

Discussion

Paul Langford:

I will begin with the first point to open up the discussion because I think that has general implications that might be of interest.

The first point was the danger of using this body of material. I am very glad that you raised that problem, it is a real one. This particular material is very class or status oriented; it tends to come from people of a certain class, mainly the aristocracy. It also comes from people who praise the English because they want to be nasty about their own government. I think both of these points are true. But I would like to say just a little bit more about each of them. Most travellers to England in the eighteenth century were either upper class, or I would have said middle class bourgeois rather than upper class. The upper class travellers come after the French Revolution because they are forced out of France. Quite a lot of them travel in England for various reasons, but they tend not to write much about it. Either because they do not need to make money by publishing the results or because they have got an enjoyable social life to live with their friends in England. So, the people who are likely to publish and ask these kinds of questions are very much the intellectuals I would say. These are people who are interested in these kinds of questions. Socially I would not call them upper class. They are often below that. But I am not saying that they represent the perception of, if you like, the common man and woman, and that worries me very much. Eighteenth century London had an interesting reputation in this respect. It was said at the time and I think it was true, that compared with most countries, the English lower class did not go in great numbers to other European cities. They went to the colonies, but they did not go to become part of the workforce in other European cities for the very good reason that, by and large, the English standard of living was considerably higher for that class of people in London than it would have been elsewhere. On the other

hand, lots of people came from other European cities to London and there were a great many foreigners. London has always been a very cosmopolitan city and so it was in this period. Xenophobic, patriotic Englishman often indulged in extremely unpleasant racism about the resulting nature of London life. I remember one of them called it the sink of Europe with the dregs of every country. So, there is a very strong consciousness of all these foreigners in London. What on earth did they think? They stayed. They were not people who would come, see the sights, go home, write a clever little book and then go back to their own kind of society. They stayed. I would love to know much more about what they thought. It is very rarely that anything of theirs get printed and that is usually to make quick money by a printer who thinks there is a story. So, I would like nothing more than to try to reconstitute that from a commentary and you are absolutely right that lack is a major problem.

The second point interests me very much. You are absolutely right that Voltaire and Montesquieu had their own reasons for praising England. And I think that is true of a lot of people. Very briefly, I would say there are two waves in the eighteenth century, of what people call anglomania. There is French anglomania in the period of Voltaire and Montesquieu when these intellectuals plainly have a vested interest in criticising their own government and producing evidence from elsewhere. So obviously they want to praise the parliamentary system, free press, religious tolerance and so on. Those are the things that were lacking under the Bourbon government. German anglomania comes later at the end of the eighteenth century and does not have quite the same aggressively political agenda. It is, in a way, a bit more objective in that Germans are not usually seeking to criticise their own governments. In fact, they are usually trying to pick out the things in Britain that can be adapted, regardless of political systems. In that sense, they too do have an axe to grind.

But I would like to take up the points you went on to make. You said they had a vested interest, that they were putting forth a view. And then you went on to use the word imaginary. Now this is a word we keep going back to. It is a word of great current interest. I do not think actually when Voltaire goes to a Quakers's meeting and then writes about it, that is imaginary in the same sense that the *Persian Letters* are imaginary. I think we ought to preserve that distinction. I am interested to know what others feel about travel literature. The same problem comes up with the travel literature of the West on the East, to take a fashionable theme. So, I see the problem and I am prepared to be badgered on it. But at the end of the day if I have got 350 travel books on eighteenth century England, and they all agree that in England, for instance, people of different religious opinions have surprising

freedom, then I think that says something quite significant not just about them but about the English society in that period. I would rather hang on to that something there that I would not want to be dislodged from.

David Marler:

John Hall gave us what was such a sparkling contribution yesterday that I tended, fairly or unfairly, to see both Derek Sayer's paper and yours [Paul Langford] in the light of what he said so that I tended to listen to what you said about eighteenth century British or English society in terms of the search of that specificity which helped to make England the site of the 'first'...? Now there we come to a difficulty. First what? We have talked about capitalism as a good thing in promoting whatever this big change was, but we have also talked about industrialisation. And I think, as someone else has already pointed out, there is a slight gap there between the one and the other. So I will come back to Derek Sayer's third question to John Hall yesterday "when is modernity?" And the point of that is that if the openness of English society observed by your travellers, the relatively liberal style of it, the social mobility which was possible within it, if these are part of the necessary preconditions for the big change which we really started looking at, then is there not a problem in that the wheels of the industrial revolution really start rolling rather later perhaps than you are talking about. By that time, as you have mentioned, there were forces in the English society which were changing it against that measure of liberalism, that measure of openness as it was coming under the pressure of war, of later still the first steering of industrial proletariat, the tide of evangelical opinion, all tightening the screws down on the society. Now is there some contradiction there between the openness which promotes the change, however labelled, and the fact that when that change really gets going in industrial sense a lot of that openness may be lost?

