***Doux Commerce* and the “Commercial Jew”: Intolerance and Tolerance in Voltaire and Montesquieu**

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**Abstract:** Voltaire and Montesquieu both defended eighteenth-century commerce against its critics—but Voltaire did so as a vehement anti-Semite, while the comparatively tolerant Montesquieu internalized the most prevalent criticisms of commercial society. Voltaire’s strategic anti-Semitism projected the market’s unsavory qualities onto an already despised minority, creating, in effect, two varieties of commerce: “our” progressive mode and “their” debased one. Montesquieu, by contrast, painted a more ambiguous picture, celebrating the market’s growth while often conceding the superiority of the pre-commercial world, a position of rhetorical self-doubt that minimized the need to manufacture scapegoats. Their clash stands as an object lesson in argumentative ethics: while Voltaire’s purism led to disturbing conclusions, Montesquieu’s self-critical approach endures as a compelling model.

Faced with attacks on a value we hold dear, we might, if the criticisms prove difficult to rebut, pursue two different strategies: deflect them onto others, or take them to heart. These were the respective responses of the *philosophes* Voltaire and Montesquieu to the eighteenth-century critics of intensified commerce: the former, polemical and unwavering, and the latter, ambiguous and self-critical. I argue that the distinction between these approaches was not merely a matter of intellectual style, but an index of these writers’ humanity: Voltaire purchased an uncompromising defense of commerce at the expense of vitriolic anti-Semitism,[[3]](#footnote-3) while the comparatively tolerant Montesquieu avoided a similar fault largely by taking greater ownership of the flaws of commerce.

It is perhaps counterintuitive that a stronger embrace of commerce would go hand-in-hand with a decisive rejection of Jews, and vice-versa. In an intellectual culture in which Jews often “served as a kind of metaphor-turned-flesh for capitalism,”[[4]](#footnote-4) what would drive an enthusiastic friend of commerce to unabashed anti-Semitism? Consider Voltaire on this score: he insistently identified Jews as the commercial people *par excellence*; he loved commerce; and yet it is difficult to deny that he despised Jews. I seek to resolve that seeming paradox by arguing that Voltaire’s anti-Semitism played an important role in his thought as an argumentative strategy in defense of commerce: Jews were the group onto which he projected a number of commerce’s most unsavory qualities. Voltaire was well aware of the profoundly disruptive effects of the rise of commercial society: its controversial dependence on lending at interest; its tendency to undermine traditional social relationships, and to replace them with relationships mediated by money; its alleged assault on the classical virtues. Yet Voltaire’s response to these charges was not to meet them head-on, but to isolate what were widely considered the worst qualities of commerce as the property of an already despised minority. For Voltaire, it seems, there were two kinds of commerce: the true, wholesome, progressive kind practiced by “us,” and the debased, grasping, calculating kind practiced by “them.” For Montesquieu, on the other hand, there was no pure version of commerce that needed saving: he accepted the growth of the market economy as a generally positive development, even as he recognized the ways in which the emerging world of trade and calculation paled in comparison to accomplishments of the ancients that “astonish our small souls.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Where Voltaire scapegoated, Montesquieu internalized; and if Voltaire outdid him as a polemicist, Montesquieu (as was recognized even in their own time) excelled Voltaire in tolerance.

Closer attention to this episode in intellectual history may shed light on these writers’ still-disputed attitudes toward Jews—but their clash has much broader implications. It points to the ways in which advocates of the market economy, not just its critics,[[6]](#footnote-6) have made use of anti-Semitism. And it offers an object lesson in what we might call argumentative ethics: the way in which Voltaire’s unyielding rhetorical purism led him to dark, disturbing conclusions, while Montesquieu’s ambiguity and tolerance went hand-in-hand. Though both thinkers shared the common goal of defending some of the central institutions of commercial modernity, Montesquieu’s mode of argumentation—which avoided scapegoating precisely *because* it embraced self-criticism and equivocation—endures as a far more compelling model.

**Explaining Voltaire’s Anti-Semitism**

It can be puzzling, even shocking, that such a well-known avatar of tolerance as Voltaire expended such effort on a lifelong project of intolerance. But Voltaire’s anti-Semitism is difficult to minimize or to explain away—and its sheer volume can be quantified by a number of metrics. In World War II-era France, for instance, Sorbonne professor Henri Labroue curried favor with the occupying German regime by compiling a volume of Voltaire’s anti-Jewish writings; it ran to nearly 250 pages.[[7]](#footnote-7) Another mark of his “obsession” with Jews came in his 1764 *Philosophical Dictionary*, a work of purportedly wider scope: some thirty out of its 118 articles attack Jews, and the article “Jew” is the single longest.[[8]](#footnote-8) Remarkably, a search by Ronald Schechter of the ARTFL database of French literature shows Voltaire accounting for 922 separate mentions of “*juif[s]*” or “*juive[s]*,” nearly forty percent of the database’s total over the entire eighteenth century.[[9]](#footnote-9)

