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Republicanism and empire in Britain and France, 1763-1815

Note: this seminar will be hosted jointly by the Political Thought and the Modern European History Seminar, and will take place in the Knox Shaw Room, Sidney Sussex College, Monday, 20 Feb 2012, 5pm

The author

Richard Whatmore studied History as an undergraduate at Cambridge, and went on to doctoral research under the supervision of Istvan Hont; he obtained his PhD in 1995. He was appointed a Lecturer in Intellectual History at the University of Sussex in 1993, and has been successively Senior Lecturer and Reader, before being appointed Professor of Intellectual History and the History of Political Thought in 2009. He was Head of History between 2003 and 2006; since 2011 he has been Director of the Sussex Centre for Intellectual History. At Sussex he has continued the tradition of intellectual history originally shaped by John Burrow, Stefan Collini and Donald Winch; he has worked particularly closely with the last, with whom he shares his interest in eighteenth and nineteenth century political economy. Along with Collini and Brian Young, he edited the two-volume *Festschrift* in honour of Burrow and Winch, *Essays in British Intellectual History 1750-1950*, published in 2000). More recently he and Knud Haakonssen have been responsible for a renewed wave of activity at Sussex, marked by a series of conferences, workshops and research projects which have forged links between intellectual historians across the Atlantic and the Continent of Europe. This collaborative activity has also informed his writings, published and forthcoming, on the nature of intellectual history today.

The focus of Professor Whatmore's own scholarship has been the intellectual history of the French Revolution and the part played by political economy in articulating the issues at stake in the long conflict between France and Britain. He began his research at a time when both fields were at a low ebb, among French as well as Anglophone historians. In his first monograph, derived from his doctoral thesis, these themes were combined in a study of the economic thought of Jean-Baptiste Say, a thinker long neglected by the Ricardo-centric historians of economic thought. Since then he has taken up the challenge of one of the great, unexplored subjects in the history of later eighteenth-century political thought: Geneva after Rousseau. In a series of articles and a forthcoming monograph devoted to the *Représentants* and the subsequent Genevan intellectual diaspora, he has shown how vital was the contribution of the Genevans to both French and English debate. At the centre of their concerns, he argues, was the future of republicanism in a Europe divided between two models of commercial empire and public credit.

Main publications:

Republicanism and the French Revolution: An Intellectual History of Jean-Baptiste Say's Political Economy (Oxford: University Press, 2000)

Against War and Empire: Geneva, Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century, Yale University Press, forthcoming spring 2012

Economy, Polity, and Society: Essays in British Intellectual History, 1750-1950, and *History, Religion, and Culture: Essays in British Intellectual History, 1750-1950* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), edited with Stefan Collini and Brian Young
Advances in Intellectual History (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), edited with Brian Young

Abstract of the paper

In recent decades historians have ceaselessly debated the extent to which republican ideas can be found in the civilized monarchies of Britain and France in the eighteenth century. This paper will limit republican ideas to those expressed by people who called themselves republicans. In doing so it makes explicit a connection between the espousal of republicanism and the defence of the existing republics of Europe. The argument of the paper is that the late eighteenth century was a watershed in discussion of how to maintain republics. Republican liberty had always been associated with independence, and a republic could only be seen to be free if it could defend itself. There was, as Venturi told us many years ago, a republican crisis in the eighteenth century. The main reason was that republics could no longer stand militarily against large monarchies. This brought the issue of the size of the state to the fore, and it was recognized that republics could not turn themselves into empires in the manner of the large monarchies. The question of whether commercial states depended upon large markets, and whether large markets could only be maintained by monarchies with imperial aspirations was widely debated by republicans. In response many republicans began to consider the promotion of republican ideas, meaning ideas about maintaining Europe's small republics, in Britain and in France. Britain and France were chosen because for different reasons they were seen as potential friends to republican liberty, and also because of their commercial and diplomatic power. Republicans were in the vanguard of a debate about alternative futures for a Europe seemingly addicted to commerce and to war. They were particularly interested in transition mechanisms capable of turning small states into large states and vice versa, and of turning mercantile systems into an international order characterized by cosmopolitanism, moderate wealth, perpetual peace and the end of empire. The French Revolution, in breaking the association between republics and small states, challenged republicanism as traditionally conceived, and also led to the loss of the independence of all of Europe's republics, with the exception of San Marino. The paper goes on to consider the consequences for political thought in Britain and in France up to 1815.

Additional reading:

'Neither masters nor slaves'. Small states and Empire in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 'Lineages of Empire. The Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought', 155 (2009), 53-81

'Shelburne and Perpetual Peace: Small States, Commerce and International Relations within the Bowood Circle' in *An Enlightenment Statesman in Whig Britain: Lord Shelburne (1737-1805) in Context*, eds., Nigel Aston and Clarissa Campbell Orr (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 249-273

'War, trade and empire: the dilemmas of French liberal political economy, 1780-1816', in *French Liberalism. From Montesquieu to the Present*, eds., Antoon Braeckman, Raf Geenens, and Helena Rosenblatt (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 169-191