Paul Langford:

Well, it is the central question of what we mean by modernity in part, isn't it? It is a semantic problem and I think there are two definitions of modernity that are going on here on which we have to decide. Plenty of us seem to mean by modernity what is called the industrial revolution or industrialisation which is taken to be the condition of modern economic life and the basis for modern society. I do not much like that as modernity, I would rather call it industrialisation which is, in fact, what we are interested in. To come to the particular problem of the timing of this economic growth,

I am not an economic historian but there seems to be very different schools of thought on this matter. My friends tell me that we are still allowed to call it the industrial revolution. I think the current trend is still to emphasise again that there really is a kind of leap of some sort going on in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But I do not see a time lag problem here. By industrialisation we really mean the continuation of things that were happening certainly in Britain and I would have thought to some extent elsewhere long before the late eighteenth century; the expansion of a consumer market if you like, and the expansion of manufacturing well before the age of cotton and coal. It is something that economic historians of the early modern period find in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. So it is a gradual ascent if you like with some very few sharp steps upwards from time to time, of which the late eighteenth century is one. So I see no difficulty with my open society and the time lag because I think the open society and the commercial growth were there and go back a very long way. By the way, I do not want to give you the impression that I think that the eighteenth century is that special. Derek Sayer has written a book on the long term development of the British state and British society and one of the things that he and I share is a conviction that there are traditions, mental patterns, ways of doing things that go back centuries. It is a cheap thing to say that nothing is ever new, but it is also profoundly true. I think historians just have to accept that this is often the case, and that they are seeing changes but these are changes in line with something going on earlier.

The other kind of modernity in which I am more interested, in which I ought to be more interested because it calls into questions the way we read cultural values, is perceived modernity. Thinking of Voltaire, why is it more modern not to believe in God than to believe in the traditional Christian God, or today in my society as in yours, why would it be more modern to be 'liberal' than to be 'fundamentalist'? Whatever is going on there, it is very difficult for us to define modernity by any objective standards. It is actually the results of people making judgements about where they want to go in the future and about what is modern. Certainly in the eighteenth century notions of modernity changed quite a lot and so did foreign notions of English modernity. For what it is worth, I would say there is quite a contrast between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that I detected in foreigners's views of England. There is a propensity in the eighteenth century to recognise Britain as very modern and going where the future is. By the middle of the nineteenth century people are much less certain about that. There is still agreement that Britain is an enormous imperial power, a vast industrial giant, but they are horrified by some of the consequences of industrialisation. So

you have people like Stendhal and Heinrich Heine, not to say Engels and Marx, coming along and telling us all about the horrors of industrialisation. If that is modernity, then obviously a lot of people want nothing of that. And there are many other aspects of Victorian society which does not look modern. There are many features of English life which actually look quite, if you like, dated by comparison with what is going on in North America in the middle of the nineteenth century. So perceived modernity is something fascinating to discuss, but it is important to be aware that we are certainly not going to reach any agreements on what modernity would be in these circumstances.

John Hall:

I would like to make three sociological comments. First, I disagree a little with you in your characterisation of state power. If the state works through and makes use of local officers and representatives in parliament who know their localities, then it is likely to be strong. Societal power backed by constitutional guarantees can give a state strength. Secondly, Adam Smith is slightly against your argument. He notes that merchants gathered together tend to conspire against the public interests, and hence says that an enlightened elite is needed to think of long term interests. Thirdly, in connection with the sociology of revolutions what seems to matter most is whether the political elite is divided or united. A united elite can fend off pressure from below for a very long time. [In the case of the French Revolution the elite was divided.]

Paul Langford:

Lot of extremely interesting points to some of which I am vulnerable, and I hope, to others less so. The question of the state is central, isn't it? I agree with you that we are probably disagreeing about words, that we are talking about the same thing. You want to call it the state and I do not really like that because it suggests this sense of control all the time. I would like to find out where we really disagree. You talked of the state using local groups of people to enforce its purposes. I do not see it like that. I think in the English society, in the English tradition, local groups of people do things. There is a very strong force there, a kind of communal tradition, and that action pushes towards the centre and gets recognition from the state. My improvement legislations are classic instances of that kind. That is, local people asking for powers to do things. It is not the state going to them saying you do this for them. I think on that point we disagree ultimately. You want

to make it an agency, don't you? You want to make it a conscious machine.

John Hall:

It was bad language on my part. Politics is central. They need the state to do things. There is a two way interaction I wanted to point out.

Paul Langford:

I want to come to the point on Smith. This is potentially embarrassing for me. I would say that there are different degrees of liberation of the market. I do not think that the gunfight that went on in the eighteenth century in Parliament represented the freedom of commercial forces in any complete sense. What it meant was that competing groups of people had to get something through parliament that probably represented a vested interest. But I think that is not like simply paying someone to get a crown license or crown monopolies. This has to be fought out in the public arena. I think one of the important points that I did not stress about the eighteenth century is that English newspapers, especially from the 1760s and 70s, printed parliamentary debates. So this is not done behind the scenes, it is done in the glare of publicity. The legislators and the people putting pressure on them have to find some sense of public interest. It might not be the one that pleases Adam Smith. It is really a kind of process of negotiation and adjustment, and working out who is more important. I think what Smith wants to do is that the consumer controls things, not the producer in any sense. What people like Smith were trying to find is the most free and natural way of doing things according to the economic laws of nature and to get them observed in these Western societies. That looks like a very utopian, Scottish Enlightenment (I try to avoid confusing Scottish and English) but it can also look like something that is English. And I think Smith is conscious that he is pushing at an open door. There is an English libertarian mentality that can be hitched up without much trouble and which can accommodate this parliamentary system that I am talking about.

