Thomas Jefferson and France, 1784-1789: Can virtue exist in a luxurious world?

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America, thou art more fortunate than our old continent. Thou hast no ruined castles, no venerable stones. No useless memories, no vain feuds, harry thee in thy soul when thou wishest to live in the present. Make something happy out of today. And when thy children start to write, may a kind Providence preserve them from tales of chivalrous knights, robber barons, and ghosts.

Goethe

> So, ask the travelled inhabitant of any nation, in what country on earth would you rather live? Certainly in my own, where are all my friends, my relations, and the earliest and sweetest recollections of my life. Which would be your second choice? France.
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The five years Thomas Jefferson spent in France as emissary of the new American republic were five of the most intriguing and curious years of his life. There in Paris, world capital of all that was beautiful, refined, and elegant, he consorted with revolutionaries, philosophes, and noblemen. And it was there he fell uncharacteristically head-over-heels in love, and wrote a delightful love letter. Yet so too did those five years in Paris only further convince him of the hopeless wretchedness of the European people and of the utter corruptness of their governments. His five years in Paris were, then, a profoundly ambivalent interlude in his life; he was at once attracted by the graces of Parisian life, by her music, her architecture, her enlightened nobility, in short, by her sophistication, but also repelled by the cruel price paid for those refinements, the price of centuries of poverty and degradation for the lower classes. But happily for Jefferson, he was able to resolve this ambivalence once back in America. In America, grace and beauty in manners and the arts were not achieved at the expense of an overtaxed, underfed peasantry. Cathedrals were not built for millions of francs by a venal and corrupt church. Kings and courtiers did not polish their manners and flaunt their refinement while peasants rioted for bread in the provinces. No, in America, republican virtue and an awareness of its necessity were tightly woven into the new nation's laws and political theories. In America, with a just government of

just men, the sophistications of Europe were merely pleasant acquisitions. The fine manners, French wines and food, art and cultivated gardens of Monticello, were not the idle pursuits of a bored, effete courtier. They were not signs of luxurious living, but signs of a republican adding grace and civility to his life as a virtuous citizen.

Jefferson went to France fully primed to find the governments there wicked, corrupt, and most importantly, non-republican. He and his contemporaries, while at school at Princeton and William and Mary, read Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and all the good Whig theorists, and drew from them their beliefs in republicanism, mixed and balanced governments, and the ideal of an agrarian commonwealth. Yet there was another fundamental belief they drew from the ancients, and this one all the young republicans shared -- the belief in the necessity of virtue in a republic. In a monarchy, fear was what restrained the selfishness of men and it was fear that compelled them to obey the laws for the common good. But in a republic, the stability of the government rested not on force, but on the consent of the governed. Men could not be forced or driven by fear to obey the laws of the land; they obeyed and sacrificed their private interests to the public good for conscience's sake alone. This then, was republican virtue: men freely, of their own volition, replacing their narrow, selfish wants with a desire for the greater good of the whole. Or, as Montesquieu put it so well, republican virtue, "is a simple thing, it is a love of the republic."[3] Indeed, in a republic this virtue was absolutely vital, for without it, as Jonathon Mason, Jr. warned, "anarchy and confusion would immediately ensue, the jarring interests

of individuals, regarding themselves only, and indifferent to the welfare of others, would still further heighten the distressing scene, and with the assistance of the selfish passions, it would end in the ruin and subversion of the state."[4] Everything then, the republic, and even freedom itself, depended on the virtue of the citizen. For, as one good Whig said, and many believed, "all men might be free, if they had virtue enough to be so."[5]

This need for a virtuous citizenry became almost an obsesssion with many leaders of the new nation, Jefferson among them. Although he truly believed in the "good sense" and "steady character" of the common man, he greatly feared that somehow, sometime, this virtue might be lost. After the Revolution, he wrote of what he feared might happen to the steady, sensible, common men, fearing that, "they will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money."[6] Still, he did not despair of his countrymen, for as Joyce Appleby has pointed out, Jefferson optimistically founded his hope for an enduring republic on the abundance of land available for cultivation, whereby any man could carve out for himself an honest, virtuous existance.[7] Agriculture, to this gentleman farmer by birth and preference, was superior to all occupations, and farmers themselves, were the most virtuous citizens. Unlike commerce, or scholarly pursuits, farming relied upon a man's personal characteristics, rather than upon his intellect; what made one farmer better than another was not his skill, his education, or his knowledge, but his diligence, his care, and his patience.[8] As Jefferson wrote, in his Notes on the State of Virginia, it is a people's manners and spirit that enable a republic to endure, and of all people, the purest in spirit are farmers.[9]

> Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue...Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example...While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a workbench, or twirling a distaff...The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores to the strength of the human body.
> [10]

Jefferson tempered his distrust of manufacturing, when, as President, he realized that only by developing her industries could America be freed from economic subservience to Europe, and in particular, to England. Experience had taught him that, "manufactures are now as necessary to our independence as to our comfort."[11] Yet, though he grudgingly conceded the necessity of manufacturing, he never ceased favoring agriculture and distrusting commerce. As an old man, he wrote that, "money, and not morality, is the principle of commerce and commercial nations,"[12] and was appalled by, "speculators, projectors, and commercial gamblers."[13]

The way to preserve virtue in a republic, then, was to give all citizens the opportunity for agriculture. In 1787, he wrote confidently to James Madison that, "our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries, as long as they are chiefly agricultural, and this will be as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America."[14] The opening of more and more land for cultivation became increasingly important as the number of workers increased. Toward the end of his first term as President, he wrote that at present, America's workers were as independent and moral as her farmers, and

> They will continue so long as there are vacant lands for them to resort to, because whenever it shall be attempted by the other classes to reduce them to the minimum of

subsistence, they will quit their trades and go to laboring the earth.[15]

Jefferson's public career bears examples of his belief in the necessity of widely available land for farming. He continually advocated measures to increase the number of freeholders, he vehemently opposed primogeniture, and as a young politician suggested a 50-acre ownership qualification for voting in Virginia, while at the same time proposing to give 50 acres to every landless white male.[16] He was largely responsible for America's first land ordinance, that of 1784, which established boundaries for 14 new states, and offered speedy means for their admission to the union.[17] And most notably, he was primarily responsible for the Louisianna Purchase, which in one sweep of a pen, doubled the size of his young nation.

