who have migrated to America, leaving uncertain whether "continental" refers to the colonists' connection to Europe or North America. It is a punning ambiguity, one that enables him to suggest a parallel between the continental vantage point of the colonist and that of a British traveler on the European continent. In the process, Paine refigures the British metropole as a provincial spot, the starting point of a transatlantic journey that bears a closer resemblance to the gentleman's Grand Tour than a tour of America, then synonymous with criminal transportation.[2] In so representing British North Americans as New World cosmopolites, Paine was drawing on a well-established tradition of masculine instruction to persuade readers on both sides of the Atlantic that the colonists were civilized and sociable, and consequently deserving of self-rule.

The notion that continental travel, and the knowledge it afforded, qualified men for positions of authority and governance was a commonplace in male conduct books and educational tracts of the day. In them the European continent was first imagined as a finishing school as well as a staging ground for careers at court or in Parliament. It goes without saying that neither Philadelphia nor New York near the end of the eighteenth century would have been mistaken for the European destinations of the Grand Tour. But as I have already hinted, and as I will develop below, the analogy between Europe and North America was, in the end, an analogy, a linguistic form. More than likely, the very figuration of the colonies as a unified continent with its own *Continental* Congress, currency and army owed as much to the history of the word "continental" as it did to the topography of North America. A relatively new word when it entered American parlance

in the 1770s, "continental" had previously achieved currency as a term connoting the distance and difference that separated the British isle from the rest of the civilized world. A product of wartime, the word came to prominence during the Seven Years' War (1756–63) when Britons concerned about their government's escalating embroilment in European affairs commenced a discussion in print of the costs and benefits of Great Britain's "continental connections." Just as Paine sought to mobilize support for the separation of Great Britain and its continental holdings in North America, so had this earlier group of wartime correspondents begun to question the wisdom of maintaining connections with the continent. One should not stretch this homology too far, but in both cases Britain's imperial identity assumed a topographic form, its "island" status made to signify the country's autonomy and self-containment, its capacity to provide for itself.³

This issue of how, and to what extent, Britons ought to engage with the rest of the world was, of course, at the center of the debates over American independence, with cosmopolitans like Paine advocating what British cosmopolitans had long advocated: the value of a more extensive commerce, which in the vernacular of the time meant not only a freer exchange of goods and services but also a broader exchange of ideas and cultures. So it should be no surprise that Paine, long before Revolutionary France granted him citizenship, expressed a partiality for Britain's continental rival in the idiom of a British cosmopolite. Denouncing the manner in which Great Britain conducted its relations with other nations, Paine wrote in *American Crisis* number 6, "there is a sociality in the manners of France, which is much better disposed to peace and negotiation." Here Paine singled out his native England, which he viewed as having a long way to go: until it "becomes more civilized, she cannot expect to live long at peace with any power." Criticizing the insular pride of the English, he speaks like an unrepentant Francophile, disdaining his countrymen's "savageness of manners" and "common language," which their "vulgar and offensive" expressions of national arrogance embody (137). Cast in this light, Paine's cosmopolitanism begins to look studied and ironic, comprising gestures that represent an effort to ventriloquize metropolitan disdain for provincial Britons.

Paine scholarship acknowledges the cosmopolitan dimensions of Paine's vision, but the distinctly British context and history of its rhetorical form have been largely eclipsed by a desire that is itself cosmopolitan. For the resurgence of interest in Paine in recent years, a corrective project that

has enhanced his stature as an Enlightenment figure as well as an American icon, is at least partly driven by an impulse to justify (ethically and historically) Paine's transnational attachments. In this vein, critics as different as Gordon Wood and Julia Kristeva have sometimes struck an elegiac note, lamenting the irony of a citizen of the world who in the end was everywhere unwelcome.[4] But if being universally unwelcome carries a risk of ending up homeless, it does not entail relinquishing such ties to one's home culture as a native tongue, a cultural literacy, and an imagined relation to the world, all of which are portable and mutable. Indeed, I would argue that Paine's cosmopolitanism is also what is most British about him. Treating Paine as a British writer does not qualify his cosmopolitanism any more than it negates his contributions to other national cultures. On the contrary, it enables us to better understand how much the Enlightenment cosmopolitanism that animated Paine and other American Revolutionaries depended upon their shared sense of being part of a British diaspora. In the same *American Crisis* essay in which Paine praised the French, he wrote, "We live in a large world, and have extended our ideas beyond the limits and prejudices of an island" (137). The line is an exemplary instance of Paine's Enlightened cosmopolitanism. It is also revealing in the way it clarifies the British coordinates of this disposition, which expresses itself spatially as a distance that separates and connects a diasporic group and its collectively imagined nation of origin, an ever-receding island.

In the spirit of recent work showing how American literary nationalism continues to obscure the cosmopolitan and transatlantic investments of early American writers, this essay explains why cosmopolitanism had a cultural and political appeal for British Americans in a necessarily ambivalent and perplexed relationship with the parent country.[5] Although essay constraints preclude a discussion of how this cosmopolitanism was later appropriated, elided, and recast, focusing on Paine's writing provides an opportunity to think about the ways in which early American political literature resists efforts to equate the nation-state with national culture. Some of the best scholarship on Paine has shown how subsequent writers and orators have drawn on Paine's body of writing to promote a variety of exceptionalist visions of American culture.[6] Such acts of appropriation have always required acts of selective reading. With these in mind, I would like to undertake another kind of selective reading, one that emphasizes the literal rather than the oft-acknowledged allegorical aspects of Paine's writ-

ing, and that focuses less on its later echoes than on its contemporary ones. Most would agree that the language of *Common Sense* seems, in the words of Robert A. Ferguson, both "intrinsic to American political speech" and "embedded in the expressions of identity on which the culture depends" (467). However, this impression is a reflection of relatively recent reading practices and ways of thinking. To demonstrate this, I read *Common Sense* and the *American Crisis* essays alongside and as part of a cosmopolitan discourse that neither promotes egalitarianism nor values autochthonous culture. The Paine that emerges from these readings is an advocate of continental interests, although not in the way usually thought.

