

# Political Economy in Late Eighteenth-Century British Radicalism: A Re-Examination of the Analytical Categories

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## ABSTRACT

Research into eighteenth-century British social thought and discourses of social issues has identified two main vocabularies—that of jurisprudence and that of civic humanism. However, several social discourses in the late eighteenth century, such as Thomas Paine's, also contain some influence from the field of political economy. These elements do not fit comfortably in either of the two abovementioned categories, and consequently, they have caused many problems for attempts at classification. Preceding research on Paine clearly shows that the problem here is due to the absence of an appropriate category for this aspect of his work. This paper conducts an inquiry into the usages hitherto of the principal analytical categories mentioned above, then points out obscurities and problems in these usages, and finally provides a new analytical category—"the vocabulary of utility"—and a redefinition of "radicalism" drawing on the work of Michel Foucault.

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## 1 Introduction: What is "radicalism"?

The year 1776 marks an epoch in British social thought, since it is the year in which Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, and Jeremy Bentham's "A Fragment on Government" all appeared. These three books represent a condensation of the characteristics of British social thought to that point, rather than the beginning of a new intellectual climate. As Lasky points out, "a hundred years of hardheaded and keen-witted political analysis, from Locke and Halifax to David Hume, had proved to be a stern taskmaster for the English mind."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lasky 2004, 517.

Research into British political thought has analyzed this process within a frame of reference principally used in the field of the history of “political” ideas. As is well known, the methods of discourse analysis developed by Pocock and Skinner have been accepted or discussed by a wide range of researchers. Skinner explains his approach in *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. His area of interest is “[t]he clearest sign that a society has entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept”; this sign, he feels, can be found in the emergence of a new vocabulary “in terms of which the concept is then articulated and discussed.”<sup>2</sup> He attempts “to construct a general framework within which the writing of the more prominent theorists can then be situated.”<sup>3</sup> Pocock elsewhere describes his approach as “discovering and recapitulating the vocabularies and idioms in which political thought has been articulated in the course of its history.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition to these methods of discourse analysis, there is also a Marxist frame of reference that pays foremost attention to the movement for workers’ rights, particularly to the push for universal suffrage. The word ‘rights of man’ is seen as one of ‘key words’ to be paid attention to.<sup>5</sup> Despite the variety in approaches, discussion of public affairs has generally been seen as “political,” and accordingly, several frames of reference provided by the discipline of the history of political thought have been employed for the analysis of these historical discourses. Traditionally, in the discipline of political thought, dichotomous categories such as “liberalism” and “republicanism” or “libertarian” and “communitarian” have been used. While the introduction of discourse analysis of the sort described above by scholars including Pocock and Skinner in the 1970s encouraged great innovation in methods of approaching historical materials, the principal categories of analysis have remained unchanged. Several researchers of the history of economic thought have attempted to extract evidence for the influence of the field of political economy from seventeenth and eighteenth-century public discourses in Great Britain and the United States, usually classifying the elements of this influence collectively as constituting the philosophy of “liberalism.”<sup>6</sup>

In the study of eighteenth-century British social thought, two categories of language employed by the primary writers have been identified: the vocabulary of civic humanism (“the vocabulary of virtue”) and the vocabulary of civil jurisprudence (“the vocabulary of rights”). The former discourse is congruent with

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<sup>2</sup>Skinner 1997, x.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., xi.

<sup>4</sup>Pocock 1985, 38.

<sup>5</sup>Williams 1976, 13. Williams defines the term “Keywords” as the words which bind “certain activities’ to “their interpretation”, and that indicate “certain forms of thought”.

<sup>6</sup>Appleby 1992; Pincus 1998. Pincus remarks that a new ideology invented by “many of the radical defenders of the Commonwealth in the 1650s and beyond”, which fits the needs of a commercial society, “can no longer be called classical republicanism but it is better understand as liberalism” (Pincus 1998, 708).

classical republicanism, and the latter with liberalism. I have also previously utilized these categories as tools of analysis in my research into late eighteenth-century Irish thought. While their application has been effective for the analysis of the discourses of the Ulster Dissenters and Dublin reformers, I have found (and present in the current paper) some elements that do not fit this schema in the discourses of Thomas Paine and of Arthur O'Connor,<sup>7</sup> the Irish politician and exponent of Adam Smith. To be specific, these elements are their frequent use of the words “interest,” “useful,” and “utility,” and their understanding of society evidenced by their use of the words “commerce” and “industry” to describe it.

A standard discourse category fit to classify these features has not yet been accepted, although Claeys (2007) points out the emergence of “a third language anchored in the new, essentially Scottish science of political economy” in political debate by 1790—a language that “attempted to avoid appeals to both Lockean rights concepts and republican virtue while remaining essentially Whiggish and progressive.”<sup>8</sup> In the British context, the meaning of the term “utilitarianism” is extremely specific, and some writers have even hesitated to use “liberalism,” since strictly speaking this has been understood to be a nineteenth-century doctrine. Consequently, researchers have been led to apply the terms “radicalism” or “radical” to Painean discourses.<sup>9</sup> However, nobody has given these terms a precise definition; instead, they retain a wide range of diverse definitions. However, in the actual late eighteenth-century discourses of Paine and the Paineites such as Arthur O'Connor, the words “republican” and “republicanism” were also used to describe their own creeds. This situation has added confusion to the classification and analysis of the Paineites, and accordingly Paine has been described using various terms: “bourgeois radical,”<sup>10</sup> “radical liberal,”<sup>11</sup> “individualistic liberal,”<sup>12</sup> “from liberal to radical,”<sup>13</sup> “commercial republican,”<sup>14</sup> “revolutionary democrat”<sup>15</sup> “libertarian,”<sup>16</sup> “economic liberal,”<sup>17</sup> and so on, as

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur O'Connor was one of the leaders of the United Irishmen after 1796, and was condemned to exile as a traitor in 1802. He settled in France and married the daughter of Condorcet.

<sup>8</sup> Claeys 2007, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Dickinson 1985; Kramnick 1990; Dinwiddy 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Kramnick 1990, 43–70.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>13</sup> Kates 1989, 571. Kates uses the term “radicalism” to refer to “democratic republicanism based upon universal manhood suffrage and a commitment to the amelioration of the lower classes through significant social and economic legislation” in contrast to “liberalism” which maintains “a constitutional monarchy based upon political freedom but an unequal electoral system” (Kates 1989, 571).

<sup>14</sup> Claeys 1989a, 98; Claeys 1989b, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Philp 1989, 122.

<sup>16</sup> Philp 1998, 246.

<sup>17</sup> Appleby 1985, 122.

if to cover all possible combinations of radicalism, liberalism, republicanism, individualism, and bourgeois and commercial characteristics. The core of the entire problem is the absence of a category of vocabulary in this area of study corresponding to knowledge derived from the field of political economy. This absence can be seen as a result of the predominance until now in the discourse analysis of late eighteenth-century social thought.

Therefore, the principal purpose of this paper is to create a novel analytical category appropriate for the assessment of the influence of political economy on social discourse. In this respect, Michel Foucault provides a new analytical frame of reference that is enormously useful for the clarification of the characteristics of British social thought in the eighteenth century. As a part of his research into “governmentality” in his lectures at the Collège de France, he analyzed the formation and features of the “radicalism” that originated in Great Britain.<sup>18</sup> His clear separation of the “vocabulary of utility” from the vocabulary of jurisprudence serves as the basis upon which I forge a drastically new categorization schema.

In order to show that my new categorization is not arbitrary or ad hoc but necessary, I will begin by conducting a detailed inquiry into the usage of principal terms in the writings of leading researchers of the period, then point out ambiguities and problems in their usages, and finally, drawing on Foucault, define the category, the vocabulary of utility, and other terms related to it.

