

ARTICLE

Political Equality and Economic Inequality in Étienne-Géry Lenglet's Recipe for the Modern Republic

Minchul Kim 

Department of History, Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, South Korea

Email: minchul@skku.edu

Abstract

Reflections on the legacy of 'Jacobin egalitarianism' in post-Thermidorian France can be seen as following one of three strands: conservative, communist, or democratic. By shedding light on the democratic trajectory, this article addresses the historiographical imbalance that has disproportionately focused on conservative and communist perspectives. This study thereby pursues a renewed understanding of the relationship between the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the evolution of political economy. Through an analysis of Étienne-Géry Lenglet's treatise, *De la propriété* (1798), the contexts and content of democratic political economy during the revolutionary decade are identified. Lenglet's politics formed an intervention in the debates during the Directory on the dynamics of property, morality, the franchise, and the principles of modern politics. His thought exemplifies a Condorcetian egalitarianism that grappled with the dilemmas posed by the rise of commerce and standing armies. This analysis of Lenglet's work challenges the notion that the radicals of the French Revolution operated outside of Enlightenment political economy: *De la propriété* was deeply rooted in Enlightenment and revolutionary rhetoric. Lenglet's politics emerges as a crucial component of diverse reform projects that contradicts reified depictions of Enlightenment political thought.

The French Revolution significantly radicalized the political economy of the eighteenth century. In particular the Directory, a regime that emerged after the fall of the Jacobin republic in July 1794 and fell to the sword of Napoleon Bonaparte in November 1799, was rich in speeches and pamphlets discussing political economy in the context of republican speculations on the future of France and Europe. Once we dispel the Napoleonic teleology forged by the Brumairians, the Directory provides us with a uniquely compelling context in the history of political thought for exploring the politics of a Machiavellian moment – one that imagined modes of governance for a free state amid intense debates on equality and inequality.¹ 'Machiavellian

¹ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition* (Princeton, 1975). Pocock has revealed that it was Quentin Skinner who had suggested the term for the title of his book: J. G. A. Pocock, 'Quentin Skinner: the history of politics and the politics of history', *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3 (2004), pp. 532–50, at 540.

moment' is a term coined by J. G. A. Pocock to denote a critical time when political writers identified 'the possibility of a republic of equal citizens, enjoying the ancient liberty of ruling and being ruled' at the same time as they believed such a prospect to be 'precarious, threatened either by internal contradictions or by contingent historical circumstances'.² At the heart of this republican conjuncture lay the question of equality. Its relation to liberty was fiercely debated in this second half of the revolutionary experience built upon the accomplishments and shortcomings of the first half, as such aspects were variously perceived by contemporaries.³ In such a context of cross-Thermidorian connections, responses in political economy to the legacy of 'Jacobin egalitarianism' can be broadly classified as following one of three strands: conservative, communist, or democratic.⁴ Thus far, historians of French political economy have placed disproportionate emphasis on the first two strands at the expense of the democratic way of discussing property, citizenship, and modern politics. This article seeks to redress this historiographical imbalance by shedding light on the contexts and content of democratic political economy during the Directory.

Since the time of Aristotle well into the eighteenth century, there existed a prevalent fear that granting political decision-making rights or suffrage to the poor would encourage them to seize the property of the wealthy. Providing the poor with political equality, in other words, would give rise to economic equality. Amidst the myriad early modern debates on its origins and modes of justification, property was widely regarded as the foundation for political stability and legal order. Democracy was often perceived both by the guardians of the Old Regime and by numerous Enlightened reformers as inherently tumultuous, precisely because it appeared fundamentally incompatible with the security of property. Such was the logic behind the fear of democracy or popular government. This fear, which continued to haunt the French First Republic, was expressed in the revolutionaries' concerns that universal suffrage would undermine property, erode national wealth, and ultimately lead to the loss of liberty. Popular government, even in the revolutionary heat of the 1790s, was often expected to pave the way for demagoguery and anarchy.⁵

²J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, vol. 3: *the first decline and fall* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 309.

³Jean-Luc Chappey, 'Raison et citoyenneté: les fondements culturels d'une distinction sociale et politique sous le Directoire', in *Citoyens et citoyenneté sous la Révolution française*, ed. Raymonde Monnier (Paris, 2006), pp. 279–88; Minchul Kim, 'Republicanism in the age of commerce and revolutions: Barère's reading of Montesquieu', *French History* 30, no. 3 (2016), pp. 354–75; Pierre Serna, *La république des girouettes: 1789–1815 ... et au-delà. Une anomalie politique: la France de l'extrême centre* (Paris, 2005), pp. 308–12; Pierre Serna, 'Français, encore un effort pour être républicains!', in *La Révolution française: une histoire toujours vivante*, ed. Michel Biard (Paris, 2009), pp. 65–79.

⁴Despite the prevalent stereotype depicting the Jacobins as extreme levellers, the actual implementation of 'Jacobin' economic policies across different municipalities in France in Year II was marked by a greater degree of moderation and complexity: Jean-Pierre Gross, *Fair shares for all: Jacobin egalitarianism in practice* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁵Robin Douglass, 'Egalitarian sympathies? Adam Smith and Sophie de Grouchy on inequality and social order', *European Journal of Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2024), pp. 17–31; Iain McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Roman past and Europe's future* (Cambridge, MA, 2013); Ruth Scurr, 'Inequality and political stability from Ancien Régime to Revolution: the reception of Adam Smith's *Theory of moral sentiments* in France', *History of European Ideas* 35, no. 4 (2009), pp. 441–9; Richard Whatmore, *Terrorists, anarchists, and republicans: the Genevans and the Irish in time of revolution* (Princeton, 2019).

This article examines a case of exception to this fear which lurked behind the politics of the eighteenth century and the revolutionary decade. This exception was the 'democratic' strand of political economy under the Directory, which vividly illustrates the emergence of a new trajectory that envisaged the decoupling of political from economic equality. It could perhaps mark the first instance in which a modern political treatise overtly and systematically intended to demolish the conventional argument against democracy that the poor, if granted political power, would strip the rich of their wealth.

I

A propitious way to approach this case is to consider it through the broader perspective on the spectrum of political economy in post-Thermidorian France. On the right flank of that spectrum we find the mainstream anti-Jacobin opinion which may be termed 'conservative'. This adjective is not entirely free from the charge of anachronism, since many deputies in this group were not conservatives in the Burkean sense but republicans who had burned the bridge to the royal past by voting in favour of the execution of Louis XVI. But the term also had a specific meaning at the time, i.e. the will to 'conserve' what these politicians considered to be the key achievements of the Revolution of 1789 in the face of total war and economic collapse. This made those 'Directorials' (*les directoriaux*: supporters of the Directory and the Directors) who were adherents to this view 'conservative republicans'. Commentators with this leaning, among whom Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, Pierre-Louis Roederer, Benjamin Constant, François-Antoine de Boissy d'Anglas, and Pierre-Samuel Du Pont de Nemours were prominent, regarded economic equality as a dangerous chimera that would eventually bring down the modern state. They tried to harness the revolutionary fervour by limiting the franchise with property qualifications and opting for elite rule.⁶ James Livesey has classified this line of thought as democratic and commercial republicanism, but such a combination was deemed problematic in the eighteenth century and the revolutionary decade. Those thinkers classified as democratic and commercial republicans by Livesey espoused a modern-commercial, rather than democratic, kind of both humanistic and juristic thought under the Directory. At the time the commercial republicans were in fact stoutly opposed to the democrats' project of building a 'democratic republic' under the framework of 'representative democracy' between 1795 and 1799. It is thus questionable whether Livesey's decision to blur the distinction self-consciously drawn by historical actors themselves – namely the line separating the democrats' political