The point about the French revolution and the division within an elite. Well, yes, division within the social elite. People protesting during the French revolution are often small town lawyers and tradesmen. They are not insignificant people, but they are people who do not actually have any obvious way of expressing themselves within the political system except by standing up and making a speech in a café or whatever. Robespierre was such. In England he would have been within the elite. There is no doubt about that. He might have even become Lord Chancellor. But there is that big

difference I think. There are different views about revolutions. I think the ruling classes of Europe, the elites, certainly did draw back with horror with the French Revolution. But there are a lot of people in similar societies that are inspired by the revolution and see it as a great opportunity; in Holland, in Belgium, in northern Italy, perhaps in central Italy, in West Germany. There are revolutionary forces there that are being liberated. Can I bring in the point you [Aykut Kansu] made about the French Revolution? I am not sure about that actually. I am interested that you have got the impression that in England too there is a revolutionary force; "people would have welcomed French troops". I am very sceptical about that. But there is a strong reforming and semi-revolutionary popular movement in the 1790s in England. In fact, if we would be talking in this room twenty years ago our view of this period would largely be based on a wonderful work by E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* which really pictures England as a society breaking up at the seams. The recent historiography has almost all been in the other direction and emphasising popular conservatism and loyalism. The truth is somewhere in between and I do think there is a very powerful movement in England that is attracted by the French Revolution especially in its moderate phase. Welcoming French troops was not one. That would be a disaster. One of the major problems in 1790s in England is that revolution gets mixed up with patriotism and it becomes patriotic to be loyal to the constitution. That is a fatal weakness of the, if you like, left in British politics in the 1790s, and one that is to recur at other times in British history.

Paul Langford: (responding to remarks from the floor on religious tolerance and the nature of the English state)

Well, I think that is very powerful and I accept all that. Absolutism of course, keeps cropping up as a problem right up to the seventeenth century. I think that the religious pluralism is a terribly important point and that has, some would say, a very direct connection with this world of improvement and particularly with economic change. John yesterday was talking about Huguenots and the gift that Louis the XIVth gave Germany, Holland, and England when he exported these extremely resourceful people who carried with them quite a lot of capital. In fact, a thing that fascinated the first wave of French anglomaniacs was people like the Huguenots. To my mind Voltaire devotes quite a disproportionate of time to the Quakers. In eighteenth century English society the Quakers are actually rather a dwindling band though they are important and interesting. He is attracted by them, because here is a body of people who do not really accept any of the religious tenets of the state. They do not even seem to accept the minimal requirements that would

normally operate in terms of toleration, that is to say belief in the Trinity and so on. They are also people who are very active in business. The great banks of modern England, Lloyds and Barclays, were founded by mid-eighteenth century Quakers. And contemporaries were well aware of this. They were very intrigued by the link between these sectarian groups and economic growth. So there is a direct connection between creating a market in religion, freeing up religion, and making the market a stronger force elsewhere.

I want to pick up Derek Sayer's very interesting point because I think it is a very general one. It is a fascinating general problem: which culture in any period and certainly in my period would welcome a cause on the ends of the bayonets of another country? But it does happen. You know the revolutionaries in the Rhineland welcomed the French troops in. And in England, the revolution of 1688 was achieved when William of Orange took its Dutch troops into England. Now the Dutch were protestants, they were allies, they did not have these images of foreigners that went with the French. But how far that was a possibility is a very interesting problem. The Jacobites in the eighteenth century, the supporters of the exiled Stuarts, based all their plans on getting either the Swedes, the Spaniards, or the French to land and invade in force Britain. That was the only way they really thought they would ever get back on the throne. Now, I still hold to my view about this that there is something unthinkable about the English welcoming French revolutionary troops anyway, but if so many people thought that was the way to get things done then it ought to make one stop and think.

Fuat Keyman:

Modernity is more than industrialisation, industrialisation is part of it. It is more than the state, state is part of it, but it has to do with the combination of capitalism, industrialisation, and the nation state. Moreover, modernity is an attitude based on two promises. One is progress, and the other is freedom. Habermas is arguing that modernity is keeping its promise of progress but it is not keeping its promise of freedom. Why? Because of the structural transformation of the public sphere, we have progress with domination. So modernity becomes something based on instrumental rationality which realises the progressive dimension of modernity but transforms its freedom dimension into domination. I really liked your presentation because you are underlying the fact that in England these trends are illustrated. On the one hand, we have progress, on the other, we have what Foucault calls normalisation of social relations.