## 2 Previous definitions of “radicalism”

We will begin by examining the various definitions of the term “radicalism” in previous research on British social thought in this period. They can be broadly classified into three types: the “languages” of rights, liberalism, and republicanism.

### 2.1 The language of rights

The term “bourgeois radicalism” has been applied to late-eighteenth century social discourses such as those of Paine, Priestley, Wollstonecraft, and so on.<sup>19</sup> In this case, “radicalism” refers to a limited claim for suffrage and the adherence to possessive individualism. Isaac Kramnick (1990) illustrates how the term was given a conservative and reactionary implication in research after the Second World War. For example, in 1967, Bernard Bailyn provided the following

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<sup>18</sup>For “governmentality”, see Foucault 2007/1977–1978, 255–358. For “radicalism”, see Foucault 2008/1978–1979, 27–47.

<sup>19</sup>Kramnick 1990, 43–70. Arblaster 1991, 51–72.

description of the eighteenth-century radicals in the United States and England alike: “The leaders of the Revolutionary movement were radicals, but they were eighteenth-century radicals concerned, like the eighteenth-century English radicals, not with the need to recast the social order nor with the problems of economic inequality and the injustice of stratified societies but with the need to purify a corrupt constitution and fight off the apparent growth of prerogative power.”<sup>20</sup> Ian Christie, as well, has identified them as “no democrats.”<sup>21</sup> Despite the aloofness of these authors from Marxism, these definitions seem to have been deeply influenced by Marxist historiography—by a class-centric perspective that seeks to follow the development of the claims for universal suffrage and social rights through history. Accordingly, this perspective devalues those who did not achieve the “real goal” because they claimed no more than a restoration of ancient rights and constitutional balance; they are labeled as “radicals,” in distinction from democrats. The adjective “bourgeois” can then be understood to stand for these writers’ class-consciousness as owners who adhere to the principle of proprietary rights.

Such is the prototype usage of “radicalism.” However, H.T. Dickinson (1977) and Gregory Claeys (2007) apply the term in a broader sense to the advocates of the political reform of the 1790s, who based their claims not on ancient rights and the constitution but on the idea of the natural rights of man. Whereas Dickinson observes that Paine had broken away from the commitment to the restoration of ancient rights, he finds another novel element in the discourses advocating parliamentary reform in the 1790s, that is to say, a “utilitarian” element. Dickinson considers that radicalism in the 1790s comprised two novel and three conventional elements. The former were the universal and inalienable rights of man and the utilitarian foundation of reform, and the latter were Locke’s notions of the social contract and the right of resistance, the notion of the ancient constitution and rights of Englishmen, and the Protestant Dissenters’ doctrine of the natural equality of all men.<sup>22</sup> These elements are actually discordant, but it is important to note that they are components of a discourse, not full-fledged general theories, and that they do not correspond to any particular bearers. As a historian, Dickinson identifies the middle class and the upper part of the working class as the most open recipients of radical ideas, as indicated by the following quotation: “By the later eighteenth century, major social and economic developments within Britain were combining to create a growing body of opinion critical of the power and the politics of the aristocratic elite. These changes had their greatest effect on the political consciousness of the middling orders, especially those who lived in urban areas, but economic crisis and social dislocation were also capable of recruiting many

<sup>20</sup>Bailyn 1992/1967, 283.

<sup>21</sup>Christie 1962, 15.

<sup>22</sup>Dickinson 1977, 240.

of the skilled craftsmen and artisans into the campaign for political reform.”<sup>23</sup> Although I will not enter into a discussion on the correspondence between the five elements of radicalism outlined above and the relative social positions of the recipients of each element, it is important to recognize that the five elements were available as rhetorical resources for reform campaigners and to know how each advocate arranged them to rationalize his or her particular claims.

Dickinson (1977) draws a sketch of the development of radicalism from the 1790s to 1815. He classifies Paine as a believer in the doctrine of universal natural rights, and Jeremy Bentham and William Godwin under the utilitarian foundation of reform. He considers the characteristic of the latter group as an assertion that “utility should be the criterion adopted to judge political actions” instead of an appeal to natural rights.<sup>24</sup> Dickinson concludes that, although Paine and his appeal to abstract rights had a great influence on the radicals of the 1790s, the claim for reform in the subsequent period rested more on the utilitarian justification of Bentham.<sup>25</sup> Whereas Dickinson’s recognition of the utilitarian element in the discourses of the 1790s is of considerable significance, he misses the point when he simply sets this element against the doctrine of universal natural rights.

Claeys’ book *Thomas Paine*, which appeared in 1989, eleven years after Dickinson’s, also lays emphasis on Paine’s proximity to the natural law tradition. However, their opinions differ as to the course of development of radicalism. Claeys argues that Paine’s natural rights doctrine made a greater impact upon the Whigs and the reform campaign than did the utilitarian doctrine. “[H]istorians have wrongly presumed that the rise of a skeptical, historicist utilitarianism simply swept aside natural rights arguments. This teleological interpretation ... derives from the idea that Burke and Bentham were the next ‘great thinkers’ to follow Hume in the canon of history of political thought and must therefore have extended his victory over the forces of dark Lockean ignorance.”<sup>26</sup> According to Claeys, it was the diffusion not of the ideas of Hume, Burke, Paley, and Bentham but of those of Paine that drove the Whigs to abandon their appeal for the restoration of the ancient constitution and their notion of franchise-holders being “restricted (even the right of resistance) to those of independent means.”<sup>27</sup> In his book of 2007, he considers “Paineite republicanism” to be a sourcepoint of “radical and liberal conceptions of the welfare state”; on the other hand, he attributes the formation of “subsequent theories of modern ‘laissez-faire’ commercial society” to the growing reputation

<sup>23</sup>Dickinson 1985, 1.

<sup>24</sup>Dickinson 1977, 245.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 246.

<sup>26</sup>Claeys 1989a, 92.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 90.

of and attention given to the works of Adam Smith.<sup>28</sup> He then declares that “an extension of the central language of ‘rights’ which lay at the core of Revolutionary discourse” was brought about by the situation after 1789, where the questions of the maximization of social and economic equality and of its compatibility with the cause of liberty came to be discussed in terms of public opinion.<sup>29</sup> However, as other research of his shows in detail, the issue of equality and property rights was posed by so-called “anti-Jacobin” pamphleteers rather than by Paine himself. “An exploration of many of the perhaps six hundred contributions to the debate reveals in particular that the issue of ‘leveling’, or economic equality, was crucial to the loyalist triumph over the Paineites, although this was not central to Burke’s arguments nor ... really implied by Paine’s *Rights of Man*.”<sup>30</sup>

When Claeys, classifying Paine as a user of the vocabulary of rights, sets him against the vocabulary of utility as exemplified by Hume, Burke and Bentham—a similar argument to that of Dickinson—he overlooks a distinctive feature of radicalism, namely the merger of the vocabulary of rights into that of utility. However, even so, he does not fail to remark on some utilitarian elements in Paine’s writings, as can be seen in the following quotation: “Paine too touted a vague brand of utilitarianism”;<sup>31</sup> to be specific, “Paine’s theory of society doubtless did construe individuals as utility-maximizing creatures primarily motivated by self-interest in seeking to satisfy their needs.”<sup>32</sup> Claeys also finds a similarity to Hume and Burke in Paine’s notion of society as “a system of wants,”<sup>33</sup> understanding Paine’s view in the following manner: Civilization is “also grounded upon the necessity of mutual aid based on the existence of common wants and the deliberate divine distribution of resources unevenly across the world to ensure co-operation. This form of sociability, reciprocal interest, was intimately bounded up with Paine’s definition of commerce.”<sup>34</sup>

Although Claeys recognizes that Paine distinguished civil society from civil government and based the former not on rights but on reciprocal needs and

<sup>28</sup> Claeys 2007, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Claeys 1989b, 4. He mentions Pendleton (1982), who estimated the number of pamphlets, books, sermons, and broadsides related to the French Revolution in England between 1791 and 1795 at about four thousand, and that compiled a bibliography of about 350 titles. Claeys estimates that one-quarter of them were related to the Burke–Paine debate (Claeys 1995, liv). A swelling amount of contributions was garnered by loyalist associations such as John Reeves’s Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers. De Montluzin (1988) made a list of the authors of about 700 articles, letters, and poems published in the first six volumes of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, issued between July 1798 and August 1800.