⁶Souleff Ayad-Bergounioux, 'La "République représentative" selon Antoine Boulay de La Meurthe (1761–1840): une figure de la bourgeoisie libérale et conservatrice', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 362 (2010), pp. 31–54; Thomas Hopkins, 'Pierre-Louis Roederer, Adam Smith and the problem of inequality', in *Money and political economy in the Enlightenment*, ed. Daniel Carey (Oxford, 2014), pp. 201–23; Andrew Jainchill, *Reimagining politics after the Terror: the republican origins of French liberalism* (Ithaca, 2008); Ruth Scurr, 'Social equality in Pierre-Louis Roederer's interpretation of the modern republic, 1793', *History of European Ideas* 26, no. 2 (2000), pp. 105–26; Richard Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution: an intellectual history of Jean-Baptiste Say's political economy* (Oxford, 2000); Richard Whatmore, 'Adam Smith's role in the French Revolution', *Past and Present* 175, no. 1 (2002), pp. 65–89; Richard Whatmore, 'Dupont de Nemours et la politique révolutionnaire', *Revue française d'histoire des idées politiques*, no. 20 (2004), pp. 335–51.

engagement from the conservatives' commercial republicanism – offers a productive approach to investigating the politics of the Directory.⁷

On the opposite end of the spectrum was a position much less influential than that of the conservative republicans and widely demonised by the Directory. It was the political economy of François-Noël Babeuf and Sylvain Maréchal, who were radical agitators of the Conspiracy of the Equals, or that of François Boissel, a Jacobin who argued against all odds for what he dubbed a 'civilised society' *without* property and marriage. They dreamed of a world where people lived under equal economic and political conditions, with or without the institution of individual property. This radical stance has often been called 'communist' by historians and is either hailed or denounced as the origin of modern communism. Whereas a vast amount of research has been conducted on the main figures of conservative political economy, the literature on the 'communist' view shows distinct focus on the life and thoughts of Babeuf, with a few studies on Maréchal and nearly none on Boissel. The most significant recent contribution to this field comes from Laura Mason, who interprets Babeuf as both a democratic and communist thinker that argued for the indispensable nature of social equality to democracy.⁸

The historiography of political economy during the Directory has thus focused almost exclusively on the two responses outlined above. In particular, since the decline of the Marxist wave in academia that had turned a fascinated eye towards the 'proto-communists' of 1796, the conservative approach has been the most popular choice for historians. The literature on the conservative response highlights the opposition between the Equals' hopeless search for perfect social equality and the conservatives' allegedly realistic acceptance of inevitable or benevolent inequality. This reflects in some cases the view of certain modern philosophers who find an underlying contradiction and incompatibility between liberty and equality.⁹

The third line of response can be labelled 'democratic' in that it belonged to a movement that espoused visions of a 'democratic republic' and explored theories of

⁷James Livesey, *Making democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2001). In this instance, 'democracy' in the title of Livesey's book is mostly the historian's term, not used as such by the historical actors themselves; the book is in fact more about 'making republic in the French Revolution'.

⁸Pierre-Antoine Courouble, *L'énigme Boissel: le philosophe sans visage* (Toulon, 2011); Maurice Dommanget, *Sylvain Maréchal: l'égalitaire, l'homme sans dieu: sa vie, son oeuvre (1750–1803)* (Paris, 1950); Maurice Dommanget, *Babeuf et la conjuration des Égaux* (2nd edn, Paris, 1989); Patrice Higonnet, 'Babeuf: communist or proto-communist?', *The Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 4 (1979), pp. 773–81; Erica Joy Mannucci, *Finalmente il popolo pensa. Sylvain Maréchal nell'immagine della Rivoluzione francese* (Naples, 2012); Laura Mason, 'Never was a plot so holy: Gracchus Babeuf and the end of the French Revolution', in *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, ed. Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser and Marisa Linton (Manchester, 2007), pp. 172–88; Laura Mason, *The last revolutionaries: the conspiracy trial of Gracchus Babeuf and the Equals* (New Haven, 2022), pp. 3, 20 and 109; Claude Mazauric, *Babeuf et la conspiration pour l'égalité* (Paris, 1962); Claude Mazauric, 'Babeuf en l'an III', in *Le tournant de l'an III: réaction et terreur blanche dans la France révolutionnaire*, ed. Michel Vovelle (Paris, 1997), pp. 55–67; R. B. Rose, *Gracchus Babeuf: the first revolutionary communist* (Stanford, 1978); Jean-René Suratteau, 'Les babouvistes, le péril rouge et le Directoire', in *Babeuf et les problèmes du babouvisme*, ed. Maurice Dommanget, Viktor Moiseevitch Daline and Albert Soboul (Paris, 1963), pp. 147–73.

⁹An expression of this theme in our century can be found in Jan Narveson and James P. Sterba, *Are liberty and equality compatible?* (Cambridge, 2010).

'representative democracy'. This movement assailed both the conservative republicans' running of the 'representative government' that was in place and the Equals' vision of a 'community of goods'. Those quoted terms were used as such by the revolutionaries themselves, and these usages of terms are significant in themselves. In the 1790s the idea of democracy continued to retain its radical Athenian connotations. To call oneself a 'democrat' at the time signified loyalty to a political position that was decidedly different from what would be espoused by the liberal democrats in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We should remain sensitive to the fact that in the revolutionary decade, put roughly, 'democracy' referred to popular government and popular education accompanied by a more or less egalitarian economic arrangement, while 'representative government' signified a regime that was ruled by an elite chosen on the basis of merit under censitary restrictions.¹⁰

Democratic political economy has largely been overlooked by historians of modern political thought and the French Revolution with the exception of Isser Woloch's *Jacobin Legacy* (1970) and a few works by Bernard Gainot and Pierre Serna.¹¹ This neglect makes the historical representation of the intellectual world of revolutionary France following the Terror porous and incomplete. Various referred to as 'democrats', 'democratic republicans', or 'Neo-Jacobins' by historians and labelled as 'democrats' or 'anarchists' by their contemporary adversaries, this group of democratic republicans envisaged a political system combining universal suffrage, mandatory primary education, industrious *mœurs*, virtuous agriculture, moderate commerce, and brave yet obedient armies. In their search for a way to break the deadlock between the *terroristes*, royalists, and Directorials, they conceptualized a republic that would be both free and stable.¹²

A striking difference between these democrats and the 'commercial republicans' studied by James Livesey is the formers' enthusiastic embrace of political equality and universal suffrage even after the Terror.¹³ The democrats did not originate from a single pre-Thermidor faction but emerged instead from a diverse blend of political experiences from the early days of the Revolution. Between 1795 and 1799 they searched for what they regarded as a genuinely republican escape route from decline and despotism. Their leaders thereby proposed plans for a political edifice which

¹⁰Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government* (Cambridge, 1997); Minchul Kim, 'Theories of representative government against democracy during the French Revolution', *The Historian* 84, no. 4 (2022), pp. 565–85.

¹¹Bernard Gainot, 'La république comme association de citoyens solidaires: pour retrouver l'économie politique républicaine (1792–1799)', in *Pour quoi faire la Révolution*, ed. IHRF (Marseille, 2012), pp. 149–80; Pierre Serna, *Antonelle: aristocrate révolutionnaire 1747–1817* (Paris, 1997); Pierre Serna, 'Comment être démocrate et constitutionnel en 1797?', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 308 (1997), pp. 199–219; Isser Woloch, *Jacobin legacy: the democratic movement under the Directory* (Princeton, 1970).

¹²Minchul Kim, 'Pierre-Antoine Antonelle and representative democracy in the French Revolution', *History of European Ideas* 44, no. 3 (2018), pp. 344–69; Minchul Kim, 'The political economy of democracy in the French Revolution: Publicola Chaussard and the democrats under the Directory', *History of Political Thought* 43, no. 4 (2022), pp. 729–58.

