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THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE IDEA OF AMERICA

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PREFATORY REMARK

My interest in exploring the thoughts of the men of the Enlightenment about America was aroused, over a period of many years, by my reading of the documents pertinent to the international history of Angloamerica in the colonial period. For as I studied the more or less petty bickerings between European nations over boundaries, islands, lands, trade, or the freedom of the seas, and the treaties with regard to America that issued from them, I was led into an interest in the larger assumptions and ideas that lay behind those activities in the minds of the European statesmen.

One was led *most obviously and directly* from diplomacy to the study of international law and its principles relative to America in the writings of the great legal theorists from Pufendorf to Vattel and beyond. From the study of international law one moved into the schemes for international peace —of William Penn, of the Abbe St. Pierre, the great Kant himself, and the part America played in the thought and in the hopes of those idealists. And from ideas in international law one moved, perforce, into the writings of the *more general political theorists*, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Franklin, Condorcet. But one did not stop there; one must study the ideas of the economists, the geographers, the anthropologists, the historians, the theorists of religion, especially of Christian missions, the litterateurs, and the philosophers.

Obviously, any project to isolate, to master, and to analyze the thinking with regard to America of all or most of the important men of the Enlightenment would be a project beside which the “moon walk” would be *hardly more than a mathematical paseo*.

I take as my definition of the Enlightenment Peter Gay’s definition of it as “a family of philosophers”, but, also, “a cultural climate—a world in which the philosophers acted, from which they noisily rebelled and quietly drew many of their ideas, and on which they attempted to impose their program”, a world which flowered, roughly, in the century between the birth of Montesquieu (1689) and the death of Holback (1789).¹ (For the purposes of this report I think

¹ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism*. New York, Alfred Knopf, 1969, pp. x-xi, 17.

of the Enlightenment as including the work of Condorcet, Humboldt, and the early Goethe.)

Many men, of course, have studied the Enlightenment as an European phenomenon. Others such as Gilbert Chinard,² Silvio Zavala,³ Benjamin Bissell⁴ and others, have done magisterial work in certain limited areas of European thought with regard to America. Many more special studies such as theirs are needed. But no one known to me has studied the problem as a whole. No one, as far as I know, had addressed himself to the whole mind of the Enlightenment with regard to the new world of America, or, more specifically for the purposes of this conference, what the men of the Enlightenment thought about Angloamerica and México.

Thus, if there is anything new about the outline presented here, that newness lies in the fact that it proposes to study European thought with regard to America in its entire perspective. That perspective is characterized by two aspects: 1) It is international. It is not limited to any one of the European countries interested in the new world but it considers them all: France, Spain, Germany, Holland, England, Portugal and, in some areas of thought, Italy. Indeed, any study of the Enlightenment as an international phenomenon must include many Americans as well as Europeans. This plan, therefore, is interested in all the Europeans and Americans who expressed noteworthy thoughts about America, and it seeks to discover, by comparing and collating them with each other, whether the "mind" of the Enlightenment with regard to America was, in fact, an international mind.

2) In the second place, this proposed program is intended to study all the areas of thought to which the men of the Enlightenment devoted themselves. Thus, it is interested in the place of America in scientific thought, in geography, in anthropology, in history, in political theory, in economics, in religion, in literature, in philosophy, and in the rising mood of nationalism. Again, by studying all these areas of thought in a total perspective, it is hoped to arrive at some viable conclusion to the existence—or non-existence—of common general ideas that ran through the areas of thought.

By about the middle of the eighteenth century, the vast phenomenon called the Expansion of Europe, already three centuries old, had called into being, among European thinkers and observers of the human drama a great corpus of thought relative to that phenomenon. This thought was an integral part of the thinking of the

² Gilbert Chinard, *L'Amérique et Le rêve exotique dans la littérature française au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècle*. Paris, E. Dioz, 1934.

³ Silvio Zavala, *América en el espíritu francés del siglo XVIII*. México, Colegio Nacional, 1949.