<sup>31</sup> Claeys 1989a, 92.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

assistance, he still classifies Paine into the vocabulary of rights for the reason that “Paine identified such [reciprocal] benefits only with a commercial republicanism tempered by a humane treatment of the poor.”<sup>35</sup>

Claeys’ denial that utilitarian elements are present in Paine seems to be a result of Claeys’ narrow definition of “utilitarianism” and “commercial society.” However, it is not only Claeys but also a great number of other researchers who use “utilitarianism” in this limited sense, for the term has generally been understood to signify a philosophical view established by Bentham that justifies laws and institutions by the criterion of the maximization of pleasure—the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Consequently, we are not allowed to utilize the utilitarian as a category in discourse analysis to designate the considerable change in language under the influence of political economy, which provided a new, rational potential basis for the justification of governments, laws, and institutions. As the term “utilitarianism” has often been used in the limited sense and an ad hoc broadening of its definition may easily mislead us, we need to find another term for the classification of utilitarian elements. However, before we come to a more precise account of this issue, a few remarks should be made concerning Claeys’ concept of “commercial society.”

While Claeys acknowledges Paine’s respect for commerce, he emphasizes the difference between Paine and thinkers like Smith and Hume. He applies the label of “commercial republicanism” to the former, and “commercial Whiggism” to the latter. “Common Sense advocated commercial liberty, but nonetheless assumed a vision of commercial society which even now (much less in 1792) implied far less inequality than did Adam Smith’s in *The Wealth of Nations*, published shortly thereafter. In this sense it remained closer to classical republicanism than to the more purely commercial Whiggism of Hume and Smith.”<sup>36</sup>

Claeys classifies the description of society as a system of wants into the vocabulary of jurisprudence, and defined “commercial Whiggism” or the Smithian view of “commercial society” as bearing the following features: (1) a support-claim for *laissez-faire* policies, (2) a support-claim for free trade, and (3) advocacy of the priority of commerce over other industries. By demonstrating that Paine did not share those views and had already taken the view of “society as a system of wants and their satisfaction through mutual interdependence” before the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, Claeys decisively separates him from Smith.<sup>37</sup> Apart from Smith, Claeys classifies all exponents of commercial society, including Hume, as users of the vocabulary of jurisprudence. Hence, Paine before the *Rights of Man* is described as an advocate of “the jurisprudential theory of needs” and after the commencement of his claim for redistribution of wealth as one “wholly alien to the Smithian as well as any

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 97.

jurisprudential vision.”<sup>38</sup> In Claeys’ frame of reference, all elements of political economy are transferred to jurisprudence or to republicanism. His Smithian model is not effective in categorizing those elements because its definition is based on the notion of Smith held by nineteenth-century economists rather than that held by contemporaries.

Having observed by example the lack of a category into which all elements created in social discourse by the knowledge of political economy can be classified, we can now turn to consider an adequate term to refer to utilitarian elements as a substitute for “utilitarianism.” In his “Utility and Natural Law in Burke’s Thought,” J.R. Dinwiddy discusses the usage of “utilitarianism,” remarking: “The term utilitarianism is sometimes used in [a] broad sense to describe a mode of thought in which utility plays a crucial part—a mode of thought which bases moral rules and judgment on considerations of usefulness.”<sup>39</sup> It is this broad utilitarianism that the analysis of social thought requires. In order to distinguish this usage from the narrow sense, referring to the ethical philosophy, the term the vocabulary of utility or the language of utility is applied to the former.<sup>40</sup> Because Dinwiddy treats utilitarianism as an approach to ethical questions, he confines the objects to be judged or justified to the “moral” sphere. However, since the moral sphere is too narrow for the identification of the “vocabulary of utility” in various discourses, the range of objects needs to be extended to the entire sphere of society. To sum up, the vocabulary of utility designates a mode of thought that bases moral, legal, and political rules, institutions and regimes on considerations of usefulness to society.

## 2.2 Liberalism and the vocabulary of jurisprudence

Since the vocabulary of utility does not exist as an analytical category in his frame of reference, Claeys instead classifies into the vocabulary of jurisprudence Hume’s arguments that “utility was the chief basis of governments, that the state of nature was a fiction and correspondingly that only ‘civil’ rights existed,” and considers them an assault on the vocabulary of natural rights.<sup>41</sup> The vocabulary of utility is for the most part assimilated into liberalism—in other words, into the vocabulary of jurisprudence. Before it is possible to enter

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>39</sup>Dinwiddy 1992, 229.

<sup>40</sup>The history of social thought deals with thoughts and ideas in historical discourses, not with the transformation of language. The word “vocabulary” means a body of words that people use when they are talking about a particular subject. It may connote the existence of a certain systematic knowledge of vocabulary forms. Hence, I use the word “vocabulary” here.

<sup>41</sup>Claeys 1989a, 91.

into a detailed discussion of liberalism and radicalism, we must try to clarify our central conception of liberalism.

Liberalism is a word with many shades of meaning; strictly speaking, it was established as an “ism” or doctrine, in the nineteenth century. In the analysis of social thought, the label “liberalism” suggests arguments or claims for liberal principles, which derive from several sources, such as the ideal of a liberal ancient constitution and of the liberty of Englishmen; the Lockean notion of civil government and its protection of proprietary rights; and the politico-economic notion of society as consisting of free business transactions between private individuals. Since research into social thought is concerned with an analysis of these sources, namely, of the foundations of the liberal principles claimed by each exponent, the use of the term “liberalism” has been a hindrance to our studies. It is so general as to veil differences in and justifications for reasoning.

Nevertheless, “liberalism” has often been employed by some researchers to describe British and American radicalism, as a consequence of an outbreak of scholastic debate regarding late-eighteenth century social thought in the 1980s. The debates originated in the work of J.G.A. Pocock, who asserted the existence of a long-lasting tradition of classical republicanism in eighteenth-century political writings.<sup>42</sup> His research gave rise to two different responses—one from researchers of liberalism, the other from those of republicanism. I shall be examining the republican elements in Paineite radicalism in the following section. For the present, we shall confine our attention to the usage of liberalism.

Joyce Appleby, objecting to Pocock and emphasizing the liberal elements in Jeffersonian exponents of “the economy’s ordering of society with minimal compulsion,”<sup>43</sup> classified Paine as an economic liberal. However, her definition of “liberalism” is obscure and we can only surmise its connotations from her statement of the “liberal worldview.” Her “liberalism” comprises the affirmation of “rational self-interest” as “a principle of action,” and claims for “free choice,” “free inquiry,” “the rule of law,” and “electoral politics” as social goods.<sup>44</sup> She does not give much attention to the differences in reasoning underlying those affirmations and claims, deeming them to be based on natural endowment, namely on the natural law. This is because she understands that “economic liberalism” is founded upon the equation of the universal principle of rational self-interest with natural law. “The acceptance of the idea of universal economic rationality was the key step in the triumph of modern liberalism because the natural economic laws depend upon natural modes of behavior.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, she provides two examples. “An English pamphleteer in the seventeenth century” argued that the utility of self-interest could lay stronger restraint on behavior

<sup>42</sup>Pocock 2003/1975, 333–552.