Jefferson was further prepared to abhor much of what he saw in France through another tenet of republicanism, one particularly dear to his brand of agrarian republicanism -- the belief that excessive luxury led to the corruption of virtuous citizens. As Gordon Wood points out in the The Creation of the American Republic, in a republican society based on ideals of frugality, industry, temperance, and simplicity, luxury is a sure sign of social sickness.[18] Many Americans immediately after the Revolution took the words of Motesquieu to heart, "commerce, which makes men cultured, entails luxury, which makes them corrupt."[19] By 1780, Patrick Henry was fulminating against the luxury and ostentation that he feared was making, "our Body politic...dangerously sick."[20] John Jay saw social and moral deterioration in the sight of, "pretension, ostentation and

refinement -- shopkeeps and tradesmen's daughters dressed like peeresses of the first rank."[21] And a clergyman in 1783, preached of his dismay at seeing everyone doing, "what was right in his own eyes", and "thus the whole of that care and attention which was given to the public weal is turned to private gain or self-preservation."[22]

Jefferson, then, went to Europe in 1784, prepared to be shocked and repulsed by her governments and societies. He carried to France with him a belief in and love of republicanism, the virtue of the common man, and the classical ideals of austerity, frugality, and practicality. What he encountered in France was something very different indeed. During his stay there, he never ceased to be alternately repulsed and attracted by French society.

The Paris Thomas Jefferson lived in for the five years between 1784 and 1789 was nearly half the size of Paris today, but in atmosphere and spirit the city has changed little since 1784. Then as now, Paris was a place to see and to be seen. An important part of a cultivated Parisian's day was a drive to the Palais Royal, that confection of gardens, shops, restaurants, and theatres. There strutted all of fashionable Paris, the women in their ridiculously wide dresses and plumed hats, the men in frock coats, lace ruffles, and powdered wigs. Jefferson was not insensible or indifferent to Parisian fashions, as his account book shows. Within a week of his arrival in Paris, he had acquired a new hat, sword, belt, knee buckles, shoe buckles, shirt and had begun powdering his hair. Neither was he immune from the temptation to make frequent trips to the Palais Royal, at least to see, if not to be seen. He went there often during his stay in Paris, calling it an "ornament", yet also a

"convenience." Occasionally he bought books from the bookdealers occupying the shops surrounding the promenade, and sometimes other items, such as a pendule and twelve ivory handled knives. He dined at the restaurants there and attended the Palais Royal's Theatre de Beaujolis. And one day, his account book shows that he paid a 96-franc fee for admission to the Salon des Echecs, where "gentlemen of the Court and the Town" could challenge one another at chess.[23]

This was the era of the great Parisian salons, at the tail-end of their heyday, when the now-aging philosophes and the young enlightened aristocrats vied with one another for the attention of Paris's great hostesses. During the time Jefferson spent in France, the salons were undergoing a transformation from a meeting place of leaders in the fine arts to a forum of liberal politics, frequented by a group of liberal aristocrats and abbés. Jefferson was drawn quickly into this circle of "literati", developing many lasting friendships both with the literati and with several of the celebrated hostesses. And it is here, with Jefferson's obvious attraction to the glittering life of Paris's graceful salons and enlightend nobility, that we encounter the contradictions within him, attraction on the one hand, repulsion on the other. For although he saw there much to despise, so too did he see and experience much that he loved. Or, as Merrill Peterson put it, "Jefferson denounced Europe, yet under the cover of his rhetoric made a marriage of convenience with the wicked temptress."[24]

Much can be learned about Jefferson's fascination with the graces of Parisian society by observing his lifestyle in Paris. His extravagant spending and costly home cannot be explained as the necessary expenditures of a foreign diplomat. John Adams and family,

while in Paris, lived in quiet seclusion at Auteuil. Even Franklin chose to shun the hustle and bustle of Paris, holding court instead at Passy. But Jefferson chose to live in Paris, taking as his official residence, the Hotel Langeac, off the Champs Elysees, on the edge of the Bois de Bologne. The hotel was something of an architectural prize, designed by Chalgrin, architect of the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile.[25] With the hotel came a stable and extensive gardens, much loved by Jefferson, but as he knew only too well, far beyond his means.

> I have at length procured a house in a situation much more pleasing to me than my present. It is at the grille des champs Elysees, but within the city. It suits me in every circumstance but the price, being dearer than the one I am now in. It has a clever garden to it.[26]

He staffed the hotel with four manservants, headed by a maitre d'hotel, plus a gardener, and a cook. And unlike Franklin, who enjoyed the attention he attracted by living in the comparatively plain style of colonial America, Jefferson made no attempt at adding provincial touches to his hotel. He purchased fifty-nine chairs, forty-four of which were gold-leafed, and covered with blue or crimson damask. His furnishings also included the much-in-vogue mahogany chairs, marble-topped tables, buffets, consoles, commodes, mirrors, paintings, statuary, silver and china. Some of his rooms he hung with toile de Juoy, a copperplate print with classical masks and temples, and French pastoral scenes.[27]

Jefferson's official duties were not such that they prevented him from indulging in the delights of Parisian life. On a day when he was not required at Versailles, he would work on his correspondence and official transactions until noon, and then stroll to the Bois de Bologne and walk for five miles or so in its green quiet.[28]

Philip Mazzei has left behind an excellent account of a day he spent with Jefferson in Paris. First thing in the morning the two men set out to visit Marmontel, secretary of the French Academy, whom Jefferson did not yet know.