⁴ Benjamin Bissel, *The American Indian in English Literature of the Eighteenth Century*. Hamden, Conn., Archon Books, 1968.

Enlightenment; and the thinking of the *philosophes* with regard to the "new world" in general and about the new world of America in particular involved every division of the intellectual life of the eighteenth century.

He who would seek to understand this eighteenth-century "rationalization" of the Expansion of Europe must therefore be prepared to read widely and deeply into the writings of the eighteenth-century savants in all the western nations and in all the fields of thought and to examine the questions the *philosophes* asked themselves with regard to the new world, and their answers. Such questions, for example, as:

What was, for them, the nature and the historical, cultural and spiritual significance of the expansion of Europe?

What was the nature of colonies —economic, political, sociological, imperial and national?

What was the meaning and the significance of the new Euro-American civilization —or civilizations— for the nature and destiny of man?

What role did America play in the development and the flowering of that mystical quality so dear to the minds of the *philosophes*, the "human spirit?"

If there was one basic assumption of all, or nearly all the *philosophes*, it was their faith in science, or, rather, in "nature" as they thought it to be revealed by science. Thus, one of the most intense interests of the men of the Enlightenment in America was in the picture of natural science revealed there —the botanists, such as Peter Kalm and Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, the physicists, such as Benjamin Franklin, the anthropologists, such as Cornelius de Pauw, and, above all, the geographers. Map-making flourished; and men such as G. Delisle, J. B. B. D'Anville, and Doctor John Mitchell, achieved high levels of scientific accuracy in their maps of America. Descriptive and theoretical geographers like Alexander von Humboldt and Karl Ritter, especially the former,⁵ whose highly significant works on the geography of America constitute a magnificent culmination to a century of Enlightenment geography relative to the new continent. Above all, the great philosopher, Immanuel Kant, although he wrote little or nothing about America, placed geography in the great corpus of organized knowledge (science), linking geography, which is a study of phenomena that exist beside each other in space, with history, which is the study of phenomena that follow each other in time. Geography is a sort of summary of nature —a philosophy of man's place in nature: mathematical, moral, political, commercial, and theological.

⁵ See, for example, Alexander von Humboldt, *Voyage de Humboldt et Bonpland* . . . 23 vols. Paris, F. Schoell, 1805-34.

But the study of the geography of America was not merely an examination of physical features of the continent, nor even as Kant would have organized it, a "summary of nature", in mathematical, moral, political, commercial and theological divisions. It was more than that: it was a study of the earth and of man which contributed to one's perspective, and to an understanding of humanity and its problems.

The *philosophes* were also interested in, and curious about, the races of men, particularly those in America. Voltaire devoted many pages in his *Histoire des Moeurs* to the American Indians and to the Negroes of Africa and America. He finds these races different from, and inferior to, the white Europeans; his racism is reflected in the writings of many another anthropologist, such as Cornelius de Pauw and M. Engel, of the *Encyclopédie*. Indeed, this "scientific" racism may be said to have been typical of the men of the Enlightenment; it was shared by David Hume, Benjamin Franklin, and many others. For them, the differences between races and the superiority of the whites were obvious, clearly demonstrated by the scientific, comparative study of the other races.⁶

Many of the *philosophes* were deeply interested in the history of America; many of them found in that history the confirmation of their own Enlightenment predispositions, but they also saw in it the narrative of one of the most significant events in the history of humanity. We are not accustomed to think of Voltaire, for example, as an historian of America, yet much of his writing, especially his *Histoire des Moeurs*, is devoted to commentary upon the rise of the Euroamerican civilizations on this continent. With regard to the expansion of Europe, led by the Portuguese, he says that "C'est ici le plus grand événement sans doute de notre globe, dont une moitié avait toujours été ignorée de l'autre. C'est une espèce de création nouvelle".⁷

The deep historical significance of this great phenomenon, however, lay not in the quantity of the gold and silver brought back to Europe, nor yet in the new products of America that changed the way of life of the Europeans, but the expansion of man's knowledge of the world and of himself. It lies in the greatness of this phenomenon as an expansion of the human spirit:

L'objet [de notre Histoire des mœurs y incluse l'histoire de l'Amérique] était l'histoire de l'esprit humain, non pas de faits presque toujours défigurés, mais de voir par quels degrés on est parvenu de la rusticité barbare de ces temps [de Charlemagne] à la politesse des notre . . .
C'est donc l'histoire de l'opinion qu'il fallut écrire; et par là ce chaos

⁶ See, for example, Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains*. Paris, 1768-1770.