<sup>43</sup>Appleby 1992, 337.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 55.

than conscience, religion, or honor because there is no hypocrisy in interest. Further, in the United States—opposing the upper-class gentlemen who spoke out “against the power of self-interest”—working-class resisters “hailed it as a ‘universal law.’” From these examples, Appleby concludes that universality of the effect of self-interest “could be equated with the uniform operation of natural laws,” and that “in the presumed naturalness of market behavior lay the key to converting self-interest from moral defect to an organizing principle of nature.”<sup>46</sup> Here, it must be noted that, although her description of self-interest emphasizes the promotion of self-interest to the level of a universal law, what she describes is, in our term, the substitution of the vocabulary of utility for that of jurisprudence.

Appleby is the first scholar to ascribe much attention to the realignment of political thought brought about in the eighteenth-century by the knowledge of political economy. However, when she evaluates seventeenth and eighteenth-century social discourses from the perspective of nineteenth-century economics, in other words, when she inserts a full-fledged *homo economicus* into a previous stage of history, the multiple elements of radicalism are overlooked. Her frame of reference, particularly her description of Adam Smith, was bitterly criticized by Donald Winch, who observes that not only “the emphasis on microeconomics” but also “other references to ‘marginal determinants’, ‘utility maximization’, and ‘mechanical adjustments’” complete a picture of Smith as the embodiment not so much of classical but of post-marginalist economics.<sup>47</sup>

Isaac Kramnick, also opposing Pocock’s “republican revisionism,” maintains Lockean liberalism to be the mainstream in the English-speaking world. His concept of liberalism comprises the approval of the self-interested, competitive individual and the claim for private rights. He remarks: “Central and enduring in liberalism is this unique conception of liberty and equality, rooted principally in attitudes toward work and the marketplace, toward achievement and talent.”<sup>48</sup> At first glance, these components seem similar to those identified by Appleby, but these various foundations of liberalism differ considerably. Kramnick’s liberalism, which he describes as Lockean, first of all assumes that “the race of life”<sup>49</sup> prevails in the state of nature; in other words, that human nature implies motion and competition. According to him, this assumption originated from Thomas Hobbes, and was accepted by Locke and Adam Smith alike. Locke approved “unlimited acquisition of money and wealth”<sup>50</sup> as a result of industrious labor, and proposed a new understanding of individuals, which defines them “in terms of what they achieve in the race of life ... this sense of

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>47</sup>Winch 1985, 291.

<sup>48</sup>Kramnick 1990, 4.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 7.

achievement seen increasingly in terms of work and victory in a market society where talent and industry have their play.”<sup>51</sup> Smith also wove into his theory the Hobbesian understanding of human nature, which was expressed best by him when he says that ambition is a desire by which all men are motivated throughout a lifetime and that life is a “race for wealth and honor and preferments.”<sup>52</sup>

Kramnick argues that this competitive individual demands to compete without fetters—in other words, with a fundamental equality to his or her competitors in the state of nature—and that the government serves only as “an inexpensive and impartial umpire over the ‘race for wealth and honors.’”<sup>53</sup> It will be clear from these features that Kramnick’s “liberalism” is founded upon the assumption of the continued existence of the “race” and it is this aspect that makes his concept of liberalism a very broad, and hence useless, category of classification. What Kramnick accomplishes in his analysis of thinkers, particularly of Smith, is the abstraction of Hobbesian elements from various other elements in their thought. This means that every thinker can be encompassed by Kramnick’s liberalism. However, I will show what important features of Smith’s work this abstraction overlooks.

Although Smith used the word “race” in his writings, what he means by it is neither “a struggle for existence”<sup>54</sup> nor “a war of every one against every one.”<sup>55</sup> Instead, he carefully supplements its meaning by the use of the word “emulation.” “Emulation” means an attempt to surpass the achievements of other people that the individual in question appreciates and esteems by following the example of those people or achievements. Smith 1979/1776 says: “[r]ivalship and emulation render excellency, even in mean professions, an object of ambition, and frequently occasion the very greatest exertions.”<sup>56</sup> It is an essential element of the improvement of society, and yields great benefit and utility to the whole. Smith’s conception of political economy transferred the “race” from the vocabulary of jurisprudence to that of utility and drew a different conclusion, namely, improvement not war. It is for this reason, at least in part, that in Smith’s work a government with absolute power was considered unnecessary and the state was summoned only to umpire. Kramnick overlooks this change in the vocabulary applied to the understanding of society.

Since not only the term “liberalism” but also the term “bourgeois radicalism” is employed in Kramnick’s research, let us now turn to a consideration

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 8. Smith (1979b/1759) says; “In the race for wealth, and honours, and preferments, he may run as hard as he can, and strain every nerve and every muscle, in order to outstrip all his competitors.” (Smith 1979b/1759, 83)

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>54</sup>Darwin 1968/1859, 114–129.

<sup>55</sup>Hobbes 1960/1651, 82.

<sup>56</sup>Smith 1979a/1776, 759–760.

of his usage of the latter. Kramnick says, “The ideology of English social radicalism begins ... with Thomas Hobbes,”<sup>57</sup> and emphasizes the importance of the Hobbesian model of individualistic society in the state of nature where people “constantly compete with one another for power, wealth, and glory”<sup>58</sup> because society is filled with a fundamental equality of opportunities to take action; this model led people to believe that “their own enterprise and ability mattered; they possessed the opportunity ... to determine their place through their own voluntary actions in this life and in this world.”<sup>59</sup> While Dickinson, as we have seen, refers to the Protestant Dissenters’ doctrine of the natural equality of all men as one of the elements of radicalism, Kramnick considers the Dissenters’ claim for natural equality as amounting to a claim to equal opportunity to undertake enterprise and views “the entrepreneurial spirit” as “a transatlantic radicalism.”<sup>60</sup> He emphasizes the aspect that natural equality means not leveling, but equal opportunity and as a result describes such a claim as “bourgeois.” According to Kramnick, although the claim for equality of opportunity was embodied in a demand for the abolition of the aristocracy, that is, the annulment of privilege and rank, the claim was also compatible with the principle of the determination of political and social placement by talent, merit, and hard work.<sup>61</sup> Such is Kramnick’s concept of bourgeois radicalism. In his view, constant existence of competition among individuals as a product of basic human nature is assumed, and his “liberalism” means a demand to restore a fetterless condition of competition in the state of nature, that is, the state without government or regime. This aligns closely with the manner in which his “radicalism” means a demand to restore a fundamental equal footing among individuals. Accordingly, he says that Godwin as well as Paine are to be classified as bourgeois radicals for the reason that “he demanded no leveling or arbitrary equalization, only equality of opportunity.”<sup>62</sup> He certainly succeeds in drawing the distinction between the appeal to the ancient rights of Englishmen and that to fundamental equality, but his conceptualization—solely developed in the vocabulary of jurisprudence, particularly “competition,” a hypothetical concept used by social-contract theory in jurisprudence<sup>63</sup>—fails to grasp many elements of the vocabulary of utility in late-eighteenth century discourses.

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>63</sup>Hobbes 1960/1651, 110–113, Hobbes argues that, since “men are continually in competition for honor and dignity”, they require “a common power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the common benefit.” (Hobbes 1960/1651, 110).