> When we arrived Marmontel was just going out, but he insisted on turning back. That morning Jefferson had to be to various other places; nonethless, our chat lasted about two hours. They had much to tell and more to ask each other...As we were about to leave, the Abbé Morellet, the foremost logician of France appeared...We had to stay another hour to talk to him, after which we went to Lavoisier's, to Condorcet's, to the Duke de la Rochfoucauld's and then home.[29]

Besides social visits and salon-going, Jefferson had subscription tickets for seats in the Tuileries and the Champs Elysees, and he also bought seats at the Italian theatre, the French Comedy, and Concerts Spirituels. He further indulged his love of music by purchasing new fiddlestrings, renting a pianoforte, and buying all the music he could of Hayden, Handel, Pergolesi, Acchini, Schobert, and Gretry.[30] Surely, if there was one thing he envied the Europeans, it was their music. So he wrote from America to a European friend,

> If there is a gratification which I envy any people in this world, it is, to your country, its music. This is the favorite passion of my soul, and fortune has cast my lot in a country where it is in a state of deplorable barbarism.[31]

Dinner was generally the peak of a leisurely afternoon. Though he dined out often, his dining room was filled several times a week with his friends of the "literati" and visiting American friends. He followed European dinner customs with the men standing or walking before going into the dining room, and the women remaining seated around the salon. After dining at Jefferson's hotel in Paris, Abigail Adams remained unsure whether or not she liked the custom.

> They have some customs very curious here. When company are invited to dine, if 20 gentlemen meet, they seldom or never sit down, but are standing or walking from one part of the room to the other, with their swords on, and their chapeau de bras, which is a very small silk hat, always worn under the arm...I wonder how the fashion of standing crept in among a nation who really deserve the appelation of polite, for in winter it shuts out all the fire from the ladies; I know I have suffered from it many times.
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While in Paris, Jefferson became something of a gastronome, collecting recipes, and developing a discerning taste for wines. His comment on drinking a red wine called Nebiule, shows a finely developed taste for a wine's flavor and characteristics:

> It is about as sweet as the silky Madeira, as stringent on the palate as Bordeaux, and as brisk as champagne.
> 33

Jefferson's gourmet tastes later prompted Patrick Henry, no refined gastronome he, to observe that Jefferson had abjured his "native victuals" in favor of French cuisine.[34]

A man loving art and architecture, lovely music, and classical ruins such as Jefferson did, was bound to be enchanted by much in France. And enchanted he was. He thrilled to the songs of nightingales, and stood fixed, "like a statue a quarter of an hour, or

half an hour. I do not know which for I lost all ideas of time, "before a painting exhibited in the rue Ste. Nicaise.[35] He was, he said, "an enthusiast on the subject of the arts."[36] And of all Europe's charms, it was her arts, that most captivated Jefferson.

> Were I to proceed to tell you how much I enjoy their architecture, sculpture, painting, music, I should want words. It is in these arts they shine. The last of them, particularly, is an enjoyment, the deprivation of which, with us, cannot be calculated. I am almost ready to say, it is the only thing which from my heart I envy them, and which, in spite of all the authority of the Decalogue, I do covet.[37]

Loving as he did, "the precious remains of antiquity, loving architecture, gardening, a warm sun,and a clear sky," his trip through the south of France was a feast for his senses. At Avignon he saw the tomb of Petrarch's Laura, and when he went to the fountain of Vaucluse, he remembered Petrarch's songs amid the songs of the nightingales. Reminiscing about his trip to his friend, Maria Cosway, he wrote,

> Imagine to yourself, Madam, a castle and village hanging to a cloud in front, on one hand a mountain clove through to let pass a gurgling stream; on the other a river, over which is thrown a magnificent bridge, the whole formed into a bason, its sides shagged with rocks, olive trees, vines, herds, etc. I insist on you painting it.[38]

And he wrote in rapture of the Maison Caree to his friend Madame de Tesse,

> Here I am, Madame, gazing whole hours at the Maison Quaree, like a lover at his mistress. The stocking weavers and silk spinners around it consider me a hypochondriac Englishman, about to write with a pistol the last chapter of his history. This is the second time I have been in love since I left Paris. The first was with the Diana at the Chateau de Laye-Epinaye in Beujolis, a delicious morsel of

sculpture...
39

....

> A more benevolent people I have never known, nor greater warmth and devotedness in their select friendships. Their kindness and accommodation to strangers is unparalled, and the hospitality of Paris is beyond anything I had conceived to be practicable in a large city.
> 40

So wrote Jefferson of the French people on the eve of his departure from France. The friendships he made while in France, were some of the most lasting of his entire life, like that with the Countess de Tessé, which lasted nearly 30 years. Most of Jefferson's friends were members of the enlightened nobility, whose society centered around the life of the great Parisian salons. The key to admission to a Parisian salon was to be brilliant at something, and the judges of this contest were the women running the salons. Jefferson could count as his friends not only the brilliant, but also the great hostesses of the day.

One of Jefferson's first friendships in France was that with the Countess d'Houdetot. At the time Jefferson met her, she was fifty-five years old and lived blissfully on her estate at Sannois, with both her husband, the Count, and her lover, the poet St. Lambert. Madame d'Houdetot's salon was a splendid one and into her glittering circle, Jefferson easily slid. In a letter to Abigail Adams, 1785, he makes note of his first visit to Madame d'Houdetot, and acknowledges his reason for making her aquaintance:

> I took a trip yesterday to Sannois and commenced an acquaintance with the old Countess d'Hocquetout. I received much pleasure from it and hope it has opened a door of admission for me to the circle of literati with which she is environed.
> 41

Jefferson corresponded with the Countess for many years, and much later, at Monticello, he recalled the days he spent at Sannois:

> Madame d'Houdetot's society was one of the most agreeable in Paris when I was there. She inherited the materials of which it was composed from Madame de Terrier and Madame Geoffrin. St. Lambert was always there and it was generally believed that every evening on his return home he wrote down the substance of the conversations he had held there with d'Alembert, Diderot, and the other distinguished persons who frequented her house. From these conversations he made his books.
> 42

The only salon rivaling the Countess d'Houdetot's was that of Madame Necker, wife of the Minister of Finance and mother of Madame de Stael. Regardless of the obvious popularity of her salon, it is nearly impossible to imagine how she ever managed to attract the people she did. None of her contemporaries found anything to praise in her, finding her cold, prudish, and highly neurotic. Jefferson, who often visited her salon, called her,

> ..A very sincere and excellent woman, but she was not very pleasant in conversation, for she was subject to what in Virginia we call the 'budge', that is, she was very nervous and fidgety. She could rarely remain long in the same place, or converse long on the same subject. I have known her to get up from table five or six times in the course of the dinner, and walk up and down her salon to compose herself.
> 43

Her salons included guests such as Jefferson, Chastellux, St. Lambert, the Baron de Grimm, Buffon, Marmontel, Madame de Stael, and the Countess de Tessé.