THE ALLURE OF THE CONTINENT

In the section of *Common Sense* entitled "Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession," Paine famously disparages the notion that the colonists, as British subjects, owe their allegiance to the British monarch. With dispatch, Paine renders King George monstrous and the prospect of remaining loyal to him necessarily perverse. The attack on monarchy is part of a broader assault on the importance of origins in determining a person's worth and identity. This was typical grist for the republican mill, but it was also overdetermined by Paine's own narrative and his sense that a man born in England might easily become something other than an Englishman. Like the motto inscribed on the plaque in the Paris street where he once lived, Paine's celebration of transformative possibilities has encouraged some commentators to view Paine as an "Englishman by birth" and an "American by adoption." In the portion immediately following the section on monarchy, however, Paine suggests that an Englishman becomes not an American but rather a *European* upon crossing the Atlantic.

Troubling the whole notion of a country of origin, he explains in one of the text's most familiar passages why such place names as "England, Holland, Germany, or Sweden" are no more meaningful than the "minor divisions" of "street, town, and county" (64). Using the conceit of a journey, Paine conjures a scene familiar to his native countrymen, a trip that begins in an English parish. How does a man greet his fellow parishioner when he runs into him "a few miles from home," muses Paine, but by greeting him with the appellation of "*neighbor*." Outside the boundaries of the town, he goes on, the same two parishioners will necessarily "[drop] the narrow

idea of a street, and [salute each other] by the name of *townsman*." Extending the conceit, Paine reasons that outside of the county the two travelers will call each other "*countryman, i.e. countyman*," and so on and so forth until meeting in France as "*Englishmen*"—at which point Paine ends the hypothetical journey and reminds his readers that the population of the colonies consists of people from all over Europe (which, for the purpose of his example, includes Britain as well). Logically, these "Europeans meeting in America" will no longer see each other as English, Dutch, or German—"distinctions too limited for continental minds"—but as fellow "*countrymen*" (64). By way of this illustration, Paine represents places of origin as terra infirma, shifting and giving way in the course of one's travels. The passage lays bare a diasporic logic that enables a heterogeneous group of Creoles and immigrants to imagine themselves as a unified people. While historians have confirmed Paine's observation that the colonists migrated from different parts of Western Europe, Paine's words nevertheless invite his readers to regard their common *homeland* as a convenient yet rational fiction, whose unifying effect depends upon a shared perception of distance traveled. By thus highlighting the spatially and temporally contingent nature of their collective identity, Paine reimagines the colonists as more bound to each other than to their counterparts in the metropolitan center.

The importance of Europe in this formulation derives, in part, from its sheer capaciousness, which enables Paine to lump together diverse populations. Just as crucial as Europe's size, however, is its cultural significance for Britons on both sides of the Atlantic. These are the readers whom Paine addresses and, more selectively, applauds for having "continental minds"—a Eurocentric cosmopolitanism that British writers had long regarded as both a sign and a source of political and social authority. To continental minds, the divisions between nation-states are akin to smaller "divisions of street, town, and county" inasmuch as neither set of distinctions encapsulates the full range of sympathies and attachments thought to regulate the conduct of an Enlightened elite. Earlier in the eighteenth century Shaftesbury had made a similar analogy to distinguish such an elite from mere "patriots of the soil"—"Englishmen" whose narrow identification with their native country he considered no less absurd than accepting a "denomination or character" from the "inn or dirty village" in which one was born (403, 401). Invoking this sense of absurdity, then, is a

means at once of neutralizing loyalist feelings for the parent country and of writing back to the metropole, with the aim of countering its image of the colonies as backwater outposts. In this formulation, it is the stay-at-home Briton whose views appear narrow and unworldly, invested in "distinctions too limited for continental minds." Paine's inversion of the relation between colony and imperial center plays upon an ambiguity in his use of the word *continental*, which refers either to the European origins of the colonists or to the common perspective of those meeting on a new continent. The resulting metonymic link between the European continent and North America, however, does not carry the bulk of its proposition, for Paine often simply speaks of one continent in terms equally applicable to the other.

"It is pleasant to observe by what regular gradations we surmount the force of local prejudice, as we enlarge our acquaintance with the world," writes Paine, alluding to the colonists' transatlantic migration in language typically used to describe the effects of the Grand Tour (64). Using the criteria with which the authors of male instructional texts authorized the ruling elite back home, Paine imagines the colonists as not only qualified to assume the reins of government but also, in both their outlook and culture, already differentiated from island-bound Britons. The continentalism he espouses is cut from the same cloth as that which Richard Hurd celebrates in his 1764 treatise *Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel*, in which he channels the voice of Shaftesbury, in a conversation with Locke, exhorting young men to take the Grand Tour. Paine and Hurd make markedly similar claims about the salutary effects of traveling to a continent. They speak of different continents, perhaps, but both authors use identical terms to explain how continental journeys potentially transform those of island origin. Each bemoans the "narrow" boundaries of Britain, the literal and figurative limits that necessarily restrict what "islanders" see and know of the world; and each regards the continent as a wellspring of manners, knowledge, and sociability. When Hurd has Locke challenge Shaftesbury's claim that "island prejudices" and native barbarism are "worn off" by travel, proposing instead a program of selective reading, Hurd makes it clear that Locke is challenging practical wisdom (152). Paine, writing from the edge of civilization, is possibly the last person one would expect to embrace Shaftesbury's Eurocentric thinking. But, in fact, it is because he writes from the wilds of North America that Paine describes its unique

situation in terms that English gentlemen used to describe Europe, as a place where insular Britons went to become cultivated, a place where they could "enlarge [their] views" as well as their "acquaintance with the world" (*Common Sense* 61, 64).