Kramnick characterizes Paine as a “radical liberal,” and emphasizes the existence of liberal elements in Paine by pointing out “his obsession with taxation.” He considers this obsession as an outcome of Paine’s understanding of taxation as “the real threat to individual freedom.”<sup>64</sup> However, David Wootton raises a doubt regarding this interpretation of Paine. “In Kramnick’s interpretation, Paine is an individualist who sees government only as a source of what is evil, of punishment and taxes, not of anything that is good. And yet it is this same Paine who wants—perhaps already in 1776—the government to use taxes to pay pensions to the elderly, and to provide the young with an initial capital sum which they can invest in their own business. ... If one thinks of Paine as an individualist and a capitalist, all this makes little sense.”<sup>65</sup> In Paine’s writings, “tax,” as well as “commerce,” is a very significant concept, for it shows a merger of the vocabulary of rights into that of utility, chiefly in the vocabulary of commerce. Paine says that there are some rights that man “throws into the common stock as a member of society”; for fear that he should have no power to redress wrongs done in these areas, he “deposits this rights in the common stock of society, and takes the arm of society, of which he is a part, in preference and in addition to his own. Society grants him nothing. Every man is a proprietor in society, and draws on the capital as a matter of right.”<sup>66</sup>

What Paine means here is no longer purely the procedure of establishment of sovereignty by the cession of rights. Since the entrustment, rather than cession, of rights is identified with taxation and investment in public credit, the phrase conveys a complete double meaning. The vocabulary of utility and commerce evidently encroaches on the vocabulary of rights and jurisprudence. Given that Paine used to work as excise officer, it is not surprising that he founded the joint-proprietorship of everyman for the common stock on the payment of excise. In the second part of *The Rights of Man*, he illustrates the colossal size of the excise tax in comparison with those of other taxes, and observes that the excise tax upon beer “falls only on those ... who must purchase it in small quantities;” but they are “not sensible of this, because it is disguised ... in the articles which” they buy.<sup>67</sup> In order to adequately understand Paine’s argument, we need to notice that it is the so-called “fiscal-military state” formed since the Glorious Revolution that he criticized. His detailed explanation and analysis of changes in taxation since the Hanover succession should be understood not only as a simple claim for the “self-regulation over expensive and tyrannical taxation,”<sup>68</sup> but also as a justification of the right of representation of the people. The popular slogan

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid, 156.

<sup>65</sup>Wootton 1994, 35.

<sup>66</sup>Paine 1791/1995b, 119.

<sup>67</sup>Paine 1792/1995c, 278, 285, 292.

<sup>68</sup>Kramnick 1990, 157.

and principle “no taxation without representation” can be rephrased: “taxation with representation.”

### 3 Republicanism and the vocabulary of civic humanism

In the 1970s, when Dickinson was researching the British radicalism of the 1790s, republicanism was not explicitly counted as one of the elements of radicalism, because, as Caroline Robbins shows in *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*, the republican element was incorporated in the notion of the ancient constitution and the intrinsic rights of Englishmen. However, Pocock’s research and the analytical category he develops—the vocabulary of civic humanism—brought republicanism into the spotlight. Many researchers, including those who adopted a critical position to Pocock, have nevertheless come to pay attention to republican elements and their continuation from seventeenth-century England to eighteenth-century Great Britain and America. However, they encountered an anomaly, namely Thomas Paine. Even Pocock acknowledges that Paine is “difficult to fit into any kind of category.”<sup>69</sup> This difficulty was to increase when researchers dealt with the late-eighteenth century discourses influenced by Paine.

What exactly is anomalous in the Paineites? It is that, while they describe themselves as republican, they place great value on commerce? According to Pocock’s historiography, republicanism and commerce in this era are incompatible. Despite his acknowledgement of political economy as “a nascent social science of a remarkably new order,” Pocock considers it as “an ideological defense of the Whig” commercial order that had been challenged by classical republicanism, employing the vocabulary of civic humanism, in the eighteenth century. Refuting the ideology of civic patriot virtue embedded in the vocabulary of civic humanism, the defenders of the Whig commercial order invented the replacement ideology of manner, which saw commerce as “the sole agency capable of refining the passions and polishing the manners” through encounters with various people in trade.<sup>70</sup> Thus, Pocock considers that it is political economy out of which the ideology of manner was fabricated for the sake of the Whig commercial order. This ideology includes concepts such as manners, politeness, and taste; these features are rather different from those employed in the vocabulary of utility. However, Pocock does not acknowledge that political economy brought about a novel vocabulary. For him, political economy results in no more than “commercial individualism.” He says: “I contend that until the era of the American and French Revolutions, and perhaps for longer still, the appeal to commercial individualism was always conducted by English and

<sup>69</sup>Pocock 1985, 276.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 195.

Scottish writers as a vindication of established, and usually traditional, forms of authority. The tradition of thought which descended from Machiavelli through Harrington was normally critical of parliamentary [that is, established] authority and the commercial society.”<sup>71</sup> The description of the political climate in the Augustan Age by Pocock as a confrontation between republicanism and political economy is sufficiently accurate, since even in a wider historical context writers of political economy actually confronted certain forms of republicanism, such as that of ancient Sparta, to demonstrate the superiority of self-interest and utility over patriotic virtue and the common good.<sup>72</sup> So to speak, the ideology of political economy built up the vocabulary of utility through criticism of republicanism. However, Pocock dismisses this aspect too lightly.

As the above quotation from Pocock shows, within the conventional frame of reference republicanism and commerce were seen as incompatible. Hence, the fact that the Paineites adopted these two elements together drove researchers of republicanism into a theoretical puzzle and led them to describe Paineites as espousing “commercial republicanism” instead of “radicalism.”

Mark Philp and David Wootton have also studied the problem of commercial republicanism. Their studies additionally include research on Paineite radicalism in the 1790s. Let us now examine the conceptualization and classification of “republicanism” that their works employ.

First of all, Philp distinguishes two meanings of “republican.” One is found in historical popular usage; the other is a category of discourse analysis. In the historical context of Great Britain, and also in the study of the history of thought, “republicanism” has had various meanings. Although nowadays the term “republic” means a regime without a monarch, Philp points out that “republic” has been used in contrast by British writers to describe historical polities that were not constitutional monarchies but instead despotisms or tyrannies. It is in this sense that it can be said that a mixed government is the best form of a republican regime; this usage has a long tradition. Philp traces “the ideal of a mixed government of the one, the few and the many, sustaining a balance of class forces which could steer the state away from domination by any particular class” back to Polybius and Machiavelli<sup>73</sup> By the term “republican principle” some people meant that which guides a regime to keep away domination by any particular power, whether individual or class-based, by the development of a system where the constituents of the regime mutually check one another’s power. Philp asserts the existence of this classical notion and argues that while the institutional structure of the British regime was put up for debate in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the classical notion of the republican principle was preserved in the understanding of the regime as a

<sup>71</sup>Pocock 1981, 58.

<sup>72</sup>See, for example, Melon 1738/1734, ch. 9.

<sup>73</sup>Philp 1998, 241.

“mixed government.” While some elements of republican and civic humanism remained in the doctrine of mixed government through the eighteenth century, he acknowledges that “others became increasingly marginal to political debate.”<sup>74</sup>

If this is the case, what elements of republicanism remained? Before answering this question, we must draw attention to a matter of confusion in the common conceptualization of republicanism. Philp presents two different understandings of “republicanism” as a technical term. One comes from the Aristotelian view, which considers man a political animal. This “authentic” republicanism considers participation in public political life to be an indispensable element for the self-realization of the human being. The other is the liberalized or “Anglicized” version, which understands the venerated “common good” to refer to the security and liberties shared and held in common by all constituents of the republic. Philp points out that the latter type of republicanism differs from liberalism in only two points: First, its political awareness and the strong motivation it provided for contribution to the public good and participation in public life; second, its understanding of liberty as lack of domination by others, in contrast with the liberalist understanding of it as non-interference by public power.<sup>75</sup>

It is this modification of republicanism that was to bring about the emergence of “commercial republicanism.” Philp argues that, while there were undoubtedly some discourses that appealed to civic virtues in the attacks against the Court Whigs at the beginning of the eighteenth century, a conceptual modification also occurred on the side of “commerce,” which resulted in the invention of the “commercial republic.” The key to the innovation of “commerce” was a change in the evaluation of trade and the accumulation of wealth. These activities, which were formerly criticized as corrupt and self-interested, became acknowledged as “symptoms of civic health and strength” and accordingly compatible with liberalized republicanism.<sup>76</sup>