The Countess de Tessé was probably Jefferson's closest French friend. Marie Kimball calls the Countess Jefferson's "spiritual affinity" and Jefferson always referred to her as his "particular

botanical friend."[44] The Countess, aunt of Lafayette, lived at Chaville, her country estate, where Jefferson dined at least once a week. Their correspondence stretched over a period of thirty years, their mutual delight in discussing anything green and growing only broken by her death in 1817.

Jefferson's correspondence with the Countess centers for the most part around their shared passion for horticulture. Nearly every letter begins with news regarding some plant, tree, seed, or bulb that one was sending or ordering for the other, as in the following letter from Jefferson to the Countess, written the morning he set out for his tour through southern France:

> I have had the pleasure to learn from Mr. Bernard of Lorient that he has our box of Magnolia and Dionaeas safe; that he will send it by the first Diligence; and take measures to prevent their being stopped or opened on the road, at the Douanes.[45]

Though certainly not the most stable, nor the longest lasting of his friendships, Jefferson's friendship with the fascinating Maria Cosway was one of the the deepest felt. He met her and her husband at the Halle au Bles, and in the words of Dumas Malone, "was quite swept off his supposedly well-planted feet."[46] The next month was spent nearly always in Maria's company, sometimes with her husband, sometimes without him. Malone writes that such were Maria's charms, that Jefferson was utterly unfitted to withstand them. She was described by a contemporary as, "a golden-haired, languishing Anglo-Italian, graceful to affectation, and highly accomplished, especially in music."[47] Jefferson described her as having all the, "qualities and accomplishments belonging to her sex, which might form

a chapter apart for her: such as music, modesty, beauty, and that softness of disposition which is the ornament of her sex and the charm of ours."[48] Actually, she can best be described as a capricious, but charming, flirt. She had a ravenous hunger for attention and little patience for lavishing it on others, as is seen in her correspondence with Jefferson. While in Paris, with him virtually at her feet, her letters are short and impatiently quick, seeming to have been written in a flurry and a flutter. But when back in London, with Jefferson preoccupied with official duties and finding no time to write any of his friends, her letters take on the demanding tone of a spoiled child.

Whatever Maria's faults, Jefferson did not see, nor heed them, remaining utterly captivated with her until her departure from Paris. And it is in his farewell letter to her, the dialogue between his Head and his Heart, that we not only see his almost boyish infatuation with her, but also, in the words of Malone, the "apostle of reason who clearly perceived reason's limitations."[49]

Gary Wills, in his book, Inventing America, carefully points out that Jefferson assigned to the Heart most of the human qualities he held dear --sympathy, benevolence, gratitude, justice, love, and friendship-- qualities, not coincidentally, he believed were maintained most easily by farmers.[50] The Head speaks only for a narrow, selfish interest, whereas the Heart argues for duty and virtue.[51]

In this poignantly beautiful letter, Jefferson shows clearly his belief that virtue is man's most precious quality; that intellect, without sentiment, is barren and disheartenly cold.

At the end of the dialogue, the Heart makes its most eloquent statement, reminding the Head that oftentimes sentiment has superior claims over reason.

> Let the gloomy Monk, sequestered from the world, seek unsocial pleasures in the bottom of his cell! Let the sublimated philosopher grasp visionary happiness, while pursuing phantoms dressed in the garb of truth! Their supreme wisdom is supreme folly, and they mistake for happiness the mere absence of pain. Had they ever felt the solid pleasure of one generous spasm of the heart, they would exchange it for all the frigid speculations of their lives which you have been vaunting in such elevated terms.[52]

This, Wills so perceptively writes, is not Jefferson rebelling against cold, calculating Reason. Rather, it is Jefferson, the apostle of Reason, praising what the French call sensibilité,[53] that inner voice that gives man his moral guidance.

This dialogue between Jefferson's Head and his Heart, therefore, is a wonderful example of Jefferson's unshakeable belief in the necessity of virtue, not only in republics, but in individual men's souls as well.

One of the major reasons for Jefferson's attraction to Parisian life was his enormous luck in friendships of the mind and the spirit. His arrival in Paris coincided with a heightening of the fever for republicanism among many young, liberal aristocrats and clergymen. Not only did Jefferson share with these budding republicans a common set of political theories and beliefs, but he and these enlightened

nobles also shared a common affinity with the philosophes, and in particular, with the Encyclopaedists. Dumas Malone sees Jefferson as sharing much in common with the physiocrats, though he finds Jefferson certainly more realistic than they, and writes that Jefferson indeed, saw himself, "as being in some sense the American representative of the idealogues, at a later time, after their philosophy had taken form."[54] Stuart Andrews, in his article "Thomas Jefferson, American Encyclopaedist", finds evidence of Jefferson's kinship with the philosophes in his Deism, his hostility to censorship, and in his passion, often obsessive, to collect, classify, and categorize.[55] Henry Steele Commager even finds some claim for Jefferson to be considered the symbol of the Enlightenment everywhere, for,

> Jefferson, alone of the great galaxy of the philosophes, embraced the whole of Enlightenment philosophy, interpreted it with matchless eloquence, added to it from his own well-stored mind, and translated it into law and practice on one of the great theatres of history. Alone of them, he kept his faith and played his part well into the new century.[56]