So frequently does Paine invoke the continental dimensions of America that the reader has no choice but to imagine the country in those expansive terms. No doubt it is because Paine was successful in dissolving the ties between the colonies and the metropole that critics have never considered whether his fixation with America's vastness comes from a metropolitan tradition of comparing continental expanses to Britain's narrower confines. However, Paine draws on just this tradition to overturn the image of Britain as a military, political, and cultural power. In the second of his wartime dispatches, the *American Crisis*, for example, Paine addresses Lord Howe, commander of the British in North America, as if he were a general from Lilliput. "I laugh at your notion of conquering America," writes Paine. "Because you lived in a little country, where an army might run over the whole in a few days, and where a single company of soldiers might put a multitude to the rout, you expected to find it the same here" (68). In addition to calling into question Britain's military strength, the taunt disparages Britons for not recognizing how small their country is in the global context. Their parochial vision and their failure to consider themselves part of something larger than their native community—dispositions that render them war-prone—become recurring objects of Paine's criticism. Drawing upon eighteenth-century moral sense philosophy, Paine portrays British Americans as more benevolent and more peaceful than their metropolitan peers, who he claims are incapable of feeling natural affection for anyone but their countrymen. "In this extensive quarter of the globe," Paine boasts in *Common Sense*, "we forget the narrow limits of three hundred and sixty miles (the extent of England) and carry our friendship on a larger scale" (64). Such testimonies to universal fellowship were the lingua franca of the global Enlightenment. But the implication that Britons possessed minds and hearts as narrow as the territory in which they lived was an idea whose roots lay in the home culture. It was promoted in texts like Hurd's *Dialogues*, where the character of Shaftesbury explains: "The very circumstance of our being Islanders seems to expose us to the just reproach of inhospitality. And if, with this disadvantage of our situation, we cherish, and not correct, those manners which are so apt to spring from it, let us not

take it amiss that foreigners distinguish us by such names, as we well deserve" (36).

This language pervades Paine's revolutionary writing and suits his polemical style remarkably well. In his rebuke of Lord Howe's 1776 proclamation banning public assemblies, in *American Crisis* number 2, Paine appears well versed in the idiom of male instruction: "It is plain that you brought over with you all the narrow notions you were bred up with," writes Paine, "but Englishmen always travel for knowledge, and your lordship, I hope, will return, if you return at all, much wiser than you came" (68). There is no mistaking Paine's populist streak, but this barb also points up the lengths Paine goes to in order to dispel the perception of the colonists as an ignorant and uncivilized lot. He describes America as if it were a destination of educational value, a place where an Englishman might shed the "narrow notions" he was "bred up with." His suggestion that Lord Howe is himself a rube underscores his point once again by reversing the relation between the British center and the North American periphery. What gives the insult its force is its intimation that North America is like continental Europe, a required destination for British men who hoped to broaden their knowledge and polish themselves. Paine's audience would have been familiar with this logic from reading such texts as James Puckle's popular advice book *The Club* (1711), one of countless books, like Hurd's, that established the European Grand Tour as the final stage in the education of British gentlemen. In this excerpt from *The Club*, Puckle expresses a sentiment that by the 1770s was commonplace: "Travelling exhibits just, kind, and charitable ideas of mankind, and is of singular use to accomplish a gentleman: It enlarges all the faculties, and takes off the narrowness of mind, which for want of knowledge of the world, is apt to sour conversation" (55–56). Puckle's vision of an urbane gentleman is similar to that of his more famous contemporaries Shaftesbury and Addison and Steele, and his advice also resembles the celebrated wisdom later found in the Earl of Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* (1774). But *The Club's* publishing history—approximately a dozen editions were published in London, Dublin, Cork, and Edinburgh through the 1750s, with new editions produced by Philadelphia printers later in the century—is a reminder that books on the training of gentlemen enjoyed a long popularity throughout the Anglophone world.[7]

Paine, for his part, is better known for being a target than a source of

allegations of conduct unbecoming a gentleman. He was a haranguer as well as a notoriously unpolished and unkempt man, who his opponents liked to say wrote in a "vulgar style."[8] Still, the emergent notion that gentility consisted neither in birth nor rank but in standards of taste and literacy—converging within a figure of polite learning immodestly called "knowledge of the world"—resonated, albeit sometimes uneasily, with Paine's efforts to expose and unseat those in unmerited positions of power. Nowhere is this more evident than in his assault on the myth of the origins of monarchy. Dispelling the fantasy of the monarchy's heroic genesis, Paine insists that the progenitor of kings was likely "nothing better than the principal ruffian of some restless gang, whose savage manners or preeminence in subtilty obtained him the title of chief among plunderers" (*Common Sense* 57). Elsewhere, he characterizes George III as more "savage" than "the naked and untutored Indian," and the soldier who serves him as having "more of the air of a dancing-master than a soldier" (*Common Sense* 87; *Complete Writings* 70). These extremes, the untutored brute and the effeminate fop, were the antipodes between which the eighteenth-century gentleman's program of education offered a middle way: fashioning men who were neither uncivilized nor so refined that they lacked their supposed natural virility.[9] One effect of using this language was to put a face on an enemy that was difficult to define, a feat when one considers Dror Wahrman's insight that "in contrast to other wars in recent memory, the American war was irreducible to any reliable map of 'us' and 'them'" (1238). More important, such rhetoric delivered a powerful indictment of British authority, insisting as it did that the British government was led by men who either failed to meet their own standards of conduct or, worse, resembled the Native American "savages," with whom the rebelling colonists were also often conflated in metropolitan print.[10] What gave these charges an added punch was their challenge to a familiar model of transatlantic exchange, which idealized imperial commerce as an exchange of colonial raw goods for metropolitan commodities, arts, and culture. The figuration of America as a continent was essential to dismantling this model.