What, then, gave rise to this change in views of commerce? Philp mentions Montesquieu, Ferguson, and some theorists in the Scottish Enlightenment as proponents of the ideal of the “commercial republic.” He observes that in addition to the invention of and advocacy for of the ideal, demands for institutional guarantees regarding participation in public life, such as “the liberty of the press and freedom of speech, ... broadening popular participation in elections, and ... particular institutional and constitutional safeguards against usurpation—including petitioning, [and] the use of juries,” led to “a growing tolerance for the pursuit of individual interests and a willingness to interpret the common good of the commonwealth”; he goes on to say that two other factors—the abandonment of the notion of “restoration of the past”

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 239.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 241.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 242.

induced by the acceptance of “innovation” and “progress,” and the claim for the franchise—made a significant impact on republicanism.<sup>77</sup>

Despite his enumeration of a large number of factors, Philp leaves the central problem untouched. The question posed above as to what changed views on commerce is equivalent to asking how the compatibility of self-interest with the public good was reasoned from the concept of commerce. The very question requires the introduction of the vocabulary of utility into the analysis of social discourse. It can be supposed that this change occurred when the term “commerce” became one of the items in the vocabulary utility. However, as the purpose of this paper is the re-examination of analytical categories, I would like to avoid entering into an actual analysis of discourse. Rather, I shall show another example of an inconvenience that has resulted from the absence of the vocabulary of utility. Wootton remarks, “[T]he Marxists agreed with the liberals: in their view too Locke was the central philosopher of the new age, and they and the liberals agreed that the progress of Lockean values was intimately linked to the advance of commerce.”<sup>78</sup> This illustrates a dichotomy in both Marxist and liberal thought between liberalism and royal absolutism. In this dichotomy, commerce belongs to the former, but Wootton immediately indicates the inappropriateness of this classification because Pocock has shown that in England it was the Court and the Court Whigs who had appreciated commercial values. Unless the vocabulary of utility is introduced as a viable category, any reference to “commerce” is to be classified as “possessive individualism” or “Lockean liberalism,” or otherwise to the “ideology of manner.” Although the effect of the very concept of commerce, if it is founded on political economy, is to break up individualism and to shore up liberalism, the concept has still wandered and failed to settle down into any particular analytical category.

For all the weakness of his analysis of discourse about commerce, Philp is fairly reasonable when he explains a British peculiarity with regard to the claim for the franchise. He points out that while the claim for universal male suffrage had been made since the beginning of the American Revolution, and that justifications for it had become diverse toward the end of the eighteenth century, the claim had consistently arisen out of the desire to maintain constitutional balance. However, the word “balance” may easily mislead us unless we provide a supplementary explanation. As we have seen above, the classical definition of a republic was a state able to avoid falling under the domination of an individual. Balance of class forces was not the primary goal.

This balance is no more than a necessary precondition. Instead, the ultimate aim was to constantly give rise to *agones*, an ancient Greek word meaning “contests,” “challenges,” or “debates.” Arthur O’Connor, a typical Paineite, provides a clear example. In his speech in the Irish parliament in 1791, he said: “It is at all

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 242.

<sup>78</sup>Wootton 1994, 13.

times a difficult task to balance out three estates, but most of all when the third [i.e., the representative democracy] has nearly merged between the other two. If the Monarchy predominates, the people find it easy to control it within constitutional bounds, whilst defeated Aristocracy will oppose it with all the malice of vindictive opposition, stimulated by disappointment, to undermine its credit with the people upon plausible pretences, if within reach—if not, invention will be set upon the rack to effect it without them.”<sup>79</sup> What the passage makes clear at once is that there has been a substitution of the vocabulary of utility for that of jurisprudence. The authentic republican notion of the *agon* among political animals changed to that of rivalry among self-interest using the vocabulary of utility.

It was not exclusively the defenders of the status quo who developed arguments in terms of interest and utility. O’Connor’s understanding of the operation of mixed government is evidently founded on the assumption of rivalries between branches or entities. He also describes the considerable change in the mixture of force and weight of the components in the British parliament, a situation that had been brought about by the patronage of the Crown in the eighteenth-century, in the following manner: the “uniform property” of monarchy and aristocracy is to entrust power not to “the control of the many” but to “the government of the few.”<sup>80</sup>

As mentioned above, Philp finds the historical understanding of republicanism to be one in which it is focused on preventing the kind of domination discussed above; however, he interprets “balance of power” to mean only separation of power. Hence, according to him, it is with the intent to secure the independence of the Commons from the Crown and the Lords that the representative system was argued to be necessary. In other words, the Commons, which had been considered overly influenced by the patronage of the Crown and the Lords, was expected to regain independence through the representative system. Philp concludes that a fair number of debates about suffrage took place in the eighteenth century, and “revolved around the idea of a balance, even when they appealed to other values.”<sup>81</sup> His interpretation of “balance of power” here leads us to miss the nitty-gritty. As the passage from O’Connor clearly shows, the real problem was in the absence of checks among the three estates within Parliament.

Before examining the republican approach to Paine, one more aspect must be clarified. Philp reckons commercial republicanism, including Paineite thought, to result from a transformation of the language of republicanism in the early eighteenth century—what can be called in Pocock’s terminology the “Country ideology.” Examining the broad lines of debate, Philp remarks: “In this process,

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<sup>79</sup>O’Connor’s speech on 19 March 1791, in *The Parliamentary Register: or, History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland*, vol. XI (Dublin, 1791), 351.

<sup>80</sup>O’Connor 1794, 19.

<sup>81</sup>Philp 1998, 254.

the more classically inspired language of republicanism which we can find in the early eighteenth century became increasingly tangled in a variety of other indigenous strands of political and philosophical thought.”<sup>82</sup> This remark brings us to the question of whether the vocabulary of republicanism was actually the basis of the transformation; a certain amount of room seems to be left to make the counterproposal that the basis was instead the vocabulary of utility, which the ideology of the Court Whigs began to employ, and the vocabulary of republicanism was merely an inducement to an awareness of the common good. Although Philp himself repeatedly enumerates other principles and foundations—“natural rights, utilitarianism, private judgment, economic and land reform”—these elements are made light of as “yoked to republicanism and ‘French principles.’”<sup>83</sup> These elements, particularly those that Philp describes as Scottish political economy, expedience, utility, and proto-utilitarianism, are left uncategorized unless the vocabulary of utility is exploited as an analytical category.

Now that we have clarified the remaining problems in the analysis of commercial republicanism, we are ready to consider Paine’s thought in republican terms. Paine can be seen as a typical example of “Anglicized” republicanism, which is commercial republicanism. However, Philp argues, if we apply not the Anglicized but the “authentic” standard of republicanism to Paine, labeling him as a republican presents a paradox because his “understanding of politics was a very narrow one”; Paine’s argument for reductions in taxes and the size of government is “expressly libertarian.”<sup>84</sup> However, the well-known dichotomy between libertarianism and communitarianism is inappropriate for the analysis of “social” thought, particularly for Paine, since for him communities are not formed through the political will of individuals but instead they result from individuals’ industrious activity in pursuit of their own well-being and happiness. Paine’s “commercial society” remains an aggregation of individuals without any political operation present to integrate them into a whole and refine private will or motivation into a public and general will. Paine founds his “commercial society” upon the reciprocal economic relationships that result from commercial activities. It is because he transferred most social relationships from the political sphere to the economic that his thought appears, incorrectly, to be libertarian. In his view, politics are meant only to supplement social activities in the economic sphere, or as Philp says, “to enable every individual to take his or her place within a commercial society by providing them with support in distress and an initial capital with which to begin adult life.”<sup>85</sup>

Despite the scantiness of republican elements in their thought, Paine and the Paineites called themselves republicans. What, then, did they mean? Their usage