¹³Pierre-Antoine Antonelle, *Observations sur le droit de cité et sur quelques parties du travail de la Commission des onze* (Paris, 1795); Pierre-Antoine Antonelle, *La constitution et les principes opposés aux floréalistes* (1798), pp. 2–11; Victor Bach, *Premier discours du citoyen Bach, à la réunion séant au Manège, sur les moyens de consolider la République* (Paris, 1799); James Livesey, 'The political culture of the Directory', in *A companion to the French Revolution*, ed. Peter McPhee (Malden, 2013), pp. 329–42.

they called ‘representative democracy’, against the conservative republicans’ cherished notion of ‘representative government’. This idea was mainly elaborated in the hands of Pierre-Antoine Antonelle, as has been significantly pointed out by Pierre Serna.¹⁴ Pierre-Joseph Briot, Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Chaussard, Marc-Antoine Jullien, Antoine François de Nantes, Félix Le Peletier, and Étienne-Géry Lenglet were also prominent in this circle during the Directory. Their political and economic thoughts are not widely discussed at present, and the literature on this ‘democratic’ stance shows a grave lack in quantity and diversity. This article aims to fill this gap and contribute to the history of modern political thought through a study of Lenglet’s treatise, *De la propriété et de ses rapports avec les droits et avec la dette du citoyen* (1798), the most systematic presentation of democratic political economy published under the French First Republic.

A lawyer from Arras with Girondin sympathies, Lenglet came to the fore of national politics during the Directory when he was elected as a deputy from Pas-de-Calais to the Council of Elders in 1798.¹⁵ He engaged energetically in legislative debates on the democrats’ side and proudly upheld their minority flag that bore ideas radical for the time, including manhood suffrage, free national primary education, progressive taxation, and the freedom of political expression and association.¹⁶ He is now all but forgotten, as are many revolutionaries who began their national political career following the Terror. The only study of Lenglet’s political economy hitherto is found in the five pages of Woloch’s *Jacobin Legacy*, which offers a brief and selective survey of *De la propriété* and affirms that Lenglet’s book ‘produced a fully developed theory of democracy’.¹⁷ For all this lack of scholarly attention, however, a close reading of *De la propriété* reveals its historical import. The text is not only a brilliant analysis of modern (as opposed to ancient) economic conditions; it is also a political pamphlet which contains potent arguments regarding why democratic political economy could be seen as the better choice for preserving liberty and national independence than conservative or communist political economy. This article demonstrates the significance of democratic political economy by placing *De la propriété* in its more immediate context of revolutionary debates on property and

¹⁴Serna, Antonelle, pp. 242–54; Bernard Gainot, 1799, *un nouveau Jacobinisme? La démocratie représentative, une alternative à brumaire* (Paris, 2001), pp. 449–81.

¹⁵*Biographie universelle ou Dictionnaire historique des hommes qui se sont fait un nom*, vol. 5, ed. François-Xavier de Feller (Paris, 1849), p. 207. Among Lenglet’s activities and writings prior to Thermidor stand out his pamphlet on the property of the Church and his long praise of Montesquieu, even though they are insufficiently connected to the context of this study, i.e. property and citizenship, to merit close discussion: Étienne-Géry Lenglet, *Du domaine national* (1789); Étienne-Géry Lenglet, *Essai, ou observations sur Montesquieu* (Paris, 1792).

¹⁶Pierre-Antoine Antonelle, *Le contraste de sentimens, ou le citoyen Delacroix en présence d’un démocrate* (Paris, 1795), pp. 40–1; Étienne-Géry Lenglet, *Expliquons-nous, réflexions sur la liberté de la presse, sur le gouvernement révolutionnaire, sur la souveraineté du peuple, sur les Jacobins et les insurrections* (Paris, 1795), pp. 45–7; Étienne-Géry Lenglet, *Conseil des anciens. Opinion sur la résolution relative à l’usage et aux abus de la presse. Séance du 3 thermidor an VII* (Paris, 1799); Étienne-Géry Lenglet, *Conseil des anciens. Opinion sur la résolution relative à la liberté civile et politique. Séance du 12 thermidor an VII* (Paris, 1799); Minchul Kim, ‘Démocratiser le gouvernement représentatif? La pensée politique d’Antoine François de Nantes sous le Directoire’, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 396 (2019), pp. 71–93, at 91.

¹⁷Woloch, *Jacobin legacy*, pp. 180–5, at p. 181.

citizenship, as well as in the wider context of Enlightenment concerns regarding the historical dynamics of the rise and fall of states.

De la propriété was first published in 1798 and underwent a second edition in 1799 with no significant changes. In the book Lenglet engaged first with the Equals and then with the conservative republicans on questions of property, citizenship, and taxation. He began with a firm repudiation of the communist outlook. This amounted to a gesture of reassurance for the ruling conservatives. It was, however, also a stepping stone for his assault on the conservatives' justification of political inequality that arose from their meritocratic fundamentalism in the economic realm. For Lenglet the Equals were not anarchists but honest men unfortunately 'seduced by the sophistry' of Plato, More, Rousseau, and Mably.¹⁸ Revealing his sympathetic gaze towards the Equals – as did other democrats¹⁹ – Lenglet stated that the writers and agitators on the Left were not 'the only ones who have some errors to renounce'. In his view the thinkers on the Right, in turn, were guilty of tarnishing the prospect of political and social improvement with charges of absurdity and impossibility, even when such prospects could in fact be transformed into a sound policy, proving 'highly possible once it is established'. Lenglet's objective was to find a *via media* between the two extremes to unite them under the republican cause.²⁰

Extending the insights of Woloch, Gainot, and Serna, this study of democratic political economy during the Directory sheds light on the often-overlooked path that lay between Livesey's commercial republicans – who staunchly regarded the democrats as dangerous radicals – and (even Mason's) Babeuf, whose firm rejection of private property stood in clear opposition to the democrats' vision of a republic grounded in property and *mœurs*.²¹ In arguing for the compatibility of political equality with economic inequality, and in moving nevertheless towards a proposition of moderate economic equality and progressive taxation, Lenglet proffered a distinctively 'democratic' – as the term would have been understood in the 1790s – perception of modern history and commercial society. Aspects of such a perception are elucidated below, and it is made clear that the historical horizon of the eighteenth-century's self-understanding was key to Lenglet's thought, just as it was for many other revolutionaries of different political colours.²² The Enlightenment's *problématique* of ancient, medieval, and modern history was a recurrent presence in *De la propriété*. The arguments, rhetorical strategy, and target opponents of the work are analysed in the following sections. In depicting Lenglet's dialogue with the various factions of the Revolution, this article brings to light the democrats' diagnosis of the French Republic, their vision of a better future, and the proposed mechanism of transition to that future.

¹⁸Étienne-Géry Lenglet, *De la propriété et de ses rapports avec les droits et avec la dette du citoyen* (Paris, 1798), p. v.

¹⁹Laura Mason, 'Après la conjuration: le Directoire, la presse et l'affaire des Égaux', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 354 (2008), pp. 77–103.

²⁰Lenglet, *De la propriété*, pp. ii–iii.

²¹Woloch, *Jacobin legacy*; Serna, *Antonelle*; Gainot, 1799; Livesey, *Making democracy*; Mason, *The last revolutionaries*.

²²Whatmore, 'Dupont de Nemours'; Mannucci, *Finalmente il popolo pensa*; Minchul Kim, 'Volney and the French Revolution', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 79, no. 2 (2018), pp. 221–42.