So who were these men with whom Jefferson was so conveniently prepared to befriend? Perhaps the most important among them, at least on the American scene, was the Marquis de Lafayette. Among all the enlightened nobility, Lafayette's influence at court was probably the greatest. Lafayette's importance at Court was by no means lost on Jefferson, who in all of his foreign friendships, was intensely aware of the advantages they could bring him as emissary of the new nation. So he wrote to James Madison that,

> The Marquis de Lafayette is a most valuable auxiliary to me. His zeal is unbounded, and his weight with those in power great...But his good sense enabling him to comprehend perfectly whatever is explained to him, his agency has been

very efficacious.[57]

It is largely through Lafayette's friendship that Jefferson became as involved with the French Revolution as he did. Through Lafayette, Jefferson became intimate with many members of the Patriot party, particularly with La Rochefoucauld, Malsherbes, and Condorcet. It is to Lafayette that Jefferson presented his draft of a charter, or declaration of rights, to be signed by the King and each of the three Estates. And it was Jefferson to whom Lafayette sent a first copy of his own Declaration of Rights.

Another of Jefferson's friendships, both on a personal and a philosophical level, was with the tragically fated Duke de la Rochefoucauld, leader of the early Revolution. According to Henry Steele Commager, the Duke was "A great swell, but indubitably a philosophe."[58] It was Crevecoeur who suggested that Jefferson make the Duke's acquaintance, urging him to,

> Put Mr. Franklin in mind of introducing you to the good Duke de la Rochefoucauld. He is the pearl of all dukes, a good man and a most able chemist. His house is the centre of reunion where men of genius and abilities often meet.[59]

The "pearl" of dukes was an ardent fan of the new republic in America, translating the constitutions of the thirteen new states into French, and then presenting two copies of the translation to every foreign minister, one for himself, and one for his sovereign.

Unfortunately, only one letter between Jefferson and the Duke has been preserved, but much is still known of their friendship, mainly through the frequent presense of Jefferson at the Duke's chateau, La Roche-Guyon, and from his long friendship with the Duke's mother, the

Duchess d'Enville. The Duchess was another of the celebrated hostesses whose salons Jefferson regularly attended, and his affection for the Duchess is witnessed in a letter to her written after his return to the United States.

> I assure you, Madame, that I consider yourself personally as with the foremost of your nation in every virtue. It is not flattery; my heart knows not that; it is a homage to sacred truth; it is a tribute I pay with cordiality to a character in which I saw but one error; it was that of treating me with a degree of favor I did not merit. Be asssured I will always retain a lively sense of your goodness to me, which was a circumstance of principle happiness to me during my stay in Paris.
> 60

Tragically, as so often happened, the Duke became a victim of the Revolution he helped forge, murdered before the eyes of his mother and wife in 1792.

Jefferson's circle of liberal friends was completed by the equally ill-fated Marquis de Condorcet, the Papal Nuncio, Count Dugnani, with whom Jefferson corresponded until the Cardinal's death, the Abbé Morellet, last of the true philosophes, and the Abbés Arnauld and Chalut. The two Abbés, always referred to as a pair, were friends not only of Jefferson, but also of the John Adams's. Jefferson grounded his friendship with the Abbés on a common love of the "crumbs of science on which we are subsisting here."[61] Jefferson's farewell to the two, addressed to them in tandem, bespeaks his high regard for their friendship:

> Instead of the pleasure, my dear friends, of meeting you again in Paris, of recounting to you our revolution and enquiring of you the details of yours, I have now to write you a letter of adieu...I shall never cease to recollect the multiplied proofs of your friendship to me, and of your patriotism towards your own country, or rather I may say

> towards the whole world...My new situation would be less unacceptable but for the friendships from which it has withdrawn me. Among these yours was of the most valued.
> [62]

There was one situation in Jefferson's career as a diplomat, and one that occurred time and again, when he was predictably a Francophile. That situation was any one involving Great Britain. He despised her government for the strangling economic hold she had over the United States, and moreover, despised her for personal reasons too. His official trip to England in 1786, to acquire with the aid of John Adams a commerical treaty between the two nations, was an utter failure. When he and Adams presented a draft of a treaty to the Foreign Minister, Lord Carmarthen, it was pointedly ignored. And when he and Adams were presented to George III and his Queen, they were publicly humiliated when the King deliberately turned his back on them. Consequently, Jefferson continued to regard George III as a buffoon, and the English as, "rich, proud, hectoring, swearing, squibbling, carnivorous animals."[63] The English, he wrote in 1787, "of all nations on earth, they require to be treated with the most hauteur. They require to be kicked into common good mannners."[64] As for King George, Jefferson wrote to Abigail Adams that he actually considered him America's greatest benefactor.

> He is truly the American Messias, the most precious life that ever God gave...Twenty long years has he been laboring to drive us to our good and he labours and will labour still for it if he can be spared. We shall have need of him for twenty more...We become chained by our habits to the tails of those who hate and despise us...He has not a friend on earth who would lament his loss as much and so long as I could.
> [65]

For all of Jefferson's jocular exaggerations, there is an element of seriousness in what he said. He regarded Great Britain as a willful impediment to American economic independence, and he personally suffered from the sting of British disdain. He was convinced that,

> That nation hates us, their ministers hate us, and their king more than all other men. They have the impudence to avow this, tho' they acknowledge our trade important to them.
> 66

France, therefore, as America's commercial ally and historical enemy of Great Britain, could not but benefit in comparison.