To be sure, not all of Voltaire’s references to Jews are negative. For instance, his 1761 pamphlet “Sermon of Rabbi Akiba” puts in the mouth of a Jewish speaker a denunciation of the Portuguese Inquisition.[[10]](#footnote-10) The *Dictionary* entry on “Jew”—after allowing that the Jews are “an ignorant and barbarous people, who have long united the most sordid avarice with the most detestable superstition and the most invincible hatred for every people by whom they are tolerated and enriched”—charitably concludes: “Still, we ought not to burn them.”[[11]](#footnote-11) And in an exchange with the Sephardic Jewish writer Isaac de Pinto, Voltaire conceded that a minority of assimilated Jews might qualify as philosophers.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Yet, despite his opposition to violent persecution of religious minorities, it is still fair to examine Voltaire as a fundamentally anti-Semitic thinker. In one respect, as Arnold Ages argues, it is a question of volume: Voltaire’s moments of tolerance are “an almost barely discernible background radiation when compared to the vastness of his verbal assaults on Jews and Judaism.”[[13]](#footnote-13) More to the point, Voltaire was regarded as France’s leading intellectual anti-Semite by his own contemporaries. Arthur Hertzberg, for instance, investigates a wide range of French writings on the “Jewish question”: while eighteenth-century anti-Semites borrowed liberally from Voltaire’s arguments, a number of pro-toleration pamphlets—including works by Pinto and by the Catholic priest Antoine Guénée—criticized Voltaire harshly and directly. As Hertzberg concludes, “overwhelming evidence shows that both Jews and gentiles...unanimously regarded Voltaire as the enemy not only of biblical Judaism but of the struggling Jews of his own day.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Given the centrality of such themes to Voltaire’s work—especially, as I will argue, to his position on commerce—it is difficult to disagree with the summation offered by Shmuel Feiner: “Judaism fills such a central place in Voltaire’s thought and politics that one cannot relegate it to the sidelines.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Still, the question remains: exactly what place? Efforts to locate the source Voltaire’s anti-Semitism, and to situate it within his broader thought, could be classified on a scale from more to less forgiving. A comparatively forgiving interpretation argues that Voltaire, secularist though he was, was simply the product of a religious education of the kind that made suspicion of Jews a common European currency.[[16]](#footnote-16) Difficult as this claim is to disprove, it still raises the question of why Voltaire, far more than most contemporary writers to receive a similar upbringing, dealt so exhaustively with Jewish topics. Perhaps, then, his animosity grew from bad personal experiences with Jews: in 1726, for instance, he lost 20,000 francs when his Jewish banker went bankrupt, and in 1750-51, he was involved in an acrimonious financial dispute and lawsuit with a Jewish investor in Berlin.[[17]](#footnote-17) But while these incidents may have added intensity to Voltaire’s prejudice, they are also an insufficient explanation: for one, Voltaire’s anti-Semitic writing predates his 1726 loss; further, Voltaire himself claimed that he had easily forgiven larger losses at the hands of gentile bankers.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Among non-biographical explanations, the more forgiving account offered by Peter Gay insists that “Voltaire struck at the Jews to strike at the Christians.”[[19]](#footnote-19) In other words, Voltaire’s writing on Jews sometimes served as a coded attack on the Church, and was sometimes intended to undermine Christianity’s biblical foundations in the Old Testament. Yet Voltaire was unafraid to criticize the Church openly and vociferously, casting doubt on his need for any such coding; his recently published letters, too, show that anti-Semitism was a private conviction, not just a public posture. And while a great deal of Voltaire’s attacks on Jews were conducted in the form of biblical mockery, he also attacked the contemporary Jewish people in racial terms, frequently resorting to the “opinion that Jews of every generation are tainted by the same defects as their forefathers.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Rather than concluding, then, that Voltaire simply used Judaism to carry on a theological argument with the Church, it is essential that we place his anti-Semitism in the context of his secular politics; as Hertzberg puts it, Voltaire “provided the fundamentals of the rhetoric of secular anti-Semitism.”[[21]](#footnote-21) In this persuasive and influential reading, the Jews” major failing in Voltaire’s eyes was their “backwards” particularism, which stood against the universalizing Enlightenment project as he saw it.

I have dwelled on these competing explanations in an effort to demonstrate that Voltaire’s anti-Semitism was important to his political thought—and not simply a biographical or theological incidental. But canvassing these accounts also shows that a crucial explanation has been largely overlooked or downplayed: the Jewish role in the growth of commerce. Strategic anti-Semitism was central to Voltaire’s impassioned defense of commerce, just as their participation in a debased form of commerce was central to Voltaire’s perception of the Jews. While Voltaire certainly attacked Jews on non-commercial grounds—Jacob Katz, for instance, classifies his attacks as moral, religious, cultural, and political—the connection between Jews and commerce ought to be foregrounded for two reasons.[[22]](#footnote-22)

First, for Voltaire, commerce was not incidental to the Jewish identity, but essential—even more defining than religion. In his *Dictionary* history of the Jews he wrote that “the sect of the Jew had long been spread in Europe and Asia; but its tenets were entirely unknown...The Jews were known only as the Armenians are now known to the Turks and Persians, as brokers and traders.” The Jews may have been fond of their temple, “but were still fonder of their money.” Similarly, Voltaire wrote that “the Jews have ever considered as their first two duties, to get money and children.” In fact, the Jewish people was literally born in usury. Here is how Voltaire describes the exodus from Egypt: “You stole to the amount of upwards of nine millions in gold...reckoning interest at forty per cent. which was the lawful rate.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Despite his claims to historical objectivity, Voltaire wrote Jewish history by projecting his perception of modern-day Jews—a grasping nation of usurers—back through time.[[24]](#footnote-24) Jews, commerce, and usury were so closely linked in Voltaire’s mind that we can best make sense of his attitudes on these subjects by considering them together.

Second, this close identification of Jews and commerce was not unique to Voltaire, but formed part of the climate of thought within which he worked: the context to which I now turn.

**The Context of the Argument**

“The advances of trade” (*les progrès du commerce*) was a commonplace phrase for French writers in the pre-revolutionary years of the eighteenth century: as Paul Cheney notes, it played a role in political discourse analogous to that of the word “globalization” in our time.[[25]](#footnote-25) The phrase stood for burgeoning foreign trade, international economic competition, and “financialization”—as well as for the domestic social dislocation that these developments threatened to bring about. France’s participation in this intensified global commerce is well-documented: for instance, French production indices nearly doubled in the period from 1700 to 1790; French export growth outpaced that of Britain over a similar period;[[26]](#footnote-26) and, between 1730 and the 1770s, “foreign trade expanded between five- and sixfold…while colonial commerce increased tenfold.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Expanded trade brought with it a developing awareness of the economy as an arena of geopolitical conflict.[[28]](#footnote-28) And the impacts of these large-scale economic processes were powerfully felt on the level of social life. They were felt in an urbanization boom that added nearly one million new residents to French cities and towns by 1780;[[29]](#footnote-29) in a commonly voiced “perception that financiers were ascendant” politically and socially; in the growth of monetary exchanges in day-to-day life; and in a “consumer revolution” that expanded access to luxury and imitation-luxury goods and sparked a fierce debate on the merits and dangers of *luxe*.[[30]](#footnote-30)

How might one speak about such sweeping change, perceived by turns as liberating and wrenching? Quite often, one spoke about commerce by speaking about Jews. This identification was grounded in at least a grain of truth. By the time of the revolution, for instance, Jews owned one-third of the mortgages in Alsace.[[31]](#footnote-31) In Paris, a small minority of the city’s Jews prospered as lenders to the army and in other visible commercial roles.[[32]](#footnote-32) Despite France’s failure to revoke a fourteenth-century edict of expulsion, Jews were permitted in a number of cases to reside in French cities on the grounds of their commercial services. In 1698, the intendent of Metz defended the residence rights of Jews in his city because they imported “all sorts of merchandise.”[[33]](#footnote-33) From 1550 on, crypto-Jews were permitted to settle in a number of Atlantic trading ports under the guise of “Portuguese merchants.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Elsewhere, the great colonial powers actively sought Jewish merchants and settlers to expand trade with the New World.[[35]](#footnote-35) In all, this disproportionate, though not dominant, role in trade and finance (itself the product of longstanding restrictions on employment) helped make Jews “a significant barometer of the changes that were taking place in France as a whole.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