II

The entirety of Lenglet's argumentation rested upon the eighteenth-century *philosophes'* preoccupation with the historical distance that divided the Moderns from the Ancients.²³ As the Thermidorians had charged the Jacobins with an anachronistic veneration for Greece and Rome,²⁴ Lenglet's strategy in opening his work was to point out that the conservative republicans' fear of a revival of Antiquity in modern politics was just as misguided as the Equals' pursuit of a golden past devoid of private property.²⁵ He sought to assure the Directorial republicans that the democrats were well aware of both the undesirability and impossibility of remaking France on the model of small ancient republics. Sparta, he remarked, had exhibited the 'grim bizarrerie' of 'a warrior people nourished by the work of an enslaved people'. History had progressed so far since the time of the Cretans, Athenians, Spartans, and Romans, whose 'circumstances were so foreign to what we find ourselves in', that the search for 'the means of achieving the same dreams' of a total reform of manners and property relations was outdated.²⁶

Lenglet criticized Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among others, for wrongly attributing 'all the misfortunes of the human race to *property*', and for making on that basis untenable accusations of society itself.²⁷ For many reformers during the Revolution, Rousseau was less a model to follow than an obstacle to overcome; Lenglet joined Mirabeau, Brissot, Antonelle, and Chaussard in this regard.²⁸ In need of finding was a middle path between an outright rejection or a complete endorsement of the inequality arising from private property. Undertaking the search, Lenglet the radical proposed the 'Modern' view that the advent of commercial society had rendered the idea of a society without property at once clearly obsolete and somewhat harmless. 'Neither the simplicity of the early Christians nor that of early men' was now to be regarded 'either as an object of concern or as an object of imitation'.²⁹

As Lenglet remarked with some regret, no other concept in the 1790s had 'excited as many hopes or fears, as much enthusiasm or horror as the word *equality*', that watchword of revolutionary radicalism.³⁰ Such a statement could have placed him on

²³Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997); J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, vol. 2: *narratives of civil government* (Cambridge, 1999); Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: a genealogy* (Chicago, 2010), pp. 24–43; Paddy Bullard and Alexis Tadié, eds., *Ancients and moderns in Europe: comparative perspectives* (Oxford, 2016).

²⁴Constantin-François de Chassebœuf Volney, *Leçons d'histoire prononcées à l'École normale*, in *Séances des Écoles normales recueillies par des sténographes et revues par les professeurs* (Paris, 1799–1800); Minchul Kim, 'The historical politics of Volney's *Leçons d'histoire* (1795)', *French Studies Bulletin* 39, no. 148 (2018), pp. 43–7.

²⁵Kim, 'Republicanism in the age of commerce and revolutions'; Wyger Velema, 'Against democracy: Dutch eighteenth-century critics of ancient and modern popular government', in *Ancient models in the early modern republican imagination*, ed. Wyger Velema and Arthur Weststeijn (Leiden, 2018), pp. 189–213.

²⁶Lenglet, *De la propriété*, pp. vi–vii.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. v.

²⁸Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Chaussard, *Esprit de Mirabeau, ou Manuel de l'homme d'État, des publicistes, des fonctionnaires et des orateurs*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1797), vol. 1, pp. 1–10; Serna, Antonelle, p. 97; Béla Kapossy, 'The sociable patriot: Isaak Iselin's Protestant reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau', *History of European Ideas* 27, no. 2 (2001), pp. 153–70, at 157–8; Richard Whatmore, 'Rousseau's readers', *History of European Ideas* 27, no. 3 (2001), pp. 323–31.

²⁹Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. viii.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 4.

the side of the revolutionary jeremiads against the 'Jacobin' – as the authors of those jeremiads dubbed it – egalitarianism that had been pouring out after Thermidor.³¹ The rhetorical strategy of *De la propriété* was to pursue that direction, in appearance joining the jeremiads, only to come back with a forceful critique of inequality in a moderate guise. In discussing the prospects for equality 'without dissolving the state of society', Lenglet's speculation considered three aspects: the 'personal faculties' of citizens, their 'possessions', and their 'political rights'.³² This framework enabled him logically to proceed from the recognition of personal differences across human beings to a justification of economic inequality in modern society, while calling for an establishment of political equality and an implementation of fiscal policies to reduce extreme economic inequality.

The first target of Lenglet's critical assessment was the Equals. Humans were 'similar' but never 'equal'. The two were entirely different, he argued, and confusing them was the source of an erroneously formulated controversy. When correctly understood, the nature of things made 'resemblance' and 'inequality' compatible.³³ People might have looked similar to each other in the state of nature, but even so 'inequality of intelligence' was inscribed in them. Commenting on Helvétius' claim that men were born 'with equal aptitude in their minds', Lenglet noted that this was an 'assertion ... very difficult to prove' and at any rate meant little more than that newborn babies had similar intellectual abilities. But due to the diversity of human abilities, children, even with an education 'absolutely similar', would grow up to possess unequal intellectual abilities just as an identical training would not make everyone into the same athlete. In any case it was 'impossible' to offer an exactly identical education to all, and this made intellectual inequality 'inevitable'. This natural intellectual inequality led to the social inequality of property through a myriad of different 'chances', resulting in extreme inequality 'after a few generations'. Lenglet surmised that this dire situation had encouraged luminaries like Mably to dream of a novel distribution of property on the basis of the idea that everything had originally been 'given in common to everyone'. If it was undeniable that the natural course of rising inequality could be checked in part by social institutions, would this be desirable in the case of a modern republic? Lenglet responded both in the affirmative and the negative. However, before making proposals that were moderately egalitarian – first political and second economic – later in the treatise, for now he chose to place sufficient emphasis on the impracticability of 'levelling all individuals exactly' and to warn of the danger of 'therefore impeding the progress of the whole species'.³⁴

In a mode of reasoning juristic rather than republican, Lenglet presented inequality as stemming from productive labour and justified thereupon. The hypothesis

³¹Pierre-Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, *Du pouvoir législatif et du pouvoir exécutif convenables à la république française* (Paris, 1795); Adrien Lezay-Marnésia, *Qu'est-ce que la Constitution de 95?* (Paris, 1795); François Louis d'Escherny, *De l'égalité ou Principes généraux sur les institutions civiles, politiques et religieuses*, 2 vols. (Basel, 1796); Jean-Baptiste Maugras, *Dissertation sur les principes fondamentaux de l'association humaine* (Paris, 1796); Adrien Lezay-Marnésia, *Des causes de la révolution et de ses résultats* (Paris, 1797).

³²Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 4.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 7–11.

that humanity as a whole had, initially, communal ownership of land was not seen as precluding private property. Such an account disdained the eighteenth century's utopian designs of communal property and closely followed the Lockean tradition that was in the mainstream of the Enlightenment.³⁵ Following out a chain of reasoning from this, Lenglet proposed that private accumulation beyond the level of necessities, the concentration of real estate in the hands of a rich few and the existence of the leisured classes 'enjoying everything without producing anything' could all be justified on the grounds that some people had superior talent to others and had been more diligent: 'yesterday he worked more or spent less'. This consideration incorporated inheritances: 'If his ease comes from his ancestors, he is enjoying their savings and work. If he is not working, it is because his father worked as much as two, because he worked for two'.³⁶ Inequality, in this light, was not a symptom of 'usurpation'.³⁷

Insofar as the right to property enabled the Moderns to successfully meet with the need for increased labour imposed on society by population growth, this right was not only just but also useful. The Moderns were many, and this made it impossible for them to imitate the Ancients, who had been few.³⁸ Here, Lenglet had common ground with the revolutionaries who dismissed the legal institutions of Antiquity as models for the 1790s, typically claiming that 'since the multitude were slaves in all countries' in ancient Greek city-states, 'their institutions can very rarely befit modern peoples'.³⁹ There was a solid agreement on this issue even between Lenglet and his Directorial adversary, Sieyès, who had maintained since 1789 that 'modern European peoples bear little resemblance to ancient peoples' due to historical changes in economic structures.⁴⁰ Radical republicans were not necessarily devoted admirers of the Ancients, despite the moderates' efforts to portray them as such. Like conservative republicans, the democrats were equally shaped by the historical perspectives of the Enlightenment.⁴¹

If the guarantee of property increased the total amount of labour, the division of labour enhanced its efficiency. That modern political economy was predicated upon the division of labour was a thesis firmly upheld by the majority of revolutionaries and most notably propounded by Sieyès.⁴² The division of labour was, for Lenglet as well as for Sieyès, a force to be reckoned with, and under the condition

³⁵Ibid., pp. 12, 19; Paul Bowles, 'The origin of property and the development of Scottish historical science', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, no. 2 (1985), pp. 197–209; Robert Lamb, 'For and against ownership: William Godwin's theory of property', *The Review of Politics* 71, no. 2 (2009), pp. 275–302; David Allan, "'The wisest and most beneficial schemes": William Ogilvie, radical political economy and the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Liberty, property and popular politics: England and Scotland, 1688–1815. Essays in honour of H. T. Dickinson*, ed. Gordon Pentland and Michael Davis (Edinburgh, 2016), pp. 103–17.