Jefferson viewed England as the exact antithesis of a nation borne along by the virtue of her citizens. The English, the only people on earth, "who wished us ill from the bottom of their souls,"[67] were driven by one characteristic -- avarice. Jefferson even trusted France more than England when France was headed by Napolean, "the first and chiefest apostle of the desolation of men and morals."[68] Napolean may have been driven obsessedly by glory and ambition, but England was propelled by greed.[69]

Finally, and perhaps ultimately, Jefferson's attraction and fondness for France can be viewed largely through his awareness of his role there. Dispatched by the Confederation to join Adams and Franklin in establishing commerical treaties with European powers, he later was named Minister to France upon Franklin's retirement. Lawrence Kaplan in his book, Jefferson and France, asserts there were two guiding assumptions for Jefferson's attitudes towards France; one, the existence of British power as a permanent threat to his

nation's security through economic pressures, and, secondly, the position of France as a counterweight to Britain.[70]

According to Kaplan, Jefferson was constantly aware of the importance for men of influence in France to champion political and economic aid to the new republic. Hence, Jefferson's friendships with Lafayette, Vergennes, La Rochefoucauld, and others. "Whatever pleasure he derived from French friends -- and it was considerable -- he was always aware of their potential influences on the Monarchy, the Directory, the Consulate, or the Empire."[71] This was not lost on his French acquaintances, though it did not damage his reputation in the least. From LaLuzerne to Vergennes, 1784,

> He is full of honor and sincerity and loves his country greatly, but is too philosophic and tranquil to hate or love any other nation unless it is for the interest of the United States to do so.[72]

In the end, for all the above reasons, Jefferson had only the highest of praise for the French people and the graces of their society. They were to him, "a people of the very best character it is possible for one to have."[73] And though he truly admired the French as, "polite, self-denying, feeling, hospitable, good humoured people,"[74] it was perhaps their manners that he loved best of all. So fine and polished were their manners, with all the roughnesses smoothed away, that, "it seems as if one might glide thro' a whole life among them without a justle."[75] Pity then, they had such a corrupt government. For,

> I love this people with all my heart, and think that with a better religion and a better form of government and their present governors, their condition and country would

most enviable.[76]

That was it, then. It was not the people of France who were to blame, it was their repressive institutions. As Joyce Abbleby has pointed out, Jefferson blamed man's degraded condition not on his nature, for all men were inherently good, but on his environment. Environment could make a man goodness itself, or ridden with vice. And it was the purpose of government to foster the environment for liberating each man's self-actualizing capacities.[77] As stated earlier, the ideal environment to Jefferson was that of the farmer, an ideal nation was one of citizen-farmers. Jefferson illustrated his conviction in the importance of environment, with his statement that even in agriculture, some types of farming were more uplifting than others, with tobacco farming being a, "culture productive of infinite wretchedness."[78]

No matter how pleasant and delightful the graces of Parisian life, they rested upon the foundation of a corrupt, decidedly unjust government and a poverty-stricken citizenry too degraded to even hope to embody republican virtue. No matter how strong his attraction to French society, he could never forget that it rested upon profoundly unjust institutions.

One institution with which he had first-hand contact, an experience he found infuriating, was with the Farmers-General. The Farmers-General had been granted by the French government the exclusive right to purchase any tobacco entering France. Hence, American tobacco producers were forced to take whatever price the Farmers-General chose to offer for their tobacco. To make matters

worse, the Farmers-General made a contract with Robert Morris in 1785, agreeing to purchase only his tobacco. Thus, Jefferson, as the protector of American farming interests in France, was faced with a double monopoly. His efforts to break the monopoly, and to reason with the French government, even with the aid and counsel of Lafayette bore little fruit. The greatest concession Jefferson could wrench from the Farmers-General was a promise they would not renew Morris's contract, and that they would agree to buy a specified amount of tobacco from American producers at a specific price. Yet for all his efforts and frustrations, the monopoly still stood -- the Farmers-General were too powerful and autonomous to be shaken.

For Jefferson, the wretched, hopeless poverty of the peasants came about as a direct result of the unequal distribution of property, which in turn was a result of the irrevocable rights of the privileged orders. In the autumn of 1785, Jefferson went with the Court to Fontainebleau, and was shocked by the misery of the peasants along the way. He wrote to James Madison,

> Another means of silently lessening the unequality of property is to exempt all from taxation below a certain point, and to tax the higher portions of property in geometrical progression as they rise.
> [79]

Jefferson was further shocked at the sight of vast uncultivated lands and unemployed, landless poor, fuming that natural rights had been offended, since, "the earth is given as common stock to man to labor and live on."[80]

Nearly everything he saw confirmed in him the notion that in France, "there are nineteen millions more wretched, more accursed in every circumstance of human existence, than the most conspicuously wretched individual of the whole United States."[81] In France he found, "the general fate of humanity...most deplorable. The truth of Voltaire's observation offers itself perpetually, that every man here must be either the hammer or the anvil."[82] As he toured the southern parts of the country in 1787, he was apalled by the conditions in which the peasants lived. In Champagne, he observed that, "the people are illy clothed. Perhaps they have put on their worst clothes at this moment as it is raining." He was shocked at the sight of women and children carrying heavy loads and working in the fields. He concluded that, "this is an unequivocal indication of extreme poverty. Men, in a civilized country, never expose their wives and children to labour above their force or sex, as long as their own labour can protect them from it."[83]

The cause of this deplorable misery was to Jefferson, a simple one: bad institutions. This, "vaunted scene of Europe... where we are to see GOD and his angels in splendor, and crowds of the damned trampled under their feet,"[84] never so horrified him as when the King of Prussia sent out 20,000 men to avenge an insult to his sister, the Princess of Orange. "Oh," wrote Jefferson,

> The blessed effect of kingly government, where a pretended insult to the sister of a king is to produce the wanton sacrifice of a hundred or two thousand of the people who have entrusted themselves to his government, and as many of his enemies! And we think ours is a bad government. The only condition on earth to be compared with ours, in my opinion, is that of the Indians, where they have still less laws than we. The European, are governments of kites over pidgeons. The best schools for republicanism are London,

Versailles, Madrid, Vienna, Berlin, etc.
[85]

Indeed, the French peasantry had been downtrodden for so long that Jefferson, uncharacteristically the pessimist, despaired of them ever bettering their own condition.