⁷ Voltaire, *Histoire des Moeurs . . .*, *Oeuvres*, Moland, ed., xii, 376.

d'événements, de factions, de révolutions, et de crimes, devenait digne d'être présenté aux regards des sages. . .

On voit dans l'histoire ainsi concise les erreurs et les préjugés se succéder tour à tour, et chasser la vérité et la raison. . . [Mais] Enfin les hommes s'éclairèrent un peu par ce tableau de leurs malheurs et de leurs sottises. Les sociétés parvinrent avec le temps à rectifier leurs idées; les hommes apprennent à penser.⁸

In writing thus, Voltaire spoke for his time. There were many *philosophes*, as Peter Gay says, and they differed widely from each other in the details and in the individualism of their thinking. But nearly all of them shared this devotion to the grand idea of the progress of the human spirit, despite, as Voltaire says, the stupidity, the savagery, the bigotry, the cruelty, the crimes and all the other animalistic instincts of men.

Other historians must be considered. The most important of all, perhaps, was the Abbé Raynal, whose monumental *Histoire philosophique et politique des Établissements et du Commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*,⁹ for all its vagaries, was a genuine effort to interpret the expansion of Europe in terms of the welfare of humanity; as such, it is a highly significant example of the mind of the Enlightenment with regard to the "new world", including America.

David Hume's *History of England*¹⁰ has much to say about the English colonies in America and the "noble principles" upon which they were founded. William Robertson's *History of America*¹¹ followed Raynal and Voltaire in his acceptance and elaboration of *La Leyenda Negra*. Juan Bautista Muñoz was commissioned by Carlos III to write a new history of the New World, but only the first volume of his projected work ever appeared, in 1793.¹²

One of the major concerns of the political theorists of the Enlightenment was the political nature of colonies and their relationship with the mother countries. For the Europeans, the most common assumption was that colonies had been established, in the first place,

⁸ François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Remarques pour servir de supplément à l'Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations et sur les principaux faits de l'histoire, depuis Charlemagne jus'qu'à la mort de Louis XIII*, *Oeuvres*, Moland, ed., xxiv, pp. 547-548.

⁹ There were many editions of Raynal's *Histoire philosophique*, which was first published in 1770. The edition used here is the one published in Geneva, in five volumes, "Chez Jean-Leonard Pellet", in 1780.

¹⁰ David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 10 vols. London, J. Wallis, 1803.

¹¹ William Robertson, *History of America*, 2 vols. London, William Strahan, 1777.

¹² Juan Bautista Muñoz, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*. Madrid, Vda. de Ibarra, 1793.

as a sort of distant factory for the promotion of the commerce of the mother countries. Thus Montesquieu wrote, in *L'Esprit des Loix*:

Les Espagnols regardèrent d'abord les terres découvertes comme des objets de conquête; des peuples, plus raffinés qu'eux trouvèrent qu'elles étaient des objets de commerce, & c'est là-dessus qu'ils dirigèrent leurs vues. Plusieurs peuples se sont conduits avec tant de sagesse, qu'ils ont donné l'empire à des compagnies de negocians, qui, gouvernant ces états éloignés uniquement pour le négoce, ont fait, une grande puissance accessoire, sans embarrasser l'état principal.

Les colonies qu'on y a formées sont sous un genre de dépendance dont on ne trouve que peu d'exemples dans les colonies anciennes, soit que celles d'aujourd'hui relèvent de l'état même, ou de quelque compagnie commerçante établie dans cet état.