³⁶Lenglet, *De la propriété*, pp. 21–33.

³⁷Ibid., p. 38.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 37–8.

³⁹*Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860: Première série, 1787 à 1799*, vol. 8, p. 412.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 594.

⁴¹Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, vol. 2.

⁴²Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, *Des manuscrits de Sieyès*, ed. Christine Fauré, 2 vols., vol. 1: 1773–1799 (Paris, 1999); Scurr, 'Social equality in Pierre-Louis Røederer's interpretation'; Scurr, 'Inequality and political stability'; Hopkins, 'Pierre-Louis Røederer, Adam Smith'.

of intellectual inequality it was a force that necessarily brought about economic inequality.⁴³ In Lenglet's view the laws of political economy stipulated that 'for all to have necessities, it must be that some have superfluities'. This was because acceleration in both agriculture and commerce stemmed from the same desire for 'surplus' as a guarantee against future uncertainties.⁴⁴

In addition to this, it was crucial to consider national defence. In the eighteenth-century and revolutionary debates regarding the best form of armed forces for modern commercial states, Lenglet followed Adam Smith and other Moderns in acknowledging the superiority of a standing army over a militia.⁴⁵ However, he also joined the radical republicans in supporting the notion of a professional standing army made up of trained citizen soldiers rather than one comprised of mercenaries. This reflects the new dimension of possibility that had been added to this question over the course of the French Revolution: now an army could be imagined that possessed both the skills of a standing army and the republican patriotism of citizen soldiers.⁴⁶ The point to be made about Lenglet's discussion of arms in relation to property was that, to sustain an army, society needed to create wealth above the level of subsistence. In this sense, in a commercial society that incurred inequality, property was a cornerstone for national independence: 'without property there is no superfluity; without trade there is no superfluity ... it is the superfluity of a nation that defends it against its neighbours'.⁴⁷

In a 'system of property' regulated by 'personal interest', Lenglet claimed, labour and accumulation would induce people to improve their abilities, thereby speeding the progress of social enlightenment.⁴⁸ By contrast, a community without property had to resort to the coercive powers of 'authority ... so immediately, universally and frequently applied to all the acts, needs, desires and enjoyments of life'.⁴⁹ Most of Lenglet's contemporaries would have read this as an unmistakable sign of liberticide,

⁴³Sieyès, *Des manuscrits de Sieyès*, vol. 1, pp. 457–9, 471–2, 489–92; Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 18. On Sieyès, see also Pasquale Pasquino, *Sieyès et l'invention de la constitution en France* (Paris, 1998); Andreï Tyrsenko, 'L'ordre politique chez Sieyès en l'an III', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 319 (2000), pp. 27–45.

⁴⁴Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 39.

⁴⁵Philippe-Auguste de Sainte-Foy chevalier d'Arcq, *La noblesse militaire, opposée à la noblesse commerçante ou le patriote françois* (Amsterdam, 1756); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne* (Rouen, 1772), p. 384; Joseph Marie Servan de Gerbey, *Le Soldat citoyen, ou Vues patriotiques sur la manière la plus avantageuse de pourvoir à la défense du royaume* (Neuchâtel, 1780); John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the militia issue* (Edinburgh, 1985); David Womersley, 'Introduction', in *Writings on standing armies*, ed. David Womersley (Indianapolis, 2020), pp. ix–xlix.

⁴⁶Edmond-Louis-Alexis Dubois de Crancé, *Second rapport du comité militaire sur l'établissement des milices nationales et le recrutement de l'armée* (Paris, 1789), pp. 7–8; Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, *Conseil des cinq-cents. Rapport au nom de la commission militaire, sur le mode de recrutement de l'armée. Séance du 23 nivôse an VI* (Paris, 1798), pp. 1–2; Alan Forrest, *Conscripts and deserters: the army and French society during the revolution and empire* (Oxford, 1989); Annie Crépin, *La conscription en débat, ou le triple apprentissage de la nation, de la citoyenneté, de la république (1798–1889)* (Arras, 1998); Philippe Catros, "'Tout Français est soldat et se doit à la défense de la patrie" (retour sur la naissance de la conscription militaire)', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 348 (2007), pp. 7–23.

⁴⁷Lenglet, *De la propriété*, pp. 58–9.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 55.

a recipe for the decline and fall of a free state.⁵⁰ While inequality produced 'anti-social passions' such as 'greed, envy, pride, selfishness',⁵¹ Lenglet argued, it was misleading to seek the solution in the abolition of property. This was because the only path to 'absolute equality' lay in the combination of 'equal work' and 'equal pay', both of which were infeasible.⁵² Modern commercial society featured a huge diversity of tasks to be fulfilled. Not everyone could be made to do the same job; people had abilities different from each other. Their preferences for the easiest jobs would bring them into conflict. The optimal division of labour would be lost and production of all kinds would decrease significantly in quantity. Starvation and other shortages of essential goods would follow. In spite of how morally fair it could seem, equal work would in economic terms result in 'minimum work, minimum production and maximum misery'. In addition, because the differences in price and salary were the effects of factors such as the diversity in the quality of goods and the relative level of supply and demand, equal pay could deteriorate the quality of goods and even destroy the market price mechanism.⁵³ It would require an omnipresent government in charge of 'distributing and classifying men' to maintain economic equality of this kind. People under these conditions would need to live as prescribed by the state, suffering 'someone else's guesses or whims'.⁵⁴ Above all, when considerations for military defence were accounted for, 'the community of goods' seemed unsustainable. The Equals' vision could not work as intended, Lenglet claimed, because establishing equality without property amounted to 'leaving work without encouragement and the whole population without activity, relations or defence'.⁵⁵

III

The point to note in Lenglet's rejection of Babouvism and his ardent embrace of private property is that therein lay no logically inherent imperative that would carry him towards an exclusivist position supporting elitist meritocracy. Politically, just as Antonelle denied the viability of Babeuf's communism and rallied the democrats around the notion of 'representative democracy' – the main elements of which were manhood suffrage, popular control over legislation and the republican political economy of small producers grounded in moderate egalitarianism⁵⁶ – Lenglet's determined breakup with the Equals did not prevent him from making a passionate call for political equality and manhood suffrage without censitary restrictions.⁵⁷ Economically, Lenglet's recognition that modern Europe could not sustain itself or

⁵⁰Constantin-François de Chassebœuf Volney, *Les ruines, ou Méditations sur les révolutions des empires* (Paris, 1791); Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, vol. 3.

⁵¹Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 23.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 47–9.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁶Antonelle, *Le contraste de sentiments*, pp. 51–7; Bernard Gainot, 'La notion de "démocratie représentative": le legs néo-jacobin de 1799', in *L'image de la Révolution française*, ed. Michel Vovelle, 4 vols. (Paris, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 523–9; Serna, 'Comment être démocrate'.