Still, why make such a barometer out of a minority that numbered only some 40,000 by century’s end—out of a people that remained on aggregate impoverished and disenfranchised, 80 percent of whom were officially recorded a “poor” in Metz in 1790, and who faced four separate eighteenth-century expulsions from Bordeaux alone on grounds of poverty? As Schechter puts it, borrowing a phrase from Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jews were “good to think.”[[37]](#footnote-37) They were a hugely useful “other” in Enlightenment discourse, across a breadth of subjects from nationalism to secularism; and among those topics, they were valuable as the prototypical people of commerce. In this regard, the imagined commercial Jew carried far more weight than Jewish reality.

Consider the value of the Jewish metaphor to critics of expanded commerce. As Jonathan Karp writes, the idea of “a specifically *Jewish* commerce…served to abstract various types of activities from the generality of economic life and, through their association with stigmatized Jews, make them vehicles for expressing widely felt anxieties about commerce in a manner that was politically safe and psychically tolerable.”[[38]](#footnote-38) In France and its neighbors, a tradition of anti-commercial references to Jews both preceded and outlived Voltaire and Montesquieu. In 1656, for instance, the English republican James Harrington attributed indulgence in trade and even deforestation to “such a Jewish humor” and advised that “they who did such things would never have made a commonwealth.”[[39]](#footnote-39) Similarly, among writers who considered trade and finance to be parasitic on “productive” economic activity, Jews almost inevitably came in for criticism. Among them was the Mantuan physician Bernardino Ramazzini, who in 1713 described Jews as “a lazy race, but active in business; they do not plow, harrow, or sow, but they always reap.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

In fact, those who stressed the primacy of plowing over trading—whether out of nostalgia, civic republicanism, or physiocratic economics—often found a useful foil in the Jews. François Hell’s notorious 1779 pamphlet on Jewish usury—published in the midst of a high-profile controversy over forged receipts that claimed to absolve Christian debtors—mixed denunciations of Jewish lenders with Rousseauian portrayals of simple peasant citizens and degrading commerce.[[41]](#footnote-41) On the other hand, the French literature on Jewish “regeneration” was less outwardly antagonistic (even as it did hold Jews to be in dire need of reformation). Still, these tracts were as much quasi-sympathetic portrayals of contemporary Jews as denunciations of the activities from which they had to be “regenerated”: invariably, the “horrible plague of commerce and finance,” as the comte de Mirabeau put it in his own 1787 work on the subject.[[42]](#footnote-42) In another celebrated essay on regeneration from the same year, by the abbé Henri Grégoire, a sprinkling of philo-Semitic comments stood alongside calls to end “judaic rapacity” by (among other steps) outlawing promissory notes, sales by Jews of goods on credit, loans by Jews to Christians, Jewish landlords of Christian tenants, and Jewish innkeepers.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Less commonly, Jews and trade occasionally appeared together in the opposite valence; one of its important exponents was Louis de Jaucourt, the most prolific contributor to the *Encylopédie*. In his entry “*Juif,”* he favorably characterized Jews as essential to economic growth: they “have become the instruments by means of which the most distant nations can speak and communicate as one. It is due to them, as it is with the pegs and nails that are used in [the construction of] a great building, which are needed to keep all of its parts together, that all of the parts of commerce are linked.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Though his treatment of Jews was not uniformly rosy—elsewhere, he criticized them sharply for their adherence to their rabbis and religious law—Jaucourt’s strand of philo-Semitism did attract at least one imitator. In a 1767 controversy over the exclusion of Jewish merchants from trade in Paris, a pseudonymous Jewish leader published a pamphlet that cited Jaucourt’s passage on “pegs and nails” and defended the Jewish people in that light as the one which best “unite[s] the knowledge and the means” to expand France’s trade.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Of course, as we will see below, it was hardly the case that all arguments over *les progrès du commerce* invoked the commercial Jew. My claim here is simply that both positions I have considered—as exemplified by, say, Ramazzini and Jaucourt—make a kind of intuitive sense. As Jerry Z. Muller puts it, “condemnation of commerce was often linked to anti-Semitism...[and] there has often been a link between philo-capitalism and philo-Semitism.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Yet Voltaire’s entry into the long-running commercial argument marks a curious exception to the rule. It was not simply that he was among the most vehement of the defenders of commerce; it was that he was equally ready to celebrate commerce and pile scorn on the Jews. And while he borrowed from an existing vocabulary of anti-Semitic invective, he deployed it to a more original end.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The originality of Voltaire’s stance was, I argue, driven by his typically unyielding need to celebrate commerce in the most unequivocal manner possible. A suggestion of this uncompromising position comes in his satirical poem, “The Man of the World,” in which Voltaire described himself silencing a sanctimonious dinner guest who rails against luxury while guzzling fine wine. At the end of Voltaire’s long speech in defense of luxury, “Sir Piety no more replied, / But, laughing, still the bottle plied.”[[48]](#footnote-48) At the risk of reading too much into light verse, we should note how Voltaire characterized the opposition to commerce: it was only possible from a standpoint of hypocrisy.[[49]](#footnote-49) Commerce itself admitted no legitimate objections. And from that assumption, it could follow that any seemingly serious attacks on it were misdirected: to the extent that they were serious, they did not apply to the essence of commerce, but to something else.

This is why Voltaire’s defense of commerce required the Jews—to supply the proper object of these attacks. I argue that he worked to clear commerce of its alleged offenses by effecting a separation between “true” commerce and Jewish commerce. He deployed the notion of Jewish commerce not to express widely felt economic anxieties, but to defuse them. Muller makes a related point when he argues that Voltaire, who was himself repeatedly charged with avarice, “reacted by denouncing the Jews as the embodiment of the vices of which he was so frequently accused—a classic case of projection.”[[50]](#footnote-50) But my claim here is that Voltaire was engaged in something more ambitious: the use of anti-Semitism as an argumentative strategy to isolate what were perceived as the worst aspects of commerce as a whole, not merely his personal foibles.