L'objet de ces colonies est de faire le commerce à de meilleures conditions qu'on ne le fait avec les peuples voisins, avec lesquels tous les avantages sont reciproques. On a établi que la metropole seule pourrait négocier dans la colonie; & cela avec grand raison, parce que le but de l'établissement a été l'extension du commerce, no la fondation d'une ville ou d'un nouvel empire.¹³

Naturally, it follows from this concept of economic dependence that colonial government should be similarly politically dependent upon the imperial government of the metropolis.

But a new political concept of the colonial societies was gestating in America —most clearly in Angloamerica. Thus Richard Bland, of Virginia, basing his ideas, in typical Enlightenment fashion, upon the notions of natural law and natural rights, explained the nature of the colonies as that of new societies, each enjoying sovereignty within its own boundaries:

Men in a state of Nature absolutely free and independent of one another as to sovereign Jurisdiction, but when they enter into a Society, and by their own Consent become Members of it, they must submit to the laws of the Society according to which they agree to be governed; . . . But though they must submit to the Laws, so long as they remain members of the Society, yet they retain so much of their natural Freedom as to have a Right to retire from the Society, to renounce the Benefits of it, to enter into another Society, and to settle in another Country; . . . This natural Right remains with every Man, and he cannot justly be deprived of it by any civil Authority. . . . Now when Men exercise this Right, and withdraw themselves from their Country, they recover their natural Freedom and Independence: The Jurisdiction and Sovereignty of the State they have quitted ceases; and if they unite,

¹³ Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Brede et de Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Loix, Oeuvres complets de Montesquieu*, André Masson, ed. 3 vols., Paris, Éditions Nagel, 1950, 1, pp. 518-519.

and by common Consent take Possession of a new Country, and form themselves into a political Society, they become a Sovereign State, independent of the State from which they separated.¹⁴

And Benjamin Franklin applied this theory to the structure of the British Empire, describing it as sort of confederation of sovereign societies bound together by their loyalty to a common monarch and by the functional necessity for some central administration of the affairs of the whole confederation. In this he echoed the thought of Adam Smith that:

The colony assemblies . . . cannot be supposed the proper judges of what is necessary for the defense and support of the whole empire . . . The assembly of a province, like the vestry of a parish, may judge very properly concerning the affairs of its own particular district; but can have no proper means of judging concerning those of the whole empire. It cannot even judge properly concerning the proportion which its own province bears to the whole empire; . . . What is necessary for the defense and support of the whole empire, and in what proportion each part ought to contribute, can be judged of only by that assembly which inspects and superintends the affairs of the whole empire [i.e., Parliament].¹⁵

But Bland's and Franklin's new concept of colonial empires as federations of sovereign states involved, also, a new concept of sovereignty, that is, a concept of sovereignty as divided between imperial sovereignty, inherent in the monarch, and colonial sovereignty, inherent in the colonial legislature. This new concept ran counter to the notion of the indivisible nature of sovereignty as expounded by Rousseau and as adhered to in the practice of the statesmen who administered the affairs of the British Empire. One is inclined to see in these ideological phenomena the appearance of a new school—an American school—of thought as to the nature of colonial empires, although it is to be recognized that a few men, such as Richard Price and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, came very close to seeing the growth and the resolution of the political structures of empires in quite similar terms.

Many other political thinkers, such as Edmund Burke, the Earl of Halifax, Josiah Tucker, and Lord Mansfield, in England, and Turgot and Moreau de St. Méry in France addressed themselves to the constitutional theory and intra-imperial institutions of the colonies, or involving them. There is a sharp contrast between the "integral im-

¹⁴ Richard Bland, *An Inquiry into the Rights of the Colonies* (1776). Richmond, edited by Earl Swem, 1922, pp. 9-10, 14.

¹⁵ *An Inquiry into The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Edited by Edwin Cannan, 2 vols. London, Methuen: University Paperbacks, 1961, II, p. 134.

perialism" of Mansfield, for example, and the "separatism" of Tucker and Turgot.