⁵⁷The Equals' personal relationship with the democrats had been much closer than their political visions had been: Michel Vovelle, 'Une troisième voie pour la lecture de la conspiration des Égaux?', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 312 (1998), pp. 217–27; Mason, 'Never was a plot so holy'.

make progress without a system of private property did not preclude him from proposing, in alignment with other democrats under the Directory, to ameliorate the social consequences of extreme inequality – just as Thomas Paine’s *Agrarian Justice*, published a year before *De la propriété*, had floated a combination of the thesis of common land ownership in the state of nature, the labour theory for the origin of property, and support for universal basic income.⁵⁸

Following the endorsement of property and economic inequality on historical, juristic, and republican grounds, Lenglet moved to political rights, inquiring whether the inequality of possessions should receive further protection through a system of unequal rights to political participation and decision-making.⁵⁹ The exclusion of the poor from voting in the revolutionary decade was commonly justified by evoking the long-inherited fear of democracy as the tyrannical rule of passion-ridden mobs.⁶⁰ With the exception of a few radicals, the majority of revolutionaries considered people without means as either ignorant or lazy and therefore unworthy of political trust. Mass participation in politics, the moderates argued, would lead to a repetition of such undesirable events as the death of Socrates or the usurpation of Caesar.⁶¹ From this ‘Enlightened’ perspective of ‘Moderns’, manhood suffrage appeared to be the road to military government, and ‘democracy’ an anachronistic remnant of ancient politics unfit for modern states.⁶² As for Lenglet, he chose against this view to call censitary restrictions on voting rights ‘distinction’ and criticized it by describing it as historically irrelevant and even harmful to modern representative republics. It was an ingenious attempt to separate manhood suffrage from contemporary perceptions of ancient democracies.⁶³

Boissy d’Anglas, one of the main architects of the Constitution of 1795 that gave birth to the Directory, put forward a famous case for ‘government by the best’.⁶⁴ To counter Boissy d’Anglas’ statement that the Republic would be ruined if the people were granted democratic powers, Lenglet asserted that the political exclusion of the poor was at once unjust in juristic terms and harmful in republican terms.⁶⁵ His argument, once again, began with history. The ancient republics of Greece and Rome made distinctions among their residents, e.g. between citizens and slaves, to

⁵⁸Thomas Paine, *Agrarian justice, opposed to agrarian law, and to agrarian monopoly* (Paris, 1797).

⁵⁹Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 61.

⁶⁰R. R. Palmer, ‘Notes on the use of the word “democracy” 1789–1799’, *Political Science Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (1953), pp. 203–26; Pierre Rosanvallon, ‘L’histoire du mot démocratie à l’époque moderne’, in *Situations de la démocratie*, ed. Marcel Gauchet, Pierre Manent and Pierre Rosanvallon (Paris, 1993), pp. 11–29.

⁶¹Jean-Joseph Mounier, *Considérations sur les gouvernements, et principalement sur celui qui convient à la France* (Versailles, 1789), p. 4; Lezay-Marnésia, *Qu’est-ce que la Constitution de 95*; Maugras, *Dissertation sur les principes*; Jacques Necker, *De la Révolution française*, 4 vols. (1796).

⁶²McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 40–63.

⁶³Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 69.

⁶⁴François-Antoine de Boissy d’Anglas, *Projet de constitution pour la République française et discours préliminaire prononcé par Boissy d’Anglas, au nom de la Commission des onze, dans la séance du 5 messidor an III* (Paris, 1795), pp. 25–8, 78; Christine Le Bozec, ‘Boissy d’Anglas et la constitution de l’an III’, in 1795. *Pour une république sans révolution*, ed. Roger Dupuy and Marcel Morabito (Rennes, 1996), pp. 81–90; Michel Troper, ‘La séparation des pouvoirs dans la constitution de l’an III’, in *La constitution de l’an III: Boissy d’Anglas et la naissance du libéralisme constitutionnel*, ed. Gérard Conac and Jean-Pierre Machelon (Paris, 1999), pp. 51–71; Jainchill, *Reimagining politics*, pp. 27, 43.

⁶⁵Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 63.

ensure that only a small portion of the population had access to politics. In his view the 'democratic' nature of those republics had necessitated the introduction of such distinctions in the first place: the laws of those states allowed a citizen, chosen by lot without any qualifications apart from the simple fact of being a citizen, to exert an enormous power over the course of government.⁶⁶ At the same time it was these distinctions that caused countless dissensions within the polities:

... was it not rather due to these very distinctions that those famous republics underwent frequent agitations, murderous debates and gradual corruption ... was it not the interminable quarrel between the patricians and the plebeians that delivered Rome to the bloodthirsty furies of Marius and Sulla and prepared the Romans to receive a permanent tyranny ... ?⁶⁷

The fall of Rome, on this account, was not to be ascribed to political equality but to the lack of it. Lenglet thus argued that the institutionalization of political inequality, far from securing social stability as the conservative republicans had supposed, brought ruin to governments and made the unfortunate cycle of history go round. On his view the Old Regime had collapsed for the same reason, and the proud and ignorant victors of 1789 were about to repeat it by forming a ruling class on the basis of distinction by wealth.⁶⁸ The conservative republicans, he insinuated, were thus fomenting a civil war between the haves and the have-nots by presupposing a false and incorrect connection between property and politics.

The conservative republicans insisted on two intertwined arguments. First, economic inequality could not be protected without an 'inequality of political rights'. Second, an equal right to political participation required an 'equality of property'. These formulations presented the prospect of political equality as a dangerous 'chimera' in associating it with economic equality.⁶⁹ Thus in 1795 Adrien Lezay had called on the ruling republicans to restrict 'the right of election' even further. His desperate advice for them was to 'reduce political liberty to expand civil liberty'.⁷⁰

Lenglet asserted against Lezay that the self-styled Moderns' anxiety about the revival of ancient democracy and the putatively harmful effects of political equality for property were historically unfounded. The growth of population over history played into political forms as much as into economic production, resulting in all modern republics being constituted in representative regimes in which sovereignty 'can only be exercised by representatives'. Compared to the ancient republics where 'a third or a tenth of the population deliberated on public affairs', only a tiny proportion of the population acted as 'legislators' in a modern republic such as France.⁷¹ For Lenglet the undeniable outcome of elections in revolutionary France was that the rich retained 'all powers' and had 'a decisive preponderance ... in all offices'.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 66–8.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 70.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 71, 145.

⁷⁰Lezay-Marnésia, *Qu'est-ce que la constitution de 95?*, p. 59.

⁷¹Lenglet, *De la propriété*, pp. 68–9.

Their 'dominance over non-property-owners' would not be easily shaken by universal male suffrage, as wealth gave them the advantage of better education and attractiveness.⁷² Lenglet made it clear that historical change had rendered universal voting rights *less* dangerous for the rich. This was because the popular vote did not immediately grant people tangible power in a way that was comparable to that of legislative representatives and government officials.⁷³

Moreover, political equality was desirable in large modern republics because it was both just and useful. Lenglet was of the opinion that the Revolution's cherished principle of popular sovereignty could not logically incorporate political exclusion. If the state of nature had ceased to exist with the advent of property and the state of society had thus been entered upon, society was a 'bank of property owners'. All workers then had a 'right to government' and an interest in 'order, justice and enlightenment', because all property, even that of a day labourer, was founded upon industrious labour.⁷⁴

Here we witness a 'democratic' entanglement of the theory of property with the theory of sovereignty that presented itself in a stark contrast to a 'conservative' version. Where Du Pont de Nemours and Lezay recognized only the land holders as sovereign on the grounds that anyone who did not have landed property was a 'foreigner' or a 'tenant' with no right to participate in the landlord's decisions, Lenglet dubbed their view a 'political superstition'.⁷⁵ While Dmitrii Alekseevich Golitsyn insisted in the name of Physiocracy that 'the landowners alone formed the body of the nation ... they are everything in the nation',⁷⁶ Lenglet regarded the supremacy of landed property to be an anachronistic trait of 'primitive' societies since modern 'industrial' societies embraced movables.⁷⁷ If Du Pont de Nemours, Lezay, and Golitsyn were right, Lenglet asked, were half of all French 'stateless', and were they all 'foreigners to the ground fertilised by their labour'? His point in this endeavour to disconnect sovereignty from property was that, if society needed to be ruled by law, whatever regulation that did not receive the consent of the entire population through an inclusive process of legislation was, from the perspective of the excluded, nothing more than a fraudulent fabrication of law imposed by 'force or cunning'.⁷⁸ This was a revolutionary argument in a time of revolutions, and political equality was thereby made a corollary of the consent theory of legitimacy that most revolutionaries dared not oppose.⁷⁹

⁷²Ibid., pp. 64–5.