CIVILIZATION AND ITS CONTINENTS

Just as Paine portrays Lord Howe as acting in a "very illiberal" manner toward the colonists, so he often represents Great Britain as behaving un-

generously in its relations with other countries. In the seventh *American Crisis*, Paine writes of Britain: "Her ideas of national honor seem devoid of that benevolence of heart, that universal expansion of philanthropy, and that triumph over the rage of vulgar prejudice, without which man is inferior to himself, and a companion of common animals" (147). The remark figures the mother country, whose parental authority Paine contested at every turn, as not only inhumane but also inhuman: lacking the extensive sympathy and social affection that eighteenth-century moral philosophers attributed to humanity. If Paine's language blurs the distinction between the social hierarchy and the natural one—suggesting that the British are not only as "vulgar" as common people but also as brutish as "common animals"—it does so in order to underscore the unenlightened state of the metropole, an uncultivated state closer to nature than civilization. Driving his point home, he writes, "Her idea of national honor seems to consist in national insult, and that to be a great people, is to be neither a Christian, a philosopher, or a gentleman, but to threaten with the rudeness of a bear, and to devour with the ferocity of a lion" (147). The hyperbole is vintage Paine, but what deserves our attention is the regendering of Great Britain, the famously cruel mother reemerging here as both un-Christian and *ungentlemanly*. In the process, the passage provides not only a rationale for rebellion but also a reason for thinking the colonies will do just fine once they are independent; using this metonymic logic, Paine depicts the metropolitan center as a savage and unpolished society, a much different vision than the one that dominated mercantilist thinking in the eighteenth century, when England was figured as the center of imperial Britannia, exporting its culture across the globe.

   Paine punctures this fantasy in an effort to dispel the fear expressed by Loyalists such as William Smith that North America, unmoored and independent, would quickly revert to its supposedly savage native state. According to Smith, the colonies needed Great Britain to sustain the agriculture and commerce that formed the foundation of civilization. Without these "happy employments," he writes in his rebuttal to *Common Sense*, the serialized letters from "Cato" (1776), "what are now well cultivated fields, or flourishing cities, would have remained only the solitary haunts of wild beasts, or of men equally wild" (183). So prevalent were such sentiments that Smith might just as easily have titled his letters from Cato *Common Sense*. In fact, a year prior to the publication of Paine's pamphlet, a

counterrevolutionary tract bearing the title of *Common Sense* (1775) appeared in London that warned colonists against turning back the clock on civilization. In this metropolitan *Common Sense*, "a candid merchant of America" concedes to "a British merchant" that a rupture with Britain may do more than disrupt transatlantic commerce: "I grant, that if the arts of civilization cease for want of employment in *commerce*, we may return to the state of the native Indians, whom we have conquered" (92). Such fears were founded on the contemporary belief that all societies progressed in similar stages, a transdisciplinary theory of development formulated in Scottish universities in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Scotsmen like Adam Smith and William Barron addressed the problem of putting Scotland on level footing with England. To commentators on both sides of the Tweed, Scotland was a country lying midway on the continuum between the primitive and the modern, more "barbarous" than England but still like England. As a number of scholars have already pointed out, British America's relation to the metropole was not all that different from Scotland's relation to London. Situated in close proximity to the Native American tribes and to the Highland clans, both British America and North Britain were regarded as borderlands on the fringes of the British world. The distances that separated London from Edinburgh and Philadelphia were perceived in allochronistic terms as well, each outpost of civilization likened to English society at an earlier stage in its historical development.[11]

But if Scotland appeared a less developed England, America provided an image of nature itself. In *Two Treatises on Government* (1690), the text that defined the parameters for thinking about development, Locke wrote that "in the beginning all the World was America" (139). Despite their differences, Loyalists and American Revolutionaries alike drew on this body of theory in their descriptions of North America's past and future. Paine and his opponent William Smith both use its terms to discuss America's capacity to succeed on its own. Both view commerce not only as the final stage of development but also as an important civilizing agent, a vehicle for spreading what were popularly known as "the arts of civilization": fine arts, letters, sciences and manners. In making the case for independence, however, Paine contested Smith's assertion that civilization's progress in North America depended upon its connection to the imperial center. As he wrote in *Common Sense*, and later quoted in his "Forester" essays penned in re-

sponse to Smith, "I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation, to shew a single advantage which this continent can reap by being connected with Great-Britain" (*Common Sense* 204).