**Scapegoats of Commerce**

We need not psychoanalyze Voltaire. Rather, my claim can be substantiated by showing evidence for each of three propositions: (1) commerce was criticized on certain grounds; (2) Voltaire held that this criticism was rightly directed toward Jews as a group; (3) Voltaire also defended commerce against the same criticism when Jews were removed from the equation. Of course, we might expect to find contradictions in someone who wrote so voluminously and unsystematically, but the recurrence of this pattern—abhorring in Jews the same commercial tendencies he praised in others—is telling. And the pattern does recur with reference to at least three criticisms of commerce that were common in Voltaire’s time: that it depended on the immoral practice of usury; that it replaced traditional relationships with a kind of calculating unsociability; and that it undermined classical, republican virtues, such as frugality and hardiness. I will examine this pattern for each criticism in turn.

*Usury*.

Voltaire’s century had, of course, inherited an ancient suspicion of lending at interest.[[51]](#footnote-51) That suspicion was derived both from classical sources—especially Aristotle’s condemnation of “the interest bred by money” as “unnatural”[[52]](#footnote-52)—and Old Testament strictures on interest-taking from “brothers.” Both of these strands were influentially united by St. Thomas Aquinas and his fellow scholastics, and they retained a hold on Christian theory, if not practice, well into the age of Enlightenment. Theological arguments for delegating moneylending to those outside the Christian community were equally ancient: as early as the fourth century, St. Ambrose pronounced that “where there is the right of war, there is also the right of usury,” and in the twelfth century, the second Lateran Council pronounced that usurers were “sever[ed] from every comfort of the church.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

By the eighteenth century, though, these strictures were more honored in the breach than the observance. As Zosa Szajkowski points out, “France presented the picture of a state, where loans on interest were officially forbidden by the Church, but where the government openly practiced a similar policy of credit, the laws regulated such credit operations, the judiciary bodies recognized these regulations, and the Church itself granted loans.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Naturally, the growth of access to credit made possible more ambitious commercial ventures; it also, however, drew the ire of those who held to traditional teachings against moneylending. In 1703, for instance, the Bishop of Bissy in Lorraine attempted to ban usury in the province, republished a sixteenth-century pastoral letter condemning the practice, and prohibited the reading of a well-known pro-usury pamphlet. In Alsace, a 1714 law established penalties against Christians who practiced “Judaism,” defined as synonymous with usury.[[55]](#footnote-55) And in 1745, Pope Benedict XIV published the encyclical *Vix Pervenit*, which condemned “the sin called usury” as that in which any lender “contends some gain is owed him beyond that which he loaned [even though] any gain which exceeds the amount he gave is illicit.”[[56]](#footnote-56)

Such condemnations were often directed against usury in general, rather than specifically Jewish usury. In fact, French usury existed even in provinces where Jews were forbidden to settle, and modern historians hold that the number of Jewish moneylenders in pre-revolutionary France as a whole remained small.[[57]](#footnote-57) Nevertheless, Voltaire maintained an “obsession with Jewish usury.”[[58]](#footnote-58) In keeping with the widespread equation of Judaism and moneylending, he identified the Jewish people as congenital usurers, more prone to the practice than any other group. His *Essay on Morals*, originally published 1754, claimed that Jews brought their fifteenth-century expulsion from Spain upon themselves, through usury and control of the nation’s money supply. In his tolerant “Sermon of Rabbi Akiba,” he still could not resist identifying Jews as “infamous usurers.”[[59]](#footnote-59) His *Philosophical Dictionary* insists that Jews learned “no art” from contact with other peoples “save that of usury.”[[60]](#footnote-60) And in 1786, the pamphleteer Foissac cited Voltaire (fairly accurately) in defense of his call to expel Jews from France’s eastern provinces: “Monsieur de Voltaire, who knew the Jews very well...stated, when speaking of them, that in all ages leprosy, fanaticism, and usury were their distinguishing characteristics.”[[61]](#footnote-61)

Voltaire was hardly unique in his time in treating Judaism and usury as virtually identical.[[62]](#footnote-62) What makes him a special case, though, is that he passionately advocated *for* usury, provided that its practitioners were not Jewish. In other words, Voltaire stood on both sides of the contentious usury question—depending on the identity of the usurers.[[63]](#footnote-63) In the same *Dictionary* that repeatedly attacked Jews for lending at interest, Voltaire also included an invented dialogue between an abbé and a Dutch merchant. The abbé is given this laughable line: “God forbade the Jews to lend at interest, and you are well aware that a citizen of Amsterdam should punctually obey the laws of commerce given in a wilderness to runaway vagrants who had no commerce.” The point, beneath the layers of sarcasm, seems to be that Old Testament restrictions on usury, being meant especially for Jews, should in no way apply to modern gentiles. The merchant responds that all modern-day opponents of usury are hypocritical moneylenders themselves, and he goes on to secure an ordinance forbidding any such preaching in the future, on the grounds that the Church must “take care not to meddle with the laws of commerce.” Returning to his own voice as narrator, Voltaire demands that the Church cease “propagating a doctrine so pernicious to commerce.”[[64]](#footnote-64)

The laws of commerce, then, mandated merchants’ freedom to charge any interest rate the market would bear—yet Voltaire devoted great energy to condemning Jews for the very same activity. Confronting a centuries-old anti-commercial legacy, he insisted that it should rightly restrict only the actions of a small minority. By implying that there was something uniquely objectionable in Jewish usury, Voltaire cleared space in which non-Jewish usury could be practiced without sanction or guilt.

*Commodification*.