Thought relative to intra-imperial relations could not avoid consideration of theory relative to inter-imperial relations, that is to say, international law and diplomacy. What part did America or the overseas colonies play in the thinking of Pufendorf or of Vattel? Inevitably, they were forced to consider such questions as those involved in the establishment of national title to unoccupied lands overseas; what rights did the Indians have over the land they occupied? What rights did the trading nations have upon the sea that separated America from Europe? What rights, if any, had the European inhabitants of a colony ceded by one imperial state to another? How were boundaries to be determined? What rights did one empire have with regard to visit to, or trade with, the colonies of another?

Vattel, as the great moralistic philosopher of international law, placed his heaviest emphasis upon "*la loi naturelle*" and the moral duty of kings and of states to observe that law.¹⁶ But other theorists saw the necessity for international organization to implement international morality. What part was envisaged for America in the schemes of William Penn, the Abbé de St. Pierre, and Immanuel Kant for international peace?

The economic philosophers of the Enlightenment had their own problems with regard to America. As already noted, such philosophers as Montesquieu thought of the colonies as sort of commercial "factory" which existed for the economic benefit of the mother country. On the basis of this assumption, they justified the system of national-imperial monopoly of the colonial economies. As François Véron Duverger de Forbonnais put it, in the *Encyclopédie*:

Toutes celles de ce continent [l'Amérique] ont eu le commerce & la culture tout-à-la-fois pour objet de leur établissement, ou s'y sont tournées: dès-lors il était nécessaire de conquérir les terres, & d'en chasser les anciens habitants, pour y transporter de nouveaux.

Ces colonies n'étant établies que pour l'utilité de la métropole, il s'ensuit:

- 1º Qu'elles doivent être sous sa dépendance immédiate et par conséquent sous sa protection.
- 2º Que le commerce doit en être exclusif aux fondateurs . . .

Ainsi le profit du commerce & de la culture de nos colonies est précisément, 1º le plus grand production que leur consommation occasionne au

¹⁶ Emmerich de Vattel, *Le droit des gens; ou, Principes de la loi naturelle appliqués à la conduite ou aux affaires des nations et des souverains*, 3 vols. Washington, Carnegie Institution, 1916.

propriétaire de nos terres, les frais de culture deduits; 2^o ce que reçoivent nos artistes et nos matelots qui travaillent pour elles, & à leur occasion; 3^o tout ce qu'elles suppléent de nos besoins; 4^o tout le superflu qu'elles nous donnent à exporter . . .

[Il y en résultent plusieurs conséquences:]

La première est que les *colonies* ne seroient plus utiles, si elles pouvoient se passer de la métropole: ainsi c'est une loi prise dans la nature de la chose, que l'on doit restreindre les arts & la culture dans une *colonie*, à tels & tels objets, suivant les convenances du pay de la domination.

La second conséquence est que si la *colonie* entretient un commerce avec les étrangers, ou que si l'on y consomme les marchandises étrangères, le montant de ce commerce & de ces marchandises est un vol fait à la métropole; vol trop commun, mais punissable par les lois, & par lequel la force réelle & relative d'un état est diminuée de tout ce que gagnent les étrangers.¹⁷

By the third quarter of the eighteenth century a number of men had arisen to challenge this assumption and the mercantilist system that had been built upon it. The greatest of these challengers, of course, was the Scottish Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, the year of Angloamerican independence, riddled the economic thinking upon which the mercantilist system was built. As for colonies:

The colonists carry out with them a knowledge of agriculture and of other useful arts, superior to what can grow up of its own accord in the course of many centuries among savage and barbarous nations. They carry out with them too the habit of subordination, some notion of the regular government which takes place in their own country, of the system of laws which supports it, and of a regular administration of justice; and they naturally establish something of the same kind in the new settlement . . . Every colonist gets more land than he can possibly cultivate. He has no rent, and scarce any taxes to pay. No landlord shares with him in its produce, and the share of the sovereign is commonly but a trifle. He has every motive to render as great as possible a produce, which is thus to be almost entirely his own . . . Plenty of good land, and liberty to manage their own affairs their own way, seem to be the two great causes of the prosperity of all new colonies.¹⁸

It is to be noted that Smith attributes the relatively great prosperity of the British colonies to the fact that they enjoy freer political institutions than other colonies. Others, such as the Reverend Josiah Tu-

¹⁷ *L'Encyclopédie*, article "Colonie", III, p. 650.