Throughout *Common Sense* Paine emphasizes this point, often arguing that independence is sanctioned by the natural order of things. Ignoring European history and contravening actual common sense, Paine writes: "there is something absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet" (69). As I have already argued, Paine's invocation of North America's continental scope carries a political charge, and here we are in a position to more fully understand why. "With respect to each other," observes Paine, England and America "reverse the common order of nature." He concludes: "it is evident they belong to different systems: England to Europe, America to itself" (69). Leave it to a former periodical writer, full of compendious knowledge, to apply an astronomical metaphor to such terrestrial matters! The "systems" of which Paine speaks are the familiar binary terms: the Old World and the New World. Yet he presents this opposition only to collapse it. Though he suggests that England and Europe are part of one system and America part of another, here America and Europe are homologous: each is an amalgamation comprising much smaller parts. Just as Europe contains England, so does America contain the colonies. Not only does Paine's formulation sneak in a theoretical rationale for America's self-sufficiency—the notion that America already belongs "to itself"—it also provides a geopolitical justification for severing ties with Great Britain: why attach oneself to an island when one has a continent all to its own? For Paine, this is more than a question of natural resources, the subject of the final section of *Common Sense*. America's continental situation offers a more important developmental advantage: according to Paine, people living on a continent are more sociable and benevolent, and less warlike.

In *American Crisis* number 8, he explains why this is so. Addressing "the people of England," Paine echoes the memorable opening passage of *Common Sense* in which he suggests that the colonists have been habituated to thinking of themselves as colonists. Here it is the imperial center that appears stuck in a pattern of thinking: "*From a long habit* of calling America your own, you suppose her governed by the same prejudices and conceits which govern yourselves" (emphasis added 163). For a time this suppo-

sition was correct, notes Paine: "Copying her notions of the world from you, she formerly thought as you instructed" (164). But as he explains in *Common Sense*, although "a long habit of not thinking a thing *wrong*, gives it a superficial appearance of being *right*," eventually "time makes more converts than reason" (45). Offering a postcolonial vision of America, Paine describes a continent that no longer moves in lock step with "unsociable" England, which has so ungenerously "set up a particular denomination of religion to the exclusion of all others" and has "cherished enmity against France and Spain" (*Complete Writings* 163–64). If Paine attributes this change of perspective to the passage of time, it is time spent off the British isle that matters most. In his own words: "the soul of an islander, in its native state, seems bounded by the foggy confines of the water's edge, and all beyond affords to him matters only for profit or curiosity, not for friendship." Thus, it is not "the continent"—Paine's frequent shorthand for British North America—that has been transformed so much as the continental situation of the colonists that has effected a change in their views. "Perhaps," Paine muses, "there is something in the extent of countries, which, among the generality of people, insensibly communicates *extension of the mind*" (emphasis added 164). Such sanguine rhetoric weds New World optimism with the cosmopolitanism of an Englishman addressing the braying hordes back home.

Indeed, it is illuminating to read Paine in relation to such writers as Shaftesbury, Chesterfield, and Oliver Goldsmith, with each of whom Paine shared a contempt for the parochialism of the English masses. In one of the miscellanies included in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711)—a work whose informal treatment of ethics, aesthetics, and politics typifies the Enlightenment culture into which Paine was born—Shaftesbury claimed that "an ill token of our being thoroughly civilized" is the unwillingness of the English to either welcome people from abroad or to travel abroad themselves. "Our best policy and breeding is, it seems, 'to look abroad as little as possible, contract our views within the narrowest compass and despise all knowledge, learning or manners which are not of a home growth'" (404). The remark appears in a discussion of what Shaftesbury calls "the noblest" of "all human affections . . . that of love to one's country" (399). Throughout the discussion, Shaftesbury articulates a cosmopolitan vision of English society, in which a governing elite composed of "philosophers and legislators" travel the world

in order to "gather views and receive light from every quarter in order to judge the best of what is perfect, and according to a just standard and true taste in every kind" (404, 405). Updating a Restoration-era cultural logic, he imagines a republic whose leaders possess the same education that prepared Charles II for the throne: a knowledge of the world acquired while abroad.[12] Surveying the contemporary state of culture and politics in his country, Shaftesbury rues the fact that so few of his countrymen have ventured off the British isle. There is an irony in this, he suggests, for England has always been a territory subject to the incursions of continental peoples, from the "Romans" to the "Normans." The English, Shaftesbury argues, have been on their island too long. Separated from continental Europe, the inhabitants of England have cultivated an antipathy for the very people who brought to England the arts of civilization. Perceiving themselves as "original and earth-born," the English have forgotten that the very "name of Englishmen" was imported "from as far as the remoter parts of Germany to this island" (403, 402). Here and elsewhere Shaftesbury describes parts of Europe as remote places, far from England, but the net effect of this rhetoric is to define *England* as a remote and still savage place, far from the cultural centers of continental Europe.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Shaftesbury's lament that his countrymen "look abroad as little as possible" had become a commonplace. Defined in relation to the continental, the term "islander" became a shorthand for insular Britons not only within British cosmopolitan circles but also wherever people felt the effects of British or, in the case of Britons removed from the centers of English power, English ethnocentrism. Paine was hardly alone in suggesting that the English were especially unwilling or unable, due to their island situation, to shed the vestiges of their native savagery. The Shaftesbury imagined by Richard Hurd in his *Dialogues on Foreign Travel* speaks matter-of-factly of "the idiot prejudices of our home-bred gentlemen; which show themselves, whenever their own dear Island comes, in any respect, to be the topic of conversation" (38–39). In the English translation of *An Essay on National Pride* (1771), the popular book by Johann Georg Zimmermann, the Swiss writer and physician who served as royal physician to George III, the English are singled out as "islanders" who "would not think the foreigner sufficiently vilified by calling him only dog," in lieu of the preferred slur "French" dog (45). The Anglo-Irish Oliver Goldsmith, in his *History of England* (1771), notes that France, dur-

ing Edward III's reign in England, was "evidently more civilized than England," whose manners and arts improved, ironically, as the English mixed with the French whom they conquered. As Goldsmith explains, citing the accidents of history, the very warlike qualities that marked the English as more savage than their continental counterpart facilitated the spread of civilization: "those imitative islanders, as they were then called, adopted the arts of the people they overcame" (386). In these accounts, the term "islander" encapsulates the geographical, cultural, and affective isolation of the English in relation to other European people.[13] Most who use the term do so not only to differentiate England from other countries, to England's detriment, but also to distinguish the polite from the vulgar.