⁷³Ibid., p. 69.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 72–4.

⁷⁵Du Pont de Nemours, *Du pouvoir législatif et du pouvoir exécutif*, pp. 10–19; Adrien Lezay-Marnésia, *Les ruines, ou Voyage en France, pour servir de suite à celui de la Grèce* (Paris, 1796), pp. 26–8; Lenglet, *De la propriété*, pp. 74–8.

⁷⁶Dmitrii Alekseevich Golitsyn (Дмитрий Алексеевич Голицын; Dimitri Alexeïevitch Galitzine; Dmitri Alekseevich Gallitzin), *De l'esprit des économistes, ou Les économistes justifiés d'avoir posé par leurs principes les bases de la Révolution française* (Brunswick, 1796), p. 227.

⁷⁷Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 27.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 78–9.

⁷⁹For a case of exception to this trend from the radical side, see Jean-Baptiste Salaville, *L'homme et la société, ou Nouvelle théorie de la nature humaine et de l'état social* (Paris, 1799); Minchul Kim, 'Sociability, natural jurisprudence, and republicanism in the French Revolution: Jean-Baptiste Salaville's empiricist science of the legislator', *French Studies* 72, no. 4 (2018), pp. 505–20.

If the exclusion of the many from politics was thus unjust from a juristic angle, it was also, from a republican angle, harmful to society at large.⁸⁰ First, since most soldiers were not wealthy they could easily face exclusion from the right to vote. This in Lenglet's view could only undermine the morale of French troops against the coalition of European monarchies and invite France to suffer the fate of Poland.⁸¹ It was foolish above all for the rich to believe that 'the vast majority' of people would say:

we will obey the laws, on condition that we do not participate in making them or even in nominating those who will make them ... at the first signal, we will run to the frontiers and fight as much as you want, provided that we never know why ... we will maintain society with all our strength, on condition that in it you are everything while we are nothing.⁸²

Lenglet thought that it was dangerous to follow Sieyès, Boissy d'Anglas, Du Pont de Nemours, and Lezay, whose arguments amounted to a transformation of 'proprietors' into 'masters', as the people were unlikely to be docile beneath them for long. As pointed out most significantly by Rafe Blaufarb, the revolutionary decade witnessed a decisive separation of property from political power by the abolition of feudal dues, venal offices, and seigneurial privileges. In this context what was being articulated in *De la propriété* was a democrat's profession of faith that aligned closely with the Revolution's legal and institutional achievements: that the collapse of the Old Regime – where property had been legally intertwined with public authority – meant that excluding the poor from politics risked provoking deep resentment towards the propertied elite.⁸³ Instead, Lenglet stated in a rhetorical strategy reminiscent of Louis-Pierre Dufourny's *Cahiers du quatrième ordre* (1789),⁸⁴ giving political rights to the poor was the more efficient means of assuaging their envy and hatred. With other democrats such as Antonelle and Bernard Metge,⁸⁵ he chose to openly trust that the people would demonstrate political virtue unless they were oppressed by an oligarchy. Equipped with political rights and the attendant dignity, the many and the poor would not turn into angry mobs as readily as the rich feared, because modern societies were constituted in a complex web of productive relations and there was no natural antagonism that would be strong enough to threaten the institution of property itself.⁸⁶ Political exclusion by means of economic distinctions

⁸⁰Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 81.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 95–7.

⁸²Ibid., pp. 82–3.

⁸³For a detailed discussion of the changes in the relationship between property and sovereignty in the Revolution, particularly of the rise of the allegedly modern, liberal, and absolute right to property, see Rafe Blaufarb, *The great demarcation: the French Revolution and the invention of modern property* (Oxford, 2016).

⁸⁴Louis-Pierre Dufourny de Villiers, *Cahiers du quatrième ordre, celui des pauvres journaliers, des infirmes, des indigens, etc., l'ordre sacré des infortunés* (Paris, 1789); Michèle Grenot, *Le souci des plus pauvres: Dufourny, la Révolution française et la démocratie* (Rennes, 2014), pp. 83–108.

⁸⁵Antonelle, *Le contraste de sentiments*, pp. 36–40; Bernard Metge, *Dialogue entre un représentant du peuple et un ancien administrateur de département sur les finances* (Paris, 1796), p. 3.

⁸⁶Lenglet, *De la propriété*, pp. 85–7.

could only make the people more ignorant and more apt to be agitated by demagogues, and their desire for political action would increase all the more 'because they had been excluded and because they feared being excluded'.⁸⁷

This description of the unintended consequences of conservative fears matched the standpoint of other democrats under the Directory, namely that each 'reaction' would give rise to another and that oppressive tranquillity could not produce social peace.⁸⁸ The lesson was that no security of order or property could be obtained through the loss of liberty. In Lenglet's terms, by dividing the people with political inequality, 'far from replacing freedom with calm, the usurpers could only provide discord and servitude'.⁸⁹

Under the condition of modernity characterized by division of labour, a standing army, and political representation, Lenglet asked, if economic inequality and political equality could be combined to uphold a large commercial republic as a free and independent state, what could this state do to finance the essential costs of administration, law enforcement, national education, public aid and, most crucially, the military?⁹⁰ For him, all of these were necessary components of a workable modern republic. The administrative apparatus and the legal system were indispensable to republican order, and education was key to fostering popular *mœurs*. The idea of public aid was often debated with passion in the legislative Councils of the Directory, in lengthy discussions to which Lenglet himself made contributions.⁹¹ He regarded public aid as a logical consequence of the twin principles that 'society must guarantee everyone the fruit of his labours, but ... it must also guarantee the subsistence of those who cannot work or whose needs exceed their strength'.⁹² As for the military, he affirmed, the days of unpaid citizen soldiers had passed and modern states were forced to defend themselves with an army paid by taxes.⁹³ What was needed, then, was a principle of taxation.

At this point Lenglet issued a justification of progressive taxation, a radical proposition for the time upheld only by a number of democrats during the Directory who explicitly venerated Condorcet – the *philosophe* had called for progressive taxation in

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 105.

⁸⁸Antoine François de Nantes, *Coup-d'œil rapide sur les mœurs, les lois, les contributions, les secours publics, les sociétés politiques, les cultes, les théâtres, les institutions publiques, dans leurs rapports avec le gouvernement représentatif, et sur tous les moyens propres à raffermir la constitution de l'an III* (Grenoble, 1798), pp. 85–8; Kim, 'Démocratiser le gouvernement représentatif?', p. 77.

⁸⁹Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 110.

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 117–22.

⁹¹Jacques-Antoine-Joseph Cousin, *Conseil des anciens. Opinion sur la résolution relative à la suppression du vagabondage. Séance du 11 vendémiaire an VIII* (Paris, 1799); Étienne-Géry Lenglet, *Conseil des anciens. Opinion sur la résolution relative aux moyens de prévenir et de réprimer le vagabondage. Séance du 12 vendémiaire an VIII* (Paris, 1799). For those issues, see also Adrian O'Connor, *In pursuit of politics: education and revolution in eighteenth-century France* (Manchester, 2017); Gaïd Andro and Laurent Brassart, 'Administrer sous la Révolution et l'Empire', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 389 (2017), pp. 3–18; Gaïd Andro, 'Une administration sans domination? Le projet constitutionnel de 1790 ou l'éphémère "modernisation" démocratique de l'administration territoriale (1789–1793)', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 52, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.4000/mcv.15709>.

⁹²Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 24.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 114–16.