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 253.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 246.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 246.

of this term has misled us for a long time. According to Philp, Paine himself provided “the most successful redefinition” of republicanism, after which the word came to bear a new meaning in the Anglo-American world.<sup>86</sup> Paine, in other words, successfully united “republicanism” and “representative government.” He says in *Common Sense*: “It is the republican and not the monarchical, part of the constitution of England, which Englishmen glory in, viz. the liberty of choosing an house of commons from out of their own body.”<sup>87</sup> Paine condemned the notion of checks between the Crown and the Commons as being of “no meaning” and a “flat contradiction,” and recommended the representative system for “convenience.”<sup>88</sup> He asserted that maintenance of a dangerous power which people need constantly to check is wasteful, and that the representative system incorporates a more effective means of checking, namely frequent elections. In his account of the formation of a government, its functions are reduced to policing and providing infrastructure. The government is turned into a business enterprise for public utility and the people became its joint entrepreneurs. Unlike Kramnick’s model, it is not individuals but political subjects whom Paine considers entrepreneurs. Political representation becomes identified with entrustment, analogous to a relationship of management by proxy, and frequent elections are recognized as a device to ensure the existence of common interests between representatives and other entrepreneurs. Paine observes, “[A]s this frequent interchange will establish a common interest with every part of the community, they will mutually and naturally support each other.”<sup>89</sup> In *The Rights of Man* (1791), he describes civil rights as “a natural right exchanged,” and the foundation of a government of reason as “the common interest of society, and the common rights of man.”<sup>90</sup> Despite his use of the word “right,” the language of politics (the vocabulary of jurisprudence) is to a great extent replaced with that of political economy (the vocabulary of utility). Philp judges the redefined meaning of “republican” as “not republican in any of the technical senses of that term,”<sup>91</sup> and sends Paine back to “radicalism.”

### 3 Radicalism and Utilitarianism

Through a re-examination of some of the preceding research, the difficulties in classification and the obscurity and inappropriateness in the previous scholarly usage of some technical terms has been illustrated. At this point, it is necessary

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>87</sup>Paine 1995a/1776, 19.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>90</sup>Paine 1995b/1791, 120.

<sup>91</sup>Philp 1998, 252.

to deal more carefully with the terms “radicalism” and “utilitarianism.” Philp applies the term “proto-utilitarian” to utilitarian elements in eighteenth-century discourses and thought. David Wootton, a researcher of British republicanism, also points out the importance of utilitarianism in the following manner: “I argue that a hitherto neglected source [of *Common Sense*, namely, Giacinto Dragonetti] suggests historians of republicanism have failed to pay sufficient attention to the utilitarianism of Beccaria and Priestley.”<sup>92</sup> After his close examination of the influence of “commercial society” on republican tradition, Wootton concludes that, as Halévy (1972/1928) has argued, Paine can be classified into the tradition of utilitarianism and goes on to say, “It is perfectly natural for a utilitarian to argue some of the time for less government—for freedom of the press and religion, and for lower taxes—and at other times for more—for social welfare legislation and public works.”<sup>93</sup> However, Wootton, as well as Philp, is extremely careful regarding the usage of “utilitarianism” and adds an explanatory note: “Here and elsewhere I do not intend to use the word ‘utilitarian’ in a narrowly technical sense: I believe, though, that my usage is in line with that of Elie Halévy’s *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*.”<sup>94</sup> His words clearly show the inconvenience historians have been subjected to until now. Hence, in this section, we will begin with the forging of a technical term—the vocabulary of utility—as a significantly different category from “utilitarianism,” discuss its relationship to political economy, and finally provide a re-definition of “radicalism.”

Halévy’s work explains the formation and characteristics of utilitarianism. First, utilitarianism is a scientific attempt motivated by the scientism that emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century, which was intended to build up a new moral and legal theory founded upon experimental evidence and exact disciplines equivalent to the physics of Newton. “In this moral Newtonianism the principle of association of ideas and the principle of utility take the place of the principle of universal attraction.”<sup>95</sup> Halévy considers these two principles as indispensable elements for utilitarianism and accordingly considers that Locke, for all the prevailing understanding of him as a prototype of scientism, cannot be classified as a proto-utilitarian due to the absence of traces of “a methodical development of a Utilitarian morality” or “a universal application of the principle of association.”<sup>96</sup> If this strict standard is applied, even Hume barely measures up. Halévy, however, argues that “the germ of the various interpretations of the principle of utility which might be, and indeed subsequently were,

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<sup>92</sup>Wootton 1994, 2.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 413.

<sup>95</sup>Halévy 1972/1928, 6.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 7.

put forward” exists in Hume.<sup>97</sup> The reason why Hume bears utilitarian elements is that he advances in his writings a general thesis that pleasure is the end of human action.

Moreover, there is another requisite for utilitarianism, which is the acceptance of a postulate that different pleasures are comparable with each other in quantitative terms: Pleasures and pains are calculable. A final point is a political creed that understands the end pursued by morality and legislation to be “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” and identifies “the interest of all with the interest of each.”<sup>98</sup> If the Benthamian creed that “the function of government is to promote the happiness of society by rewards and punishment” is further added as a requisite, the extension of the term would be even narrower.

Such are the requisites for utilitarianism in the exact sense. Therefore, this term is inappropriate for the analysis of social thought and discourse, since they are neither scientific theories that follow the model of physical science, nor designed to be so. We must introduce another term that is distinguished from “utilitarianism.”

As Wootton suggests, Halévy does prepare another term, the “language of utility,” which comes from his awareness of expressions peculiar to the British. According to his account of the formation of the language of utility, in England the word “interest” had been preferred and substituted for the words “class” or “rights”; for example, “landed interest” or “moneyed interest” for the class of landlords or of moneyed men and “vested interest” for an acquired right. Hence, when the democrats sought to spread their ideas in an intelligible manner to their fellow countrymen, they were led to “speak the language of utility, to translate their programme of political reforms into the common language,” drawing on the writings of Bentham and Adam Smith.<sup>99</sup> The efforts of reformers to gain the people’s attention and understanding resulted in the substitution of the language of utility for that of politics.

Halévy points out that in *The Wealth of Nations* Smith saw interest in one’s own subsistence and happiness as a human tendency, and declares: “It was this idea of utility and not the idea of liberty or intellectual emancipation which was fundamental in Adam Smith. ...”<sup>100</sup> Halévy also classifies Paine as a user of the language of utility, for the reason that his notion of primitive society is the economic and not the jurisprudential state of nature; society “is founded on the principle of exchange, in other words, on the principle of natural identity of interests—that is to say, on one form of the principle of utility.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 189.

However, when he concludes that Paine's democratic philosophy "returns to the philosophical tradition of Hume and Adam Smith, that is to say of the philosophy of utility,"<sup>102</sup> his argument, as can be seen in the use of the term "the philosophy" of utility, leaves obscure the question of the relationship between the language of utility and political economy. However, before discussing that, a broad definition of the "language of utility" must be provided. Several observations in the last few paragraphs make it clear that the language of utility was a sort of index that accepted and justified affairs on the grounds of interest and usefulness (utility).

Michel Foucault applies the term "English radicalism" to the language of utility. According to him, this radicalism was brought about by the emergence of English empiricism and political economy and coalesced in confrontation with the problem of "how to set juridical limits to the exercise of power by a public authority."<sup>103</sup> In those days, there were essentially two possible ways of solving this problem. One is Rousseau's approach, which starts from the principle of rights, and the other was that of English radicalism, which comprises the analysis of government practice in terms of utility. The latter defines the government's sphere of competence on the basis of the utility that government intervention would bring about. "The question addressed to government at every moment of its action and with regard to each of its institutions, old or new, is: Is it useful? For what is it useful? Within what limits is it useful? When does it stop being useful? When does it become harmful? This is not the revolutionary question: What are my original rights and how can I assert them against any sovereign? But it is the radical question, the question of English radicalism; the problem of English radicalism is the problem of utility."<sup>104</sup> In Foucault's usage, "radical" signifies in its original sense, that is, in relation to the fundamental nature of something. The following is a more precise explanation of this aspect.