Under the heading of “commodification,” I consider the family of criticisms holding that commerce corrodes human relationships and other values by affixing prices to an ever-increasing range of goods. According to these criticisms, certain goods once derived an important part of their value from the fact that they were “priceless,” but they were progressively cheapened as greater swathes of life came under the sway of money; traditional relationships were held to have been replaced by economic calculation. A modern version of this argument is offered in Michael Sandel’s *What Money Can’t Buy*: “Some of the good things in life are corrupted or degraded if turned into commodities.”[[65]](#footnote-65)

That argument’s older antecedents were frequently directed against the eighteenth-century growth of commercial society. In a 1711 issue of *The Spectator*, Richard Steele complained “that it is a melancholy thing, when the World is mercenary even to the buying and selling [of] our very Persons.”[[66]](#footnote-66) To some, commodification was an offense against nature. Ferdinando Galiani’s 1751 book *On Money* reports this contemporary complaint: “A natural lamb is more noble than one of gold, but how much less is it valued?” Such critics, according to Galiani, regarded the notion of a price set by market forces as an arbitrary imposition: they “refer to it variously as folly, fraud, or madness; they regard price as unreal.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Among the relationships said to be corroded by markets were patriotism and generous hospitality. For John Trenchard, in a 1721 issue of *Cato’s Letters*, “true merchants are citizens of the world, and that is their country where they can live best”;[[68]](#footnote-68) while Trenchard viewed this commercial cosmopolitanism in a generally positive light, others reacted harshly against it.[[69]](#footnote-69) Spontaneous generosity was also a victim of the market. In the midst of celebrating the spread of commerce in his 1766 *View of the Progress of Society in Europe*, William Robertson paused to regret that in pre-commercial society, “hospitality abounded...and secured the stranger a kind reception under every roof where he chose to take shelter,” while “the entertaining of travellers was [ultimately] converted into a branch of commerce.”[[70]](#footnote-70)

Voltaire’s own writings show that he was well-acquainted with these arguments. Again, however, he held that the corrosive, calculating brand of commerce was not a property of markets in general, but was a specific property of Jews—that, rightly considered, it was the Jewish brand of commerce that had the effects lamented above. In one of his earliest anti-Semitic writings, a 1722 letter, Voltaire accused a Jewish acquaintance of espionage, partly on the grounds that “a Jew belongs to no land other than the one where he makes money.”[[71]](#footnote-71) The cosmopolitanism praised by Trenchard (and elsewhere praised by Voltaire) became sinister when practiced by a Jew. In a letter toward the end of his life, Voltaire struck the same theme in a discussion of Jewish merchants in the Americas: Jews are incapable of putting down roots in any society, but “go wherever there is money to be made.”[[72]](#footnote-72) And in an exchange with a group of Jewish critics he included in a later edition of the *Dictionary*, Voltaire suggested in an acid aside that the love of money blinded Jews to culture: “I know not how it entered my head to write an epic poem at the age of twenty. (Do you know what an epic poem is?)” The exchange concludes: “You are calculating animals—try to be thinking ones.”[[73]](#footnote-73) Finally, as seen below, Voltaire regularly accused Jews of inhospitality. In sum, Voltaire held that Jews were uniquely unsociable, and unbound by ties of country or culture, because economic calculation had blunted all of their other attachments.

This is a surprising argument from Voltaire—because elsewhere, he happily celebrated the power of the market to dissolve old allegiances. That story was told most explicitly in Voltaire’s universal history, the *Essay on Morals*: the spread of buying and selling, and the growth of international exchange, gentled manners, advanced intellectual cultivation and tolerance, and dampened national animosities. This was a standard *doux commerce* account, in which economic calculation served to foster peace.[[74]](#footnote-74) What is noteworthy is an absence: in Voltaire’s progressive history of trade, the Jewish role in commerce—which he stressed so heavily elsewhere—was largely neglected. Harvey Mitchell calls this “a narrative of commercial change from which Jews drop out of sight.” Voltaire “appears not to have linked [Jewish] affluence with the softening of *moeurs* and sensitivities to the wider world of the intellect, which lay at the core of his history of the civilizing impulse in Western Europe.”[[75]](#footnote-75) The pattern we observed with respect to usury reappears: the version of commerce from which Jews have been whitewashed is entirely praiseworthy.

That Voltaire consciously elided the Jewish role in commerce in the *Essay* is suggested by a key contrast with the *Dictionary*. In the latter, Voltaire (citing Montesquieu) credits Jews with the invention of letters of exchange, which made secure global trade truly possible: “Then, and not until them, commerce was enabled to elude the efforts of violence, and maintain itself throughout the world.”[[76]](#footnote-76) Voltaire noted this development without further comment, and returned to his usual charges of usury and avarice. But this pivotal moment in commercial history is absent from the *Essay* and its progressive account of trade.[[77]](#footnote-77) Conceding a key Jewish role in that account would have severely complicated Voltaire’s effort to isolate the most unsavory aspects of commerce as strictly Jewish.

*Attack on classical virtues*.

There is, as we will see, a somewhat more tentative case to be made that Voltaire used Jews to defuse a third attack on commerce: that it prevented a revival of the frugal virtues of classical republicanism. A number of neoclassical writers treated the ancient world of Greece and Rome as an idealized foil for commercial society: while the ancient republics achieved glory by disdaining luxury and trade, excessive love of wealth sapped the vigor of modern states. A notable proponent of this view was Rousseau. In his 1754 fragment on “Luxury, Commerce, and the Arts,” he argued that in classical society, commerce “was tainted with the contempt felt toward luxury. The Romans despised it, the Greeks left it to Foreigners....When these Peoples started to degenerate...there was only luxury and money to satisfy them.”[[78]](#footnote-78) Modern states, needless to say, were far down a similar road to decadence. Adam Ferguson struck a similar note in his 1767 *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, where he praised the virtuous and regimented life of ancient Sparta. The typical Spartan “was active, penetrating, brave, disinterested, and generous; but his estate, his table, and his furniture, might, in our esteem, have marred the lustre of all his virtues.” Sparta’s independence and power endured for centuries, precisely because it valued the true virtues, not the illusory virtue suggested by wealth. In modern Europe, by contrast, “men must be rich, in order to be great.”[[79]](#footnote-79) As John Shovlin sums up this strand of historiography, “luxurious nations were sooner or later struck by despotism.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

Voltaire, too, considered himself a guardian of the classical legacy. But, as might be unsurprising at this point, he held that the greatest threat to a revival of classical virtue came not from commerce, but from Jewish culture. Specifically, he saw the alien culture of the Jewish people, as disseminated both by Christianity and by Jews themselves, as the age-old enemy of Europe’s true Greco-Roman heritage. For Voltaire, the classical-Jewish tension was ancient, and almost Manichean in its starkness. Ancient peoples could be classified easily on this schema: “Greeks, who philosophised...Romans, who ruled...Jews, who amassed wealth.”[[81]](#footnote-81) In fact, whatever was valuable in Jewish culture and literature was likely plagiarized from neighboring Greeks. Voltaire was fond of repeating charges from Cicero, Seneca, and Tacitus that Jews were uniquely selfish and inhospitable; Voltaire, like Tacitus, interpreted Jews’ strict dietary laws as forbidding them from sharing a table with gentiles. Voltaire even imagined himself acting out the role of an ancient anti-Semite: in a fictional letter to Cicero under the penname “Memmius,” he wrote that Jews “are, all of them, born with raging fanaticism in their hearts....I would not be in the least bit surprised if these people would not some day become deadly to the human race.”[[82]](#footnote-82) This classicizing attitude was a crucial step in the development of modern, secular anti-Semitism, which justified itself by reference to Jews’ inborn nature rather than their religion.[[83]](#footnote-83)