1793 – as their intellectual inspiration.⁹⁴ The proposal for progressive taxation would likely have terrified many Directorial writers such as Jean-Baptiste Maugras, whose treatise on social jurisprudence, *Dissertation sur les principes fondamentaux de l'association humaine* (1796), urged the French to recognize the sacred nature of property rights and do away with the radicals. Maugras was adamant that progressive taxation was, on the one hand, 'unjust' to the property owner since it violated his rights and, on the other hand, 'impossible' to execute as the rich would conceal their real scale of assets.⁹⁵

From Lenglet's perspective, however, progressive taxation was just *and* wise. It was just because it conformed to the fundamental principle of social morality that 'each person must give back to society in accordance with the benefits he receives from it'. First, the benefits of law enforcement and national defence provided by the government to the rich were greater than those to the poor, because the former had vastly more to lose than the latter when 'society was threatened with chaos'. Second, the rich received the best share of the profit from the Atlantic and Mediterranean trade which, in turn, corrupted the nation's *mœurs* with luxury and aggravated the misery of the poor by increasing the food prices (the logic was that some of the resources and labour power invested in foreign trade had been diverted from domestic agriculture).⁹⁶ In addition, progressive taxation was wise because free states had much to gain from avoiding any 'extreme disproportion of fortunes'. Great opulence would be responsible for moral degeneration across the nation because 'great fortunes almost equally corrupt those who envy them and those who possess them'. The rich would fall into decadence as their desires would be fed by their wealth, while the poor suffered from the 'feeling of deprivation'.⁹⁷ Drawing on this consideration, Lenglet also proposed that necessities should be exempt from taxation.⁹⁸ In *De la propriété* he was being consistent with his pre-Thermidor position in favour of 'lessening the burden of taxation for the poor', announced in his speech at the Société des Amis de la Constitution of Arras in 1791.⁹⁹ If it was crucial to avoid the fantasy of a perfect equality in modern states, it was no less paramount from the viewpoint of a radical democrat that the aristocracy of wealth be eliminated from the Republic.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, 'Sur l'impôt progressif (1793)', in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, ed. Arthur Condorcet O'Connor and François Arago (Paris, 1847), pp. 625–36; Bernard Gainot, 'La réception de Condorcet dans les milieux néo-jacobins', in *Condorcet: homme des Lumières et de la Révolution*, ed. Anne-Marie Chouillet and Pierre Crépel (Paris, 1997), pp. 263–71; Jean-Pierre Schandeler, *Les interprétations de Condorcet: symboles et concepts, 1794–1894* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 68–101; Minchul Kim, 'Condorcet and the viability of democracy in modern republics, 1789–1794', *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2019), pp. 179–202, at 193–5.

⁹⁵Maugras, *Dissertation sur les principes*, pp. 147–9.

⁹⁶Lenglet, *De la propriété*, pp. 123–9.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁹⁹Étienne-Géry Lenglet, *Réflexions sur le payement des impôts, lues par É.-G. Lenglet dans la première séance publique de la Société des Amis de la Constitution d'Arras, le 18 février 1791* (Arras, 1791), p. 8.

¹⁰⁰Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 141.

IV

Lenglet remained faithful to the principles laid out in *De la propriété* through the years of the Consulate and the Empire, constantly criticizing hereditary office and censitary voting restrictions and calling for political equality as a means of achieving genuine 'harmony' in 1815.¹⁰¹ Such was his vision of how to make the existence of a free state under modern conditions viable. If 'social laws' could not remove 'natural inequality' among its citizens, society could still be driven towards a twofold operation of improvement. The first was to 'improve the condition of all' by increasing the level of production. The second was to 'prevent the strongest or the most adroit from oppressing the weakest', thus holding the pernicious effects of inequality in check.¹⁰²

The political economy of *De la propriété* aligned its author with the democrats of the Directory who firmly supported manhood suffrage. Historians of this period, particularly Bernard Gainot and Pierre Serna, have established that the democrats as a political group were recruited from across a number of pre-Terror factional lines. Their moral, political and economic ideas were articulated in the face of the looming decline and fall of what they regarded as a republic based on the oligarchy of the rich.¹⁰³ This article, by examining the articulation of the connection between politics and economics in the democrats' thought, revivifies the work of Gainot and Serna on the Directory, suggesting that a rich field of study awaits us beyond the horizon of the much studied conservative strand of political economy. On a closer reading, the democrats are revealed to have been closer to Thomas Paine than former Girondins were, at least in political economy if not in personal affiliations. In *An End to Poverty?*, Gareth Stedman Jones placed Paine's egalitarian *Agrarian Justice* alongside the works of Condorcet and William Godwin, calling for them to be considered collectively as 'the beginnings of social democracy' that 'preceded the genesis of nineteenth- or twentieth-century socialism'.¹⁰⁴ This article has complemented Jones' work by analysing Lenglet's political thought, adding to the history of political economy a branch of Condorcetian egalitarianism – not widely shared among former Girondins, a group to which Condorcet did not firmly belong in terms of political thought – that did not shy away from the predicaments of modern liberty, commerce, and a standing army.¹⁰⁵ *De la propriété* affirmed that moderate equality, in combination with manhood suffrage, would underpin the political economy of a modern republic. The proposal offered in the work for the transition mechanism to such equality was progressive taxation and tax exemptions on necessities. These fiscal policies were to be combined with the recognition that, while economic inequality seemed favourable to a certain extent for the Moderns, equality was nonetheless beneficial to political rights even if the time of the Ancients had irreversibly passed. Even the Moderns, so it was argued, stood to gain from democratic equality.

¹⁰¹ Étienne-Géry Lenglet, *Questions sur le pacte social des Français* (Douai, 1815), pp. ii, 17–19.

¹⁰² Lenglet, *De la propriété*, p. 62.

¹⁰³ Gainot, 1799; Kim, 'The political economy of democracy in the French Revolution'; Serna, *Antonelle*; Serna, 'Comment être démocrate'.

¹⁰⁴ Gareth Stedman Jones, *An end to poverty? A historical debate* (New York, 2004), pp. 233–4.

¹⁰⁵ Kim, 'Condorcet and the viability of democracy in modern republics'.

Lenglet's *De la propriété* was, in its outlook and rhetoric, heir to both the Enlightenment and the Revolution. It exemplified how deeply a provincial lawyer thrown into the political turmoil of the First Republic was steeped in the historical perspectives of the 'Enlightened narrative'.¹⁰⁶ It is a case in point, all the stronger because it is not unique, that even the radical democrats of the French Revolution articulated their vision in languages inherited from the historians and *philosophes* of the eighteenth century. Admittedly, to the eyes of political actors in France, the sphere of possibilities for reform and regeneration after 1789 seemed to have expanded drastically, and this made the Revolution a profound rupture for them. However, they were still children of the Enlightenment. Various strands of revolutionary thinkers reached different conclusions from each other on the questions of the day, but they were working with a more or less shared set of eighteenth-century languages and logics of approaching political and social issues multifariously adapted to the new times. It is misleading to suggest that Sieyès, Rœderer, and their 'moderate' acolytes were the only group of revolutionaries who sought answers to the predicaments of the modern republic. In this regard, *De la propriété* reveals the weakness in John Robertson's claim that the radical Jacobins dismissed the faith of the 'Enlightenment philosophers' in political economy and pursued instead 'a simple reassertion of virtue at the expense of economic betterment'.¹⁰⁷ It also induces us to turn down Jonathan Israel's reified classification of revolutionary factions that regards the democrats as 'populists' unworthy of his treasured label of 'Radical Enlightenment'.¹⁰⁸ As has become much clearer in this article, such a historically radical vision of political economy as Lenglet's was less of an outlier than an integral part of the Enlightened reform projects of the revolutionary republic.

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¹⁰⁶Hugh Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment* (New Haven, 2010), pp. 1–16.

¹⁰⁷John Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 405.

¹⁰⁸Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary ideas: an intellectual history of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton, 2014), pp. 4, 697.

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