> If all the sovereigns of Europe were to set themselves to work, to emancipate the minds of their subjects from their present ignorance and prejudices, and that, as zealously as they now endeavor the contrary, a thousand years would not place them on that high ground, on which our common people are now setting out...If anybody thinks that kings, nobles, or priests are good conservators of the public happiness, send him here. It is the best school in the universe to cure him of that folly.
> [86]

It is not surprising, then, that Jefferson became an enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution, a revolution he viewed as a vehicle for destroying France's old, corrupt institutions, and replacing them with free ones. As a fascinated observer of the Revolution from its beginning, he expressed his confidence that all would end well, and free. In 1789, he wrote, "I will agree to be stoned as a false prophet if all does not end well with this country. Here is but the first chapter in the history of European liberty."
[87]

Jefferson has been criticized by several historians, most severely by R. R. Palmer, for taking a moderate, cautious stance in the Revolution. Palmer accuses Jefferson of misreading the real causes of the Revolution, and placing too much confidence in the nobles. Jefferson, says Palmer, so feared monarchy, that he remained blind to the inherent conservatism in the Assembly of Notables.
[88]

As for the people, writes Palmer, Jefferson was, "insensitive to the case for equality of taxation, equality of representation, and equality of citizenship in France."[89] This statement is decidedly unfair. Jefferson was paramountly concerned with equality of representation in France, advocating to his Patriot friends in 1788 a charter providing for periodical meetings of the three Estates, giving the Estates, not the King, the exclusive right to taxation, and insisting that all amendments be proposed and all laws be registered with the Estates.[90] Later in the Revolution, Jefferson even advised Lafayette to disobey his instructions from his constituents, and join the Third Estate.[91]

As for Jefferson's seeming blindness to the fulminations of the unprivileged classes, Merrill Peterson has pointed out that this should not be suprising, since, "a social revolution from below was no part of his experience or his theoretical equipment."[92] Even Palmer admits that Jefferson lacked the class consciousness necessary to be aware of a rising unprivileged class, he "being a gentleman, not an aristocrat, and had difficulty recognizing it in others."[93]

If Jefferson seemed to place more faith in the nobles than they ultimately deserved, it was because the leaders of the early Revolution, the Patriot Party with whom Jefferson had close ties of friendship, seemd to be establishing the very vehicles of liberty he thought important: provincial assemblies, one Estate comprised of all classes, a declaration of rights, and minimal powers for the King. Even during the beginning of the Terror, when some of the more flagrant of the aristocrats lost their heads, Jefferson never swayed from his pro-Revolution stance.

> I have been through it daily, have observed the mobs with my own eyes, in order to be satisfied of their objects, and declare...that I saw so plainly the legitimacy of them, that I have slept in my house as quietly thro' the whole as I ever did in the most peaceable moments.
> [94]

The moderate stance taken by Jefferson during the Revolution can best be attributed to his fear that if too bold of steps were taken toward liberty, the King and his army would step in and crush the fledgling movement. "It is to be feared that an impatience to rectify every thing at once, which prevails in some minds, may terrify the Court, and lead tham to appeal to force, and to depend on that alone."[95] Furthermore, there remained the problem in Jefferson's mind, of granting liberty to a populace which had for centuries been denied education, free speech, the right of habeus corpus, and the practice of suffrage. He feared they could be used by a faction driving for power, they could be, "led to take side with one party, and thus give the other a pretext for crushing them still more."[96] He also believed that any change in that drastically retarded society must be gradual, because if more liberty was attempted than, "the people are ripe for, they may lose all, and retard infinitely the ultimate object of their aim."[97] Or, as he wrote in 1788, "the misfortune is that they are not yet ripe for the blessings to which they are entitled."[98]

Yet despite all of Jefferson's hesitations and his cautions for moderation, he remained confident, almost exhuberantly so, of the success of the French Revolution. He keenly felt his responsibility as a leader of the American Revolution, who in France, could give sage advice on the establishment of republican government. He saw the struggle in France as an attempt to illuminate,

> The human mind as to the rights of the nation, aided by fortunate incidents, that they can never retrograde, but from the natural progress of things, must press forward to the establishment of a constitution which shall assure to them a good degree of liberty.
>
> 99

And back in America, he wrote to the doomed Marquis de Condorcet,

> I am looking ardently to the completion of the glorious work in which your country is engaged. I view the general condition of Europe as hanging on the success or failure of France. Having set such an example of philosophical arrangement within, I hope it will be extended without your limits also, to your dependents, and to your friends in every part of the earth.
>
> 100

As has been stated before, what Jefferson thought corrupt in France was not her people, but her society, her environment. He deplored the tradition of privilege that endowed a fraction of the populace with the right by birth of living and playing as they pleased, while the great majority of the people literally starved. He remained unimpressed at the brilliance and lavishness of life at Versailles, and had nothing good to say about the beautiful, but extravagent, Marie Antoinnette. What privelege did to French society, he thought, was create a purposeless environment, where duty and virtue carried little weight alongside beauty, power, and wit. In 1787, Jefferson wrote a biting satire on a day in the life of a Parisian lady:

> At eleven o'clock it is chez Madame. The curtains are drawn. Propped on bolsters and pillows, and her head scratched into a little order, the bulletins of the sick are read, and the billets of the well. She writes to some of her acquaintance and receives the visit of others. If the morning is not very thronged, she is able to get out and hobble round the cage of the Palais Royal: but, she must hobble quickly for the Coffeur's turn is come; and a tremendous turn it is! Happy, if he does not make her arrive when dinner is half over! The torpitude of digestion

> a little passed, she flutters half an hour thro' the streets by way of paying visits, and then to the spectacles. These finished, another half hour is devoted to dodging in and out of doors of her very sincere friends, and away to supper. After supper cards, and after cards bed, to rise at noon the next day, and to tread, like a mill-horse, the same trodden circle over again.
> [101]

