

Cheney, Paul Burton: *Revolutionary Commerce. Globalization and the French Monarchy*. London: Harvard University Press 2010. ISBN: 978-0674047266; 320 S.

**Rezensiert von:** Michael R. Lynn, Purdue University North Central

The economic history of eighteenth-century France rose to prominence, and fell somewhat, alongside theories positing the economic origins of the French Revolution, but throughout this shift intellectual historians have continued to express a keen interest in the development of economic thought during that period. The idea of a commercial revolution, modeled by Great Britain but experienced elsewhere in different ways, has helped propel this interest as has the financial interrelationships between European countries and their various colonies.

Paul Cheney offers a contribution to this field of study through an in-depth exploration of eighteenth-century French economic thought. He achieves this by using the idea of globalization, admittedly anachronistic, but a notion which allows Cheney to analyze the „advances of trade“ (*le progrès du commerce*) and to subject Enlightenment theorists to a different sort of discussion, one in which he can explicitly outline the relationship between ideas and social change. Social and political interpretations of the French Revolution are not, Cheney argues, antithetical. Instead, economic authors of the eighteenth century explicitly articulated a vision for how best to structure France's political system.

After an introduction, in which he situates himself within the historiography and establishes some of his main questions, Cheney lays out his argument in seven substantive chapters. In the first chapter, Cheney offers a critique of the standard shift from a mercantilist to a physiocratic system over the course of the period. Montesquieu's 'De l'esprit des lois' (1748) influenced authors from both sides of this debate which leads Cheney to suggest that the differences between these two models were not the main divide in economic theory.

Instead, he posits an analysis based on the interrelation between different parts of the economy, especially on overseas trade, the

role of France's constitution in supporting its economic performance, and the place of *moeurs* as a category of economic thought. Here, Cheney points out that the vast majority of economic writers lived and worked in Paris, thus placing them in a bad position to recognize the full extent of overseas trade. Nonetheless, some authors, such as Pierre-Daniel Huet, Etienne de Silhouette, and the abbé de Saint-Pierre did address economic matters with a broad eye. They noted the importance of understanding the relationship between manufacture, commerce, navigation, and the political constitution of a nation, as well as the attitudes of its population toward such concerns as frivolity and luxury.

The second chapter turns to Montesquieu and looks at his main works to help understand his points of view. Montesquieu distinguishes economic systems as a function of political ideology, but he also differentiates between luxury trades and the carrying trade as the basic mode of operation. Ultimately, Cheney argues, to understand Montesquieu requires some knowledge of his biography. As a figure who traversed the divide between Paris and the provinces as well as someone enlightened who earned his living through agriculture, Montesquieu spanned the distances between center and periphery as well as between those with an agricultural view of France and those with a trans-Atlantic point of view. The third chapter turns to an exposition of philosophical history and its impact on the history of commerce. Examining authors such as the Chevalier d'Arcq and Georges-Marie Butel-Dumont, both of whom wrote works on the history of commerce and were influenced by Montesquieu, allows Cheney to analyze how two figures, from opposing points of view, drew on Montesquieu. As such, Montesquieu's influence cannot be compartmentalized as being in support of one view over another.

The next chapter turns to examine the role of finances, taxation, and expenditures. Cheney explores the Spanish case through a discussion of the writings of François Duverger Véron de Forbonnais although other authors, like Raynal, who wrote also on this topic. Cheney argues that the finance problems revealed the real issues facing France, including taxa-

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tion, ballooning debt, and the risk of despotism. The fifth chapter examines physiocracy. Although they decried history, against which they positioned themselves, a full reading of the extant sources indicates to Cheney that the Physiocrats talked about such topics frequently. An analysis of a Physiocratic journal indicates that over fourteen percent of the articles were on historical subjects and twenty percent dealt with history and colonial commerce. Pierre Rouband, a proponent of physiocracy, even wrote an extended historical work devoted to the implications of Europe's economic and political expansion into the Americas.

This leads to the sixth chapter in which Cheney discusses the idea of a *commerce national* within the context of both French and French colonial economics. Here, Cheney analyzes the role of the Exclusive, the trading group established in 1717. The debate over trading privileges extended across the eighteenth century even as France's political relationship with its colonies was also redefined. The colonies were forced to adopt policies that made them similar to France while simultaneously keeping them under the rule of the mother country. French colonies were to act like France, but have none of the rights.

In the last chapter, Cheney examines *l'Affaire des Colonies*, the debate over the fate of the colonies during the French Revolution. Even as the constitutional monarchy was failing to meet expectations at home, the slave societies of the colonies were arguing that slavery could not be eradicated without significant consequences. Globalization now posed something of a threat to France as the differences, political and economic, between France and its colonies starkly emerged. The question was how to apply universal principals without actual giving all people, such as slaves, access to them.

Thus, the expansion of the French economy left an indelible mark on political and social structures as writers attempted to reconcile changing economic ideas with the challenges presented by globalization. Well written and carefully researched, Cheney offers a more complicated vision of the relationships between eighteenth-century economic theories, and the role of Montesquieu and others

in the development of France's global economy, that helps elucidate the connections between economics and politics during the Enlightenment and at the start of the French Revolution.

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