It is the concept of "interest" that is at the core of this radicalism. As seen earlier, many researchers, even Halévy, have used the term as if its meaning were self-evident or given, without providing any clear analysis, and accordingly, some inconsistencies have been left untouched. However, Foucault, gives an intelligible explanation of the term's origin and its contents. What is called "interest" is a "principle of an irreducible, non-transferable, atomic individual choice," and this choice is "unconditionally referred to the subject himself."<sup>105</sup> Foucault ascribes this principle to Hume, since it is Hume's empirical philosophy that first declared that the ultimate principle is nothing but the feeling of self-interest of each individual based on sensations of pleasure and pain, and

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 190.

<sup>103</sup>Foucault 2008/1978–1979, 39.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 272.

that this feeling cannot be reduced further. Since the feeling of interest refers directly to the individual him- or herself, and is not transferable to another person, it should be continually retained by the subject. On the other hand, the subject of “rights” accepts the principle that natural rights are ceded for the sake of the establishment of the juridical will (positive laws) and agrees in this sense to self-renunciation.

As a result of this difference in characteristics between the subjects in the two posited models, the subject of interest is irreducible to the subject of rights. Hence, the subject of interest remains after the establishment of positive laws and becomes the permanent condition for the functioning of the self-ceded subject of rights. Interest can be defined as a form of will that is both directly and unconditionally subjective. This form of will is “the source of interest, the starting point of an interest, or the site of a mechanism of interests.”<sup>106</sup> With this “interest,” Hume replaced the jurisprudential basis of the continued existence of institutions. In a well-known example, he asserted that the reason contracts are respected is “not because we have contracted that we respect the contract, but because it is in our interest that there is a contract.”<sup>107</sup> That is to say, what brings about the continued existence of a contract is not the juridical will but an element located by the subject of interest in his calculation of his interest.

Such is Foucault’s analysis of the formation and nature of the subject of interest beginning with Hume. It is this subject that eighteenth-century British thought tacitly assumed and held in common as an image of the human. The subject of interest occurs naturally and can coexist with other subjects of interest, since interests are supposed to increase mutually. For example, as the famous phrase in the exordium of *Common Sense* clearly conveys,<sup>108</sup> in Paine’s view, it is civil society, composed of the subjects of interest, which forms the basis of the human community; the political institution, the civil government, is supplementary, and its establishment secondary.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, the subject of rights is the “constituter” or initiator of another, more supreme subject of rights, such as a state, through a contract, that is, through the principle

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 273.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 274.

<sup>108</sup>Paine 1995a/1776, 5. He remarks: “Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness.”

<sup>109</sup>As to the necessary formation of society, Paine remarks: “In all cases [Nature] made [man] greater than his individual powers. No one man is capable, without the aid of society, of supplying his own wants.” This “mutual dependence and reciprocal interest which man has upon man, and all the parts of civilised community upon each other, create that great chain of connection which holds it together.” (Paine 1995c/1792, 214) In more improved civilization, he says, a few general laws of “common usefulness” are required, and laws of trade and commerce “are followed and obeyed, because it is the interest of the parties so to do.” (Paine 1995c/1792, 216).

of the ceding of his natural rights. The French Jacobin is typical of the subject of rights.<sup>110</sup>

The emergence of the subject of interest changed the scope of the affairs the state was requested to deal with. The function of the state became understood as “government,” that is, management for the sake of common interests through the building-up of a system that leads each individual to recognize his own interest and pursue it without hindrance. The mercantile system failed as a motivating constituent of government because it conducted its functions by the power of ordinance based on *raison d'état*. However, the political economy of Adam Smith provided a doctrine that enabled his contemporaries to maintain that the mercantile motivation of the state was a hindrance to good government. Therefore, as the above-cited passage shows, the very knowledge of political economy leads to the interrogation of government. Foucault observes, “[E]conomics is a discipline that begins to demonstrate not only the pointlessness, but also the impossibility of a sovereign point of view over the totality of the state that he has to govern. Economics steals away from the juridical form of the sovereign exercising sovereignty within a state, precisely that which is emerging as the essential element of a society’s life, namely economic process.”<sup>111</sup> In broad terms, British radicalism is a commencement of the undermining of juridical reason by political economy; in concrete terms, it is a commencement of the replacement of the juridical basis of the continued existence of institutions with one rooted in the language of utility.

It is useful at this point to clearly explain the difference between utilitarianism and radicalism. As Bentham clearly shows, while utilitarianism dismissed the language of rights, it saw the juridical system and political institutions as crucial factors directly influencing an individual’s feelings of pleasure and pain, and attached great importance to them as a result, whereas the basis of the justification of laws was located in utility, not in the ceding of natural rights with consent. On the other hand, while radicalism places on its starting point a subject who perceives pleasure and interest, unlike utilitarianism it does not see another, superior factor capable of controlling the subject’s feelings of pleasure as a requisite for society. Each individual is assumed to be an independent perceiver of interest and pleasure. As an analytical category, “radical” should be confined to ideas in accordance with this principle.

#### 4 Conclusion

Originally, the civic-humanist vocabulary of virtue and the jurisprudential vocabulary of rights and law were not dichotomous. However, influenced by

<sup>110</sup>Foucault 2008/1978–1979, 39–40.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 282.

the well-known dichotomous categorization in politics between libertarian and communitarian, they have come to be understood as dichotomous by a considerable number of researchers, particularly those with a political focus. This misunderstanding, rooted in a liberal antagonism toward Pocock's doctrine of classical republicanism, has caused a great number of confusions and inconsistencies in the usage of "liberalism" and the choice to use it rather than "republicanism." This obscure enlargement of the category of liberalism has veiled the existence and nature of the intellectual changes influenced by the advent of political economy.

That the discourse advocating political reform of the 1790s should have been classified as an example of vocabulary of utility was recognized by Dickinson in the 1970s. However, it was seen as in opposition to the language of rights advanced by Paine, and accordingly the merger and substitution that occurred between the two vocabularies were overlooked. While the vocabulary of utility was considered to be opposed to the vocabulary of jurisprudence, it was subsequently merged into the vocabulary of jurisprudence by the enlargement of the category of liberalism, for "liberalism" became understood as reliance on the assumption of the self-sustenance of commercial society and the advocacy of government non-interference. This liberalism was also considered to be in opposition to the language of rights, which demands political participation. Accordingly, the emergence of the new vocabulary was reduced in the scholarly mind to a conflict between two elements in the juridical vocabulary.

The use of the civic-humanist and the jurisprudential vocabularies as tools of discourse analysis is certainly useful when they are employed for research on Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment or on social discourses in early eighteenth-century England. However, as the ideas of political economy spread, particularly after *The Wealth of Nations*, social discourses came to bear some novel elements that neither of the two vocabularies contained.

The core concept of the vocabulary of utility is "interest." This entails a subject by whom the feeling of interest is felt. Interest is a feeling of fundamental, unconditionally related pleasure and pain in the subject. In this sense, it is very radical, and consequently the vocabulary of utility can be better called an expression of "radicalism" than of "utilitarianism." This new usage of "radicalism" is totally different from the dominant usage hitherto in which the term means only half-baked claims for rights. The adoption of these concepts—"the vocabulary of utility" and "radicalism"—would make the superficial and obscure category of "economic liberalism" useless, at least in the field of the history of social thought.

"Republicanism" as an analytical category has been fairly well organized and explored. On the other hand, "liberalism" remains rather messy. The tidying up of "liberalism" by historians of economic thought is needed. This paper represents an attempt to begin this task.

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