Himself a gentleman by birth, he lived a life rich with culture and elegance, but deplored, and even feared, unbridled luxury and wanton extravagence. The key, as so often with this highly reasonable man, was moderation. Late in life, he termed himself an Epicurean. And as a gourmet and a connisseur, he aptly fits this self-description. But his Epicureanism was marked by a strict self-discipline, which as Adrienne Koch has pointed out, lends reason for calling him a Stoic. Ultimately, writes Koch, Jefferson lived a life somehow combining the two, using them as, "complimentary techniques in the realization of the good life."[102]

So, while leading an elegant, rather than a plain life, Jefferson abhorred reckless lavishness. His ever hardening conviction that French society was at heart purposeless was spurred on by alarming news from home. To many citizens, it seemed that America, the untouched new republic, was being threatened by the corrupting influence of blatant luxury. William Hay wrote to Jefferson in 1787 that the Americans were now a, "Luxurious, Voluptuous, indolent, expensive people, without Economy or Industry."[103] James Madison, too, was alarmed and wrote Jefferson in the same year that America was, "marked by symptoms...truly alarming, which have tainted the faith of the most orthodox republicans."[104] To many Americans, it seemed that frugality and that wonderful simplicity of manners, was being eaten

away, for as one Virginian said in alarm, "luxury, luxury, the great source of dissolution and distress, has here taken up her dismal abode; infectious as she is, she is alike caressed by rich and poor."[105] And, for Jefferson, although he relished in many of the delights of Parisian culture, he could never accept them without a corresponding virtue in the society. He would even prefer to live without sophistication at all, if he could not have a virtuous, happy, society, too.

> ..and I am savage enough to prefer the woods, the wilds, and the independence of Monticello, to all the brilliant pleasures of this gay capital. I shall therefore resign myself to my native country with new attachments, with exaggerated esteem for its advantages, for tho' there is less wealth there, there is more freedom, more ease, and less misery.[106]

Indeed, although America had less wealth, less sophistication, and little of Europe's social graces, she had a virtuous people and good institutions. And if she wanted to acquire a higher taste for art, architecture, or gracious living, she could do so without fear of her society becoming corrupt. For as Joyce Appleby has pointed out, Jefferson's hope for an enduring republic was, "built much on the enlargement of the resources of life, going hand in hand with the enlargement of territory, and the belief that men are disposed to live honestly, if the means of doing so are open to them."[107] Americans would not be like Europeans, born, according to the laws of the land, to a life of infinite pleasure and ease, or to one of infinite misery. Americans were assured of a virtuous society, as long as they were assured of the ability to cultivate the earth. And it was of this, that Jefferson was determined to assure his countrymen.

In America, then, there were no kings building pleasure fountains like those at Versailles, whose running costs were so large that they could only be displayed on occasions of state. Nor would the average American farmer become a near-serf like his fellow tillers-of-the-soil in France. There was no tithe to be paid to landed lords in America. In America women would not be rioting for bread in the streets, while elegant ladies of noble houses practiced on their harpsicords. Happily, in America, a man could live graciously, drink elegant wines, build a spectacular home, purchase fine art and entertain with style and refinement, and do so without losing his republican virtue. Americans were virtuous and their government stood guard to keep any portion of them from losing their virtue. Any civilities or elegancies they acquired would merely be additions to their degree of civilization. Indeed, it was virtue that had made America free, and virtue that kept her so. As Madame d'Houdetot wrote to Jefferson in 1790,

> The characteristic difference between your revolution and ours, is that having nothing to destroy, you had nothing to injure, and laboring for a people few in number, incorrupted, and extended over a large tract of country, you have avoided all the inconveniences of a situation contrary in every respect. Every step in your revolution was perhaps the effect of virtue, while ours are often faults, and sometime crimes.
> 108

So it was that Jefferson could live the life of a sophisticated gentleman farmer, perched atop his hill at Monticello. He could tinker, tear down, and put up his beloved architectural plaything, and he could design gardens fashioned after the early English romantic school, where all the planting looked as if it grew there of its own accord. He could fill his villa with art and nearly ruin himself with

the purchase of thousands of books. He could search for domestic servants who could play the French horn, clarinet, hautboy and bassoon, and thus, have an in-house orchestra. He could hire a French chef, Monsieur Julein, and serve of one meal rice soup, round of beef, turkey, mutton, ham, loin of veal, cutletts of mutton and veal, fried eggs, fried beef, macaroni, fruit, and wines.

So, too, could he, ever the dedicated citizen, use his knowledge and love of Europe's art and culture to bring elegance and refinement to America. He believed that although her governments and societies were reprehensible, the Old World had much to offer the New in the realm of the fine arts. Consequently, he was responsible for commissioning Houdon to create a life-size statue of Washington.[109] And he worked ceaselessly to improve his nation's taste in architecture, which he considered bad, and that of Virginia, where, "it is worse than in any other part of America which I have seen."[110] His admiration of European architecture did not, however, encompass that of England, which he called, "the most wretched stile I ever saw."[111] He is even credited with beginning the classical revival in architecture in America, with his monumental design of the Richmond capital, modelled after the beautiful Maison Carree.[112] Architecture, his beloved past time, was the art he strove most determinedly to raise to heights of admiration in America. Indeed, he considered it a duty, asking Madison in 1785, "but how is a taste in this beautiful art to be formed in our countrymen, unless we avail ourselves of every occassion when public buildings are to erected, of presenting to them models for their study and imitation?"[113] And as if to explain his passion for architecture, music, and art, he told Madison,

> You see, I am an enthusiast on the subject of the arts. But it is an enthusiasm of which I am not ashamed, as its object is to improve the taste of my countrymen, to increase their reputation, to reconcile to them the respect of the world and procure them its praise.
>
> 114

Jefferson's five years in France were above all else, a learning experience. He went there as a republican, prepared to find corrupt governments and unhappy subjects. In that sense, Europe did not disappoint him. Yet also, Jefferson acquired graces in France that he could never again be completely comfortable without. He returned to America, graces in hand, only more convinced that Americans were the freest, happiest people in the world. Jefferson, on his return from France, was much like Robert Frost on his return from a dark forest,

> They would not find me changed from him they knew --
> Only more sure of all I thought was true.
>
> 115

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