¹⁸ Adam Smith, *op. cit.*, II, p. 83.

cker and David Hume, went even further and, while minimizing the economic profitableness of the colonies to the mother country, proposed that the colonies be given their independence entirely. It is to be noted, also, that in all of the major Euroamerican empires American-born colonials were appearing to challenge, in the name of natural economic laws and natural economic rights, the old mercantilistic system of laws and regulations under which the economies of the colonies were controlled by the metropoli.

Most of the religions of Euroamerica had their centers in Europe. Only the Indian and the African religions had no European connections.

In general, the Christian leaders in Europe assumed that America, in addition to being, in a religious sense, an extension of Europe, was also a rich field for missionary enterprise for the extension of the faith among the Indians and Negroes. George Berkeley, for example, the Anglican Bishop of Cloyne, in Ireland, expressed what seems to have been the generally accepted English attitude when he wrote that:

Although there are several excellent persons of the Church of England, whose good intentions and endeavours have not been wanting to propagate the Gospel in foreign parts . . . it is nevertheless acknowledged that there is at this day but little sense of religion, and a most notorious corruption of manners, in the English colonies settled on the Continent of America, and the Islands. It is also acknowledged that the gospel hath hitherto made but a very inconsiderable progress among the neighboring Americans [Indians], who still continue in much the same ignorance and barbarism in which we found them about a hundred years ago.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the Jesuits, for example, among the Catholics devoted a major part of their activity in America, from Canada to Paraguay, to the work of converting the Indians to Catholicism and protecting the Indians from the European Christians.²⁰ The rationalization of this great religious expansive movement constitutes a vast field for investigation.

But European Christianity, itself, was passing through a sort of revo-

¹⁹ George Berkeley, "A Proposal for the better supplying of churches in our foreign Plantations and for converting the savage Americans to Christianity by a College to be erected in the Summer Islands, otherwise called the Isles of Bermudas", *The Works of George Berkeley, D.D.; Formerly Bishop of Cloyne, Including his Posthumous Works*, edited by Alexander Campbell Frazer, 4 vols. Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1901, iv, pp. 341-364, iv, p. 346.

²⁰ For example, one needs only to mention the vast collection of the *Jesuit Relations*, — not only those from North America (*The Jesuit Relations and allied Documents* . . . Edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites . . . 73 vols. Cleveland, O.: Burrows Brothers, 1896-1901), but those from other parts of the hemisphere, published and unpublished as well.

lution as one of the effects of the rationalism of the Enlightenment. From the English rationalists through the naturalism of the Deists to the atheism of such *philosophes* as Dennis Diderot and the Baron d'Holbach, the old theology and the old religious institutions were coming under fire. The activities of the Christians in America, whether Catholic or Calvinist, were attacked with vitriolic criticisms by such historical writers as Voltaire, Robertson, Raynal and a host of others; The *Encyclopédie* was thoroughly saturated with criticism, explicit or implied, of the religious Establishment.

In America, too, religious thinking tended to become "American", as against that of the European establishments, and their "American", localized versions of Christianity tended to align themselves with the other ideological forces, economic, political, and psychological, that were working with increasing clarity, during the middle decades of the century, toward the moods that eventuated in independence.