Voltaire was as strict a classicist as any when he felt that the Greco-Roman heritage was threatened by Jews; but he was far more cavalier about classical virtues when they were threatened by commerce. In the *Dictionary*, for instance, he mocked the Rousseauian notion that Rome’s poverty was the root of its virtue: “When, in the earlier periods of their history, these banditti ravaged and carried off their neighbors’ harvests; when, in order to augment their own wretched village, they destroyed the poor villages of the Volsci and Samnites, they were, we are told, men disinterested and virtuous.” In fact, he continued, Romans only attained real civilization with the growth of their wealth and luxury, precisely the point at which Rousseau held them to have degenerated: “When, by a succession of violences, they had pillaged and robbed every country from the recesses of the Adriatic to the Euphrates, and had sense enough to enjoy the fruit of their rapine; when they cultivated the arts, and tasted all the pleasures of life, and communicated them also to the nations which they conquered; then, we are told, they ceased to be wise and good.”[[84]](#footnote-84) There are two subversive notions here. First, Voltaire stripped away the idealizing gloss that obscured the “wretched,” rapacious nature of early Rome.[[85]](#footnote-85) Second, he implied that the Romans were no different in the frugal and decadent periods of their history, but equally ravenous for plunder in both. Contrary to Rousseau and Ferguson, the only benefit to be found in this compressed history of the classical world was the progress of commerce.

In this respect, Voltaire’s position on the ancients echoed his positions on usury and the spread of markets: it shifted depending on the presence of Jews. When the classical heritage was considered in opposition to Jews, it was to be strenuously defended; but when the ancient world was considered in opposition to the commercial world, it could be denigrated much more freely. Still, the claim that Voltaire used anti-Semitism to isolate the controversial qualities of commerce is at its most tenuous here: Voltaire saw Jewish culture and particularism as the enemies of classical virtue, not simply Jewish commerce. Voltaire’s treatment of the ancients and the Jews is, nevertheless, worth our attention in this context. To those who attacked usury, Voltaire replied that the true problem was Jewish usury; to those who attacked commercial calculation and commodification, Voltaire replied that the true problem was Jewish calculation; and to those who considered the ancient, republican virtues to be in danger from commerce, Voltaire suggested that their attention would be more profitably turned toward the danger from Jews. The pattern, to say the least, strains the benefit of the doubt.

However, a skeptical response might be made at this point: I have shown that Voltaire’s strident defense of non-Jewish commercial practices coexisted with his condemnation of similar practices undertaken by Jews, but I have not proven a causal relationship between those facts. I have not, in other words, demonstrated that his commercial anti-Semitism was a deliberate argumentative choice. That objection is fair as far as it goes, given the notorious difficulty of placing the intentions of historical figures on solid footing. Yet it is a point in favor of the plausibility of my account that it depends on the existence of a complex pattern (public criticism of a commercial practice, accompanied both by Voltaire’s defense of the practice in non-Jews and condemnation of the practice in Jews) at multiple points of Voltaire’s philosophical career, across a wide range of topics.

The skeptic might renew the objection, however, by asking us to consider a counterfactual Voltaire: one who, say, defended usury *and* celebrated Jews for promoting it. If Voltaire could have plausibly taken that set of positions, then the anti-Semitism of the actual Voltaire would likely have come from a different source than argumentative strategy. In response, I would deny that such a counterfactual was plausible. The criticisms of the market economy I have touched on were too widespread and impassioned to be dismissed out of hand; an advocate of commerce could displace its harms onto an “other” (as Voltaire did) or argue that they were worth accepting in the balance (which, for instance, Montesquieu did), but would make limited rhetorical headway by denying that they were harms at all and venturing a complete endorsement of actually-existing commerce.[[86]](#footnote-86) I would posit that the harms of commerce identified by its critics proved very difficult to strike from the equation—they had to be accounted for somewhere. For Voltaire, then, the *persuasive* alternative to an uncharacteristically equivocal stance was scapegoating the commercial practices of an out-group. To paraphrase his own words, if the Jews did not exist, he would have had to invent them.

**“Is This the Philosophy of Montesquieu?”**

Nor were all of Voltaire’s contemporaries willing to extend him the benefit of the doubt. In a series of open letters to Voltaire published in 1769, Guénée accused him of inconsistency with Enlightenment principles of tolerance: “What kind of philosophy is this which, dominated by hatred and dedicated to the blindest prejudice, permits itself these outrageous attacks on a people, the descendants of whom already have more than enough about which to complain? Is this the philosophy of Montesquieu and Locke?”[[87]](#footnote-87)

It was appropriate that Voltaire was censured in the name of Montesquieu. He was to Enlightenment philo-Semitism what Voltaire was to Enlightenment anti-Semitism—and, in *The Spirit of the Laws*, he developed a far more tolerant attitude toward Jews in the course of grappling with the same commercial controversies that so exercised Voltaire.

A passage especially worth our attention is Montesquieu’s discussion of the Jewish role in the development of letters of exchange. Voltaire, as we noted, cited this passage without comment in the midst of denunciations of Jewish usury; Montesquieu’s treatment was much more laudatory. Even though the historical Jewish role in this development was, in point of fact, exaggerated—Francesca Trivellato characterizes it as a “legend”—Montesquieu “stands out for both embracing the legend and interpreting it as casting Jews in a positive light.”[[88]](#footnote-88)

Jews entered Montesquieu’s history of commerce *as a result* of medieval anti-usury laws, not because they were congenital usurers: finance, due to its bad reputation, “passed to a nation then covered with infamy.” If Jews turned “dishonest” through medieval commerce, it was because they were forced into a disreputable economic niche, not because they were deceitful by nature. In the next step of Montesquieu’s history, newly enriched Jews were targeted for intensified persecution—not, contra Voltaire, because their tribalism naturally offended good Europeans, but simply as part of sovereigns’ crude and shortsighted ploys for monetary gain. Finally, the Jewish invention of letters of exchange ended such appropriation, “for the richest trader had only invisible goods.” For Montesquieu, this creation of “invisible goods” had two epochal effects. First, the mobility of capital promoted moderate government: the new ease with which lenders could simply leave an oppressive state acted as a check on monarchs’ despotic tendencies. Second, once financiers no longer needed to resort to cunning to defend their goods and persons, “commerce, which had been violently linked to bad faith, returned, so to speak, to the bosom of integrity.”[[89]](#footnote-89) Jewish dishonesty, then, was historically contingent rather than congenital (not the most enlightened position imaginable, but still quite tolerant for its time). And more importantly, Montesquieu described Jews reclaiming their honesty, and furthering the cause of political freedom, through a consequential act of creativity.