NATIONAL PREJUDICES AND THE PREHISTORY OF NATIONALISM

For Paine, the chance to portray metropolitan power brokers as insular and ungentlemanly was also a chance to portray the Revolutionaries as the type of men who warranted the positions they sought to usurp. But in making this case, Paine was not calling for a national revolution. Nor was American nationalism in his thoughts when he inveighed against English "national pride and prejudice" (*Common Sense* 52). Such local prejudices were, as Goldsmith wrote in his essay "On National Prejudices" (1763), traits of the "pseudo-patriot" as well as "the meanest and lowest of the people" (95, 96). As an English exciseman, Paine had written Goldsmith in 1772 seeking Goldsmith's help in his fight for better pay for excise officers—a cause hardly as glorious as the American Revolution but one, nonetheless, that provided Paine with his first experience in political writing. Although there is no evidence of a friendship between the two, or even of a response from Goldsmith, the latter's thoughts on the distinction between patriotism and national prejudice, if they did not influence Paine, were certainly compatible with the brand of patriotism that Paine came to espouse, and which predates modern nationalism.[14] In fact, both men subscribed to an Enlightenment view of patriotism so pervasive that it would be foolish to attribute the similarity in their beliefs to a matter of influence or friendship. Far from insisting that a dislike of foreigners was an inevitable by-product of love of country, the proponents of Enlightenment patriotism viewed local prejudices as obstacles that stood in the way

of forming such larger societies and ultimately achieving peace on a global scale.

Because eschewing local and national prejudices was neither easy nor clearly desirable, it goes without saying that not just anyone could become a patriot. In decrying the pervasiveness of national prejudices, for example, Goldsmith took it for granted that "the meanest and lowest of the people" held the most narrow of views. This "might be excused," he reasoned, for such people "have few, if any, opportunities of correcting [their views] by reading, travelling, or conversing with foreigners." It was less excusable, wrote Goldsmith, that national prejudices seemed to "infect the minds, and influence the conduct even of our gentlemen." So closely identified were the latter with their transcendence of such prejudices that Goldsmith reasonably argued that men who possessed them necessarily forfeited their claim to being gentlemen: "for let a man's birth be ever so high, his station ever so exalted, or his fortune ever so large, yet, if he is not free from the national and all other prejudices, I should make bold to tell him, that he had a low and vulgar mind, and had no just claim to the character of a gentleman" (96). These words express an enlightened vision, but hardly a democratic one. For both of these reasons, however, such cosmopolitan patriotism held a special appeal for those scrambling for position on the British periphery, where the capacity to read, travel, and converse with foreigners mattered more than birth or station in the effort to get ahead.

It was in this vein that so many members of the Revolutionary generation, including Washington, Paine, and David Ramsay, the historian and South Carolina delegate to the Continental Congress, liked to call themselves "citizens of the world." If such a figure of speech suggested a transpolitical attachment to all life and humanity, a classical signification it shared with the term "cosmopolite" (citizen of the cosmos), it also conveyed a distinctly eighteenth-century sense of participation in the international republic of letters.[15] By declaring oneself a "citizen of the world," one effectively established one's credentials to enter into public debate, that is, to speak on behalf of one's country from a point of view that was both informed and disposed to peace. The citizen of the world personified Enlightenment idealism, but this figure was the original issue of the gentlemanly culture that spawned the Grand Tour. It is not only that the continental routes of the Grand Tour were the same ones traveled by such men as Paine, Franklin, and Hume, but also that the tour's channels of intercul-

tural communication—letters of introduction, transnational patronage, and multilingualism—were the same channels used by celebrity philosophes as well as lesser known literati. Like the Grand Tour itself, the Enlightenment encouraged (mostly) men to improve themselves by transcending their local attachments and expanding their views of the world. Thus, this child of the Enlightenment, the citizen of the world, had a genteel pedigree and a Eurocentric outlook. His cosmopolitanism was less ecumenical than instrumental: displaying it was a way of showcasing cultural capital and establishing political authority.

In so publicly "laying aside all national pride and prejudice" in the opening pages of *Common Sense*, Paine was casting himself as just such a cosmopolite (52). This was a *common* gesture. With remarkable regularity, Revolutionary and anti-Revolutionary writers on both sides of the Atlantic prefaced their remarks by affirming their cosmopolitanism. Thus begins one anti-Revolutionary pamphleteer, responding to Adam Smith's pro-independence sentiments: "as I am a perfect cosmopolite myself, and consequently an avowed enemy to nationalities and personalities which arise from the passions and prejudices of a contracted mind, I shall consider the doctrine and not the writer, nor the spot from whence he drew his first breath" (*Letter to Mr. Powys* 12). Coming from an English writer, who may well have felt particularly affronted by a Scotsman's support of America, the remark seems suspicious if not overwrought. It seems all the more so since such declarations are more easily associated with Paine than with metropolitan Britons, whom Paine condemned as "narrow and ungenerous" (*Common Sense* 65). But why should we take Paine so literally at his word? His cosmopolitanism was neither singular nor quixotic.