In the literature of the European Enlightenment, America looms large. For America provided literary themes derived from heroic deeds and the conflicts of civilizations, as in Voltaire's *Alzire, ou les Américains*, and from nationalistic fervour, such as in James Thomson's *Britannia and Liberty*. At the same time, the American experience provided nationalistic themes for the nascent literature of the Anglo-Americans themselves. Thus, Voltaire uses his novelle, l'Ingénu, as a vehicle for his moral conviction that men reared in a state of nature, as among the Hurons, were more sincere, honest, direct—in short, more "natural"—than men reared in the corrupt, selfish, conspiratorial, hypocritical society of Europe. In his *Alzire, ou les Américains*, Alvarez say (of Alzire), on the theme of the conflict of the two cultures, Spanish and Indian:

Son coeur aux Castellans va donner tous les coeurs;
L'Amérique à genoux adoptera nos moeurs;
La foi doit y jeter ses racines profondes;
Votre hymen est le noeud qui joindra les deux mondes;
Ces feroces humains, qui détestent nos lois,
Voyant entre vos bras la fille de leurs vois,
Vont, d'un esprit moins fier et d'un coeur plus facile,
Sous votre joug heureux baisser un front docile;
Et je verrai, mon fils, grâce a ces doux liens,
Tous les coeurs désormais espagnols et chretiens.²¹

And Alzire says of herself:

Je fus instruite, Émire, en ce grossier climat,
A suivre la vertu sans en chercher l'éclat.

²¹ Voltaire, *Alzire, ou les Américains*, (*Oeuvres*, Moland, ed.), III, pp. 367-438, III, p. 390.

L'honneur est dans mon coeur, et c'est lui qui m'ordonne
De sauver un héros que le ciel abandonne.²²

James Thomson, in his panegyric on British freedom, *Liberty*, glorifies what he feels to be British cultural supremacy and the expansion of British freedom overseas:

Despairing Gaul her boiling youth restrains,
Dissolv'd her dream of universal away:
The winds and seas are Britain's wide domain:
And not a sail, but by permission, spreads.
Lo! swarming southward on rejoicing suns,
Gay colonies extend; the calm retreat
Of undeserv'd distress, the better home
Of those whom bigots chase from foreign lands,
Not built on rapine, servitude, and woe,
And in their turn some petty tyrants prey;
But, bound by social freedom, firm they rise;
Such as, of late, an Oglethorpe has form'd,
And, crowding round, the charm'd Savannah sees.

The literature of the Enlightenment is abundantly rich in thought about America. Is there a general concept, or "idea" of America revealed in that literature?²³

Among the Angloamericans, the early stirrings of an Angloamerican nationalism is to be heard in the "Poem on the Rising Glory of America" by Philip Freneau and H.H. Brackenridge:

This is they praise America, thy pow'r,
Thou best of climes by science visited,
By freedom blest and richly stor'd with all
The luxuries of life. Hail happy land,
The seat of empire, the abode of kings . . .²⁴

Again, as in other areas of thought, it may conceivably be discovered that the "mind" of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was really two minds, an European mind and an American mind, an European "idea" of America and an American "idea" of America conceived by the Americans themselves.

Eighteenth century philosophy, as such, concerned itself little, directly, with America. In the writings of Immanuel Kant, perhaps the greatest of the eighteenth-century formal philosophers, the student

²² Voltaire, *Alzire, ou les Américains*, (*Oeuvres*, Moland, ed.), III, p. 432.

²³ Watter Wädepuhl, *Goethe's Interest in the New World*. Jena, Frommann, 1934.

²⁴ Philip Freneau and H. H. Brackenridge, *Poem on the Rising Glory of America*. Philadelphia, 1772, p. 28.

finds extremely little, if anything, that is of direct reference to the new world.

And yet, in the general philosophical outlook of the men of the Enlightenment, America looms large. John Locke, for example, was of high importance among philosophers for his sensationalism that seemed to justify the philosophers in much that they thought, relative to America or to anything else; but his great place in the Enlightenment philosophy, or "idea", of America derived not so much from what he said about America as for the vast influence he exercised upon the gestating mind of America itself.