Throughout *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu offered similarly tolerant readings of historical data that Voltaire would interpret in a sinister light. While Voltaire often rationalized historical expulsions and persecutions, Montesquieu criticized them: for instance, Montesquieu singled out for censure medieval laws designed merely to humiliate Jews; in his own century, Russian persecution of Jewish lenders was an instance of “despotism” and a failure to grasp the basic principles of finance.[[90]](#footnote-90) He took Jewish law at face value, insisting that its guiding purpose was religion, not trade or usury.[[91]](#footnote-91) And he treated Old Testament cleanliness and leprosy laws as a sensible response to the Middle Eastern climate, not any Jewish propensity to disease.[[92]](#footnote-92) Voltaire and Montesquieu both censured violence against Jews. But whereas Voltaire’s denunciations were hedged and equivocal, Montesquieu’s were full-throated: in years to come, Montesquieu warned his contemporaries, persecution of the Jews “will be cited to prove that [you] were barbarians...will stigmatize your century.”[[93]](#footnote-93) Ages notes that Montesquieu stood nearly alone in his day in his expansion of the notion of religious tolerance to include non-Christians, not just competing branches of Christianity.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Again, it is illuminating to consider Montesquieu’s attitude toward Jews through the lens of his attitude toward commerce.[[95]](#footnote-95) And again, the example of Montesquieu complicates accounts of “a link between philo-capitalism and philo-Semitism.” Montesquieu treated the rise of commercial society with far more circumspection than Voltaire did, a fact that goes some way toward explaining his friendlier stance toward Jews: he saw the whole of his society as implicated in a project that was both healthy and harmful. He was both a friend and a critic of commerce. Anoush Fraser Terjanian sees signs of Montesquieu’s ambivalence in his treatment of “the deleterious effects of commerce” and “the corrupting potential of commerce upon mores.”[[96]](#footnote-96) For Montesquieu, writes Michael Sonenscher, “greatness and wealth set limits on how far virtue could go.”[[97]](#footnote-97) Similarly, Sharon R. Krause notes Montesquieu’s refusal to treat commercial society as an unequivocal good: “No unitary standard makes possible a rank ordering of the lives of honor, political virtue, moral virtue, and commerce.”[[98]](#footnote-98) Lacking Voltaire’s need to defend an un-nuanced position, Montesquieu also lacked Voltaire’s need for commercial scapegoats.

Montesquieu’s ambivalence is best seen in his treatment of the classical world, which he held up (as would Rousseau and Ferguson) as a foil for the world of commerce.[[99]](#footnote-99) The ancient republics of virtue received Montesquieu’s deepest admiration: “Most of the ancient peoples lived in governments that had virtue for their principle, and when that virtue was in full force, things were done in those governments that we no longer see and that astonish our small souls.”[[100]](#footnote-100) And these remarkable accomplishments were directly tied to frugality and a rough equality.[[101]](#footnote-101)

But this picture of the pre-commercial world was complicated by Montesquieu’s characterization of public virtue as a difficult and unstable balancing act. Republics of virtue demand constant repression or sublimation of citizens’ “particular passions,” as well as constant “dread” of external enemies; like Sparta, they could combine “the harshest slavery with extreme liberty.” Commerce entered Montesquieu’s political theory as a moderating force that offered stability and a measure of peace at the cost of true excellence: while the republic of virtue was a high-risk, high-reward proposition, commercial society was comparatively low-risk, low-reward. “Commerce corrupts pure mores,” argued Montesquieu, but “it polishes and softens barbarous mores, as we see every day.”[[102]](#footnote-102) While Montesquieu saw contemporary commerce operating “every day” in its softening aspect, he described its corrupting aspect in the same breath. Voltairean commerce was strictly progressive, while Montesquieu’s commerce was double-faced.

In fact, under certain conditions, commerce might turn harmful, just as an excess of virtue might. Improperly regulated, commercial society could prove self-destructive: sometimes, as Montesquieu argued, “an excess of wealth destroys the spirit of commerce,” and conspicuous consumption eclipses the true signs of virtue, as “each man takes the marks of the condition above his own.”[[103]](#footnote-103) This is not to suggest that he saw these sad outcomes as inevitable: as Nannerl O. Keohane points out, Montesquieu also held that commerce, under the right thrift-preserving strictures, could “be supportive of a republic rather than inimical to it.”[[104]](#footnote-104) Yet, as Keohane argues, Montesquieu was radical and conservative by turns; and if his radical streak held out the possibility of a modern, commercial republic of virtue, his caution also left him highly attuned to the toll of contemporary Europe’s commercial transformations.

So where commerce prevails unchecked, “there is traffic in all human activities and all moral virtues; the smallest things, those required by humanity, are done or given for money.” And usury, unsavory as it is, is unavoidable: “The business of society must always go forward; usury is established, bringing with it the disorder that has been experienced at all times.”[[105]](#footnote-105) Just like the other critics I have examined here, Montesquieu associated commerce with immoral lending, commodification, and the decline of the classical virtues—or at least the threat of those outcomes. Yet he also considered those potentially ill effects to be costs worth paying for commerce’s stabilizing effects. More importantly, he saw them as costs paid by commercial society as a whole, not as distortions of commerce imposed by a calculating minority.

Montesquieu’s refusal to scapegoat certainly cannot explain in its entirety his friendly attitude toward Jews; he might, for instance, have remained neutral toward them. Judith N. Shklar attributes Montesquieu’s idealization of the Jewish people to his deep identification with the victims of cruelty.[[106]](#footnote-106) Scholars have also pointed to his greater comfort with cultural pluralism and diversity, in contrast to Voltaire’s universalism, which enabled him to appreciate “the Jew and Judaism as one of the many valid forms of culture and religion.”[[107]](#footnote-107) But it is also true that thinkers with stark views of the world tend to imagine equally stark enemies—a temptation to which Montesquieu was especially immune.