For the same reasons that it is historically inaccurate to view Paine as iconically American, it is equally inaccurate to represent him as exceptionally cosmopolitan. In both cases, what gets overlooked is the conventional possibility of being a "citizen of the world." In Paine's era, this epithet was familiar and generic. It marked someone as Enlightened and above partisanship, and its purchase extended beyond secular spheres into the period's Christian discourse of brotherly love. As Adam Smith reasoned in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), the capacity to see oneself as part of a divinely ordered human society was the foundation for the kind of "enlarged and enlightened" patriotism that promoted the welfare of neighbors close and far.[16] In this conventional usage, the title "citizen of the world"

applied to anyone who claimed a plurality of attachments, worldly and celestial. It appealed to Revolutionaries as well as Loyalists. In a typical gesture, the pacified American in the metropolitan *Common Sense* invokes the label in a plea for reconciliation:

> As an American, I suppose myself not devoid of prejudices, in favor of my country: As a British subject, I shall rejoice, to see our swords turned again into plough shares: As a Christian, I am interested, not in these passing sublunary things of a day; but as I hope for a blissful eternity! In these several views, I find every day softens down the resentments I had indulged, and my soul is captivated more with the love of peace and good-will towards mankind. I am a citizen of the world. (106)

So open and plural a conception of identity, which permitted a Loyalist to be both "an American" and "a British subject," conversely enabled a Revolutionary to be both a Briton and an American citizen. For this reason, this most civilized of postures often lent its imprimatur to rebellion. With its accent on "love of peace and good-will towards mankind," the figuration of world citizenship did more than soften the rhetoric of revolution. It encouraged the colonial population to view revolution not as a precipitous break but as an act of restoration—one authorized by nature as well as Christianity.

Defined by what it rejected as much as by what it absorbed, cosmopolitanism nonetheless offered a means of differentiating a diasporic people from both the countrymen they left behind and the non-Christian natives among whom they lived. This differentiating operation has historically been obscured by cosmopolitanism's universalizing gestures, valorizing "the world" and "all humanity." We need not rehearse the arguments used to circumscribe such categories as "the world" and "the human," however, to recognize the qualified nature of Revolutionary cosmopolitanism. When in *Common Sense* Paine declares, "we claim brotherhood with every European christian, and triumph in the generosity of the sentiment" (64), the net effect of those words is to isolate what is most distinct about the colonists. Written at a moment when British Americans were deliberately conflated with Native Americans in metropolitan print, his declaration defended the colonists against this slur without insisting on the purity of the population.

By insisting on the colonists' continental identity, Paine struck on a way

to define them as developmentally, if not fundamentally, different from the islanders whom they left behind. The "continental minds" that distinguish Paine and his cohorts from their metropolitan counterparts were, of course, the very things that distinguished members of the British ruling class from common people back home. Although he never uses the phrase himself, Chesterfield, in his *Letters to His Son*, effectively urges the younger Stanhope to acquire a continental mind in his travels through Europe. His paradigmatic gentleman is one who "becomes of every country." Such a person, Chesterfield remarks in language that resembles Paine's, "is no longer an Englishman, a Frenchman, or an Italian, but he is an European" (1939). For those living on the margins of the British world the appeal of this ideal lay in its suggestion that the real provincials were the English denizens of the British metropole. It was in this vein that David Hume, self-exiled in Paris and smarting over his treatment in England, expostulated to his fellow Scotsman Gilbert Elliot: "Can you seriously talk of my continuing an Englishman? Am I, or are you, an Englishman? Will they allow us to be so? Do they not treat with Derision our Pretensions to that Name . . . I am a Citizen of the World" (470). Thus, for those Britons who felt that they had an unfair share of English rights, wealth, and cultural capital, this rhetoric of cosmopolitanism was potentially liberatory. It was not just a compensatory rhetoric but also a vehicle for dismantling metropolitan authority.

In this way, the Revolutionaries at once authorized themselves as a new ruling elite and managed to do what Chesterfield and others had never fully succeeded at doing: namely, to sever themselves from an island-bred rabble.[17] This useful fiction—in which the monarch plays a "ruffian" and an "untutored" brute—was just the thing Paine needed to transform a colonial fantasy into a post-Revolutionary reality. If it is hard to reconcile this posture with the more familiar image of a rougher-hewn Paine, it is only because we associate this continental fetish with a profligate aristocracy. But British cosmopolitanism was a modern phenomenon. It promoted global commerce as much as it was a creation of that commerce, which is perhaps why the writer who served as spokesman for a commercial people adopted the posture in the first place. Remarkably, Paine's efforts to reproduce a metropolitan rhetoric of refinement helped generate a populist lexicon that has often defined what is most "American" about Paine. For among its other effects, Paine's redeployment of Eurocentric politeness

cast an ironic light on the sinews of imperial power, exposing metropolitan cultural authority as just another sham perpetrated on the people.

NOTES

1. In the introduction to his provocative study *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*, Edward Larkin explains how Paine's transnational and cosmopolitan agenda contributed to his later "disappearance in the historical accounts of the [Revolutionary] era" (18).

2. Eighteenth-century accounts of criminal transportation to America abound, from Daniel Defoe's transatlantic novel *Moll Flanders* (1722) to Ebenezer Cooke's hudibrastic poem *The Sot-Weed Factor, or A Voyage to Maryland* (1708). In his satiric monologue *The Celebrated Lecture on Heads* (1764), George Alexander Stevens describes "the head of a sharper" (one of many characters) who "was born at sea, on board a transport, in which, his mother was humbly requested, by a rule of court to take a seven years tour to America" (50).