David Hume, as a philosopher, wrote little that directly involved America; but in his *History of England* he gives much attention, as has been noted, to the development of the Angloamerican colonies and the "noble principles" upon which they were founded. And as the tension between the colonies and England developed, Hume became an ardent, often vitriolic, partisan of the Americans, to the point of actually advocating their independence.

And George Berkeley, the great immaterialist, could see in America, as did Voltaire, a stage for the further progress of the human spirit:

The Muse, disgusted at an age and clime
Barren of every glorious theme,
In distant lands now waits a better time,
Producing subjects worthy fame:

There shall be sung another golden age,
The rise of empire and of arts
The good and great inspiring epic rage,
The wisest heads and noblest hearts.

Not such as Europe breeds in her decay;
Such as she bred when fresh and young,
When heavenly flame did animate her clay,
By future poets shall be sung.

Westward the course of empire takes its way,
The four first Acts already past,
A fifth shall close the Drama with the Day;
Time's noblest offspring is the last.²⁵

The fragments of Enlightenment thought that have been pieced together here are offered only as examples of the thinking that the *philosophes* were doing, both in Europe and in America. They are presented only as opening doors, as it were, into the mind of the

²⁵ George Berkeley, "Verses on the Prospects of Planting Arts and Learning in America", *The Works of George Berkeley*, edited by A. C. Frazer (4 vols.) Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1901, iv, pp. 365-366.

Enlightenment with regard to America. The pattern here is, of course, but the merest sketch, a sort of *esquisse*, of the problem, if even that. It has been presented in this way for the sake of suggesting an *überlick* of the eighteenth-century "mind" with regard to America, in perspective both of time and of place and of the Enlightenment "mind" in general.

Is it possible to make any generalization as to the Enlightenment "mind" with regard to America? Were there any ascertainable "common denominators" that ran through most of the thinking of most of the *philosophes*, or were they but "a family" of thinkers, an host of individual men who did their own thinking individually, each having little in common with the others?

It does appear that there were certain concepts and assumptions that were shared by most of the intellectual leaders of the century, no matter which the fields in which they worked. To suggest only a few, one might refer, first, to the faith of most of them in science: not only the factual and mathematical knowledge of the universe and of man that derived from science but, also, the enthusiastic faith that men could know and understand more, and that, knowing and understanding, they could influence or control the material universe and its laws for the physical, moral, and spiritual betterment of the human condition. This was their belief in progress, their faith that man *could* improve his condition, if he would, by the use of his mind.

In the second place, it seems to be clear that, for most of the *philosophes*, the great *leit-motif* in their thinking was the "human spirit". This was the essence of their metaphysic. Most of them, from the geographers to the political scientists to the nationalists to the philosophers, held this ideal before them. The bulk of the *philosophes'* writing constituted a great morality, even a religion. It was a sort of metaphysic derived from the notion of "nature" and of "nature's God", functioning in a system of "natural Law" through an ethic based upon scientific knowledge and interpreted by human reason.

So far as the idea of America was a part of this metaphysic this new world was understood to be at once the scene of terrible aberrations from the moral principles of natural law among men and a stage upon which might enacted, at last, the victorious drama of liberty, of human rights, and of human felicity. In America, itself, there seems to have appeared a new idea of America, expressing a new concept of what America was and what its destiny, in terms of the "human spirit", might be.

Most of the quotations cited here are expressions of ideas that are generalizations derived from the observation of actual experience. They are, in a sense, rationalization of experience. It might be thought to be possible to write the history of these ideas, therefore, only in a con-

text of an history of experience, or events. Yet, how much of demonstrable connection is there between events and Voltaire's "*esprit humain*" or Vattel's "*amour universel du genre humain*?" Our historian of ideas is confronted, again, with a sort of modern version of the age-old realist-nominalist dilemma: the ideas are real, certainly, but is their reality an existence in events only, or do they exist only in the minds of many different men a sort of existence that is independent of events, an existence which gives these ideas a life of their own, and, therefore, a history of their own?

Aquí está el problema. It is a problem in generalization. It is an invitation to the labors of many minds.