**Conclusion**

Martha Nussbaum has observed that expressions of disgust for minorities—from gays and lesbians to Indian “untouchables”—often depend on “a double fantasy: a fantasy of the dirtiness of the other and a fantasy of one’s own purity.” In fact, exaggerations of the other’s depravity can be intensely gratifying: “The intended reader is revolted, but at the same time comforted: I am nothing like this.”[[108]](#footnote-108)

I have argued that Voltaire’s writing on Jews was designed to elicit a similar reaction in his readers: “We are nothing like this.” If Jewish commerce could be proven dirty, then the essence of commerce could be proven pure. Montesquieu was troubled by some of the very same aspects of commerce, yet his response was entirely different: “We are, for better or worse, just like this.” That acceptance of responsibility is perhaps the beginning of tolerance.

Like many utopian visions, Voltaire’s dream of commerce demanded enemies, whose disappearance would mark, and perhaps constitute, utopia’s inauguration. In fact, the purification of commerce would coincide with the gradual extinction of the Jews: “When the society of man is perfected, when every people carries on its trade itself, no longer sharing the fruits of its work with these wandering brokers, the number of Jews will necessarily diminish.”[[109]](#footnote-109) Montesquieu might have responded that, even then, trade would be disruptive, sometimes corrupting, often unsavory, and yet still preferable to the alternatives. Purification was out of the question.

The contrast between these two positions, and the implicit debate between the *philosophes* who embodied them, is a matter of lasting relevance. We can better appreciate this relevance if we approach Voltaire’s and Montesquieu’s writing on commerce not simply as entries in isolated series of disputes, but as contributions to a common rhetorical project—one in which they marshaled different means toward a shared end. Both Voltaire and Montesquieu spent considerable effort making the case for a set of concepts and institutions centrally identified with the liberal society and its economy. And they directed this case toward an often-skeptical audience—from Pope Benedict and his condemnation of lending at interest to classical republicans like Ferguson—still deeply attached to the pre-commercial world.

The work of “selling” these concepts and institutions was not an abstract exercise in moral philosophy, but a practical appeal to a particular audience, in all of its prejudices and preconceptions.[[110]](#footnote-110) As I argued above, the criticisms of commerce faced by Voltaire and Montesquieu could not be brushed aside or, perhaps, even refuted; given the audience to be persuaded, the criticisms had to be granted in some form. And we have seen how each writer responded to this argumentative constraint.

The approach of Voltaire might, in an historical and ethical vacuum, seem immediately more promising. It offered its audience a glittering and uncomplicated economic vision, along with the assurance that the commercial ills they saw around them could be safely attributed to a minority that was already, conveniently, despised. Montesquieu’s equivocal approach offered less clarity, was less assimilable to the everyday demands of politics, and asked its audience to consider the beam in its own eye. In fact, it is a sign of Montesquieu’s indirections that his position on commerce remains a matter of dispute to this day.

So one lesson of this comparison might be as follows: overpromise, establish the sharpest possible contrasts, and pin the faults in your own position wherever they can most conveniently be pinned. Such a strategy might appear justified when the cause of selling one’s own version of the future seems worthy and urgent enough. Yet when the promises come due, such an uncompromising strategy will leave intensified scapegoating as a necessary recourse. We see such scapegoating not only in Voltaire’s constant appeals to the evil of Jewish commerce, but as an ugly theme that often recurs when economic promises and economic reality fail to align, from anti-immigrant sentiment in times of economic distress, to Stalin’s constant invocations of Trotskyist saboteurs, to the “anger and recrimination and...profoundly unsubtle introspection” that regularly succeed burst financial bubbles.[[111]](#footnote-111) The uncomplicated, maximally assertive approach, perfected by Voltaire but deployed many times since, reliably manufactures scapegoats. And I would contend that the most polemical “salespeople” often underestimate the dangers that accompany Voltairean rhetoric.

I conclude, then, with the suggestion that the attitude of Montesquieu is a better candidate for emulation: not just for the straightforward reason that it proved more tolerant, but for the perhaps less obvious reason that tolerance is a consequence of rhetorical self-doubt. That attitude would surely yield slower-acting, less spectacular results than the Voltairean approach. Yet Montesquieu thoroughly prepared his audience to accept the grave losses that accompanied the growth of commerce; he won greater credibility for his case by conceding its flaws; and he left an answer readily available for those occasions when Europe’s commercial transformation proved wrenching—namely, that he had promised nothing less. The greater humanity of *The Spirit of the Laws* lies, I think, in its willingness to take the bad along with the good, and to own both: to welcome the transformation even in the knowledge that precious goods had been lost in the process. This humane, self-critical, gratification-delaying rhetoric still retains its value.

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2. I would like to thank Turkuler Isiksel and Ronald Schechter for their helpful comments and encouragement during the preparation of this article. Thanks also to *History of Political Thought* referees for their helpful suggestions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Strictly speaking, it is anachronistic to describe Voltaire’s attitudes with a term that was not coined until the nineteenth century. However, I follow a number of Voltaire scholars, including Arthur Hertzberg, in using the term—both to serve concision and to suggest the extent to which Voltaire’s criticism of Jews was founded on secular rather than religious grounds. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jerry Z. Muller, *Capitalism and the Jews* (Princeton, 2011), p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne M. Cohler et al. (Cambridge, 1989), p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As in the saying, “anti-Semitism is the socialism of fools,” attributed to Ferdinand Kronawetter. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews? The Reason for Antisemitism*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2003), p. 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism, Vol. III: From Voltaire to Wagner*, trans. Miriam Kochan (Philadelphia, 2003), p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ronald Schechter, “The Jewish Question in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (1) (1998), pp. 84-91, p. 85. While Voltaire accounts for some forty percent of eighteenth-century mentions of “*juif[s]*” or “*juive[s]*” in the ARTFL, and a disproportionate share by any measure, Voltaire’s work may also be overrepresented in the database, potentially inflating the proportion. (Thanks to Ronald Schechter for clarifying this point.) In any case, Voltaire “wrote the word *Jew*, *Jews*, or *Jewish* on average nearly once a week during his very long adult life”; Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley, 2003), p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Voltaire, *Sermon du Rabbin Akib*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 24, ed. Louis Moland (Paris, 1877-85), p. 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, trans. anon