3. The phrase "continental connections" pervades writing of the Seven Years' War era, and of course especially war commentary. In *Considerations on the Present German War* (1760), Israel Mauduit vivisects what he calls "this smoke-ball of a pompous phrase" and the political debates in which it prominently figures, before conventionally concluding that "whenever the other nations of Europe will unite in an effectual alliance of war against France, it will then be the interest of England to join in that alliance: but that in every divided state of Europe . . . [it must] invariably be the interest of Britain never to concern itself with them" (81, 82). In a mock rejoinder to those who believe "that Britain ought always to have some continental connections or other," he snaps, "let us lament the fate of our island, that having so long remained above water, it must now sink, unless chained and moored by some connection to the continent" (81). So hackneyed had the phrase and debates become in this short span of time that by 1768 the author of a satiric periodical essay on "Modern Authorship" could elicit a laugh by recounting his early days as a hack "[maintaining] both sides" of an argument "with great fluency," including "[writing] for and against continental connections within the month, and with great applause" ("A Genuine Sketch" 202).

4. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva writes, "Some wished that a Paris street would bear his name. Man of the street, indeed, is Paine nevertheless a man of any place? Of what place could he be, if not the place where a crisis brewed, an explosion or a revolution took place? Deprived of rest, without conclusion, 'cosmopolitan'—in the sense of a permanent shattering" (167). Expressing a similar sentiment in his *Revolutionary Characters*, Wood remarks, "He became a man without a home, without a country, truly a citizen of the world" (217).

5. To cite just a few examples of recent scholarship that overturns the presumption of a nationalist and exceptionalist impulse in early American writing: Tawil's

examination of the European origins of American exceptionalism; Larkin's re-figuration of Hector St. John de Crevecoeur as a cosmopolitan loyalist ("The Cosmopolitan Revolution"); Tennenhouse's reframing of early American writing as a literature of diaspora; Tamarkin's study of Anglophilia's role in shaping antebellum American identity; and Armstrong and Tennenhouse's analysis of the transnational imagined communities of antebellum fiction.

6. Kaye documents the busy afterlife of Paine's image, words and ideas and covers a lot of ground, from the abolitionist and woman's suffrage movements to American socialism to the speeches of Ronald Reagan. Once again, Larkin's book is also useful; ch. 5 examines "The Historical Construction of Thomas Paine through the Nineteenth Century," and the epilogue looks at Melville and Whitman's attempts at reinserting Paine into a national conversation about America.

7. In addition to the volumes listed in the *English Short Title Catalogue*, a number of early nineteenth-century editions are catalogued in *WorldCat*.

8. See Ferguson 488. Paine's reputation for being ill mannered and ungentlemanly goes back to some of the earliest biographies of Paine, including an early hatchet job by James Cheetham. In his *Life of Thomas Paine* (1809), for example, he focuses on Paine's inability to have a polite conversation, a skill that defined the gentleman: "Scarcely a word would he allow us to speak. He always I afterwards found, in all companies, drunk or sober, would be listened to; but in this regard there were no *rights of men* with him, no equality, no reciprocal immunities and obligations, for he would listen to no one" (xxvi).

9. Barker-Benfield examines this opposition between virility and refinement.

10. Rozbicki similarly observes that the Revolutionary elite often accused their metropolitan counterparts of having neglected to uphold the virtues, mores, and manners of English gentility. Wahrman demonstrates how both sides "deflect[ed] the anxieties incumbent upon an unnatural civil war by associating and even conflating the enemy with the savage if not unnatural barbarity of the Indians" (1246)

11. A number of scholars have examined this homology between Scotland and America; see ch. 4 of Crawford as well as Wood's comparison of Scotland and America on 195–96 in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. Clive and Bailyn broke this ground in their 1954 essay. For a full treatment of the stages theory of development, see Meek.

12. In his Restoration panegyric, John Dryden celebrates the returning monarch as seasoned and worldly:

> Forced into exile from his rightful throne,
> He made all countries where he came his own;
> And viewing monarchs' secret arts of sway,
> A royal factor for their kingdoms lay.
> Thus banished David spent abroad his time,
> When to be God's anointed was his crime;

And when restored made his proud neighbours rue
Those choice remarks he from his travels drew. (lines 75–82)

13. These examples highlight the pejorative sense of the term *islander*, which is the sense in which Paine uses the term. Although *islander* was also used as a more neutral descriptor, its identification with geographical and cultural insularity, for better or for worse, was widely accepted. Thus in the 1773 printed oration *A Discourse on the Advantages of the Insular Situation of Great Britain* (1773), author and Royal Navy chaplain John Bonar enjoins his "countrymen, not to be insensible to those advantages that we islanders so eminently enjoy" (2). The text's syntax and pace evoke the scene of the speech's delivery at Spithead ("On Occasion of the Preparations for His Majesty's Review of the Fleet"), and its content fits the occasion: namely, the natural military and commercial advantages afforded by the sea. Insisting that it is no "small blessing that our country" is "so eminently set apart from the people on the Continent," Bonar equates insularity with security and views island dwelling as the source of its population's maritime wealth and "manly constitution" (3).

14. See Chapin on the lack of "support for the belief that Goldsmith and Paine were friends" (23).

15. Ch. 2 of Heater's *World Citizenship* provides a useful gloss on the history of "the citizen of the world," from Diogenes through the Enlightenment. Also see Heater's discussion in ch. 5 of his *Brief History of Citizenship*.

16. See Smith's discussion of the difference between "savage patriotism" and the patriotism of an "enlarged and enlightened mind" in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 269–70.

17. A persistent complaint of English travelers on the Continent in the second half of the eighteenth century was that there were too many English wherever they went. This gripe was socially motivated inasmuch it was often expressed by members of the upper ranks who were dismayed to find themselves in close proximity to the riffraff they thought they had left behind. In a letter to the periodical *The World*, for example, Chesterfield referred to the "swarms of English" who "overrun France" as "a second incursion of the Goths and Vandals" (106). As the Grand Tour became increasingly available to ordinary men and women, its socially differentiating function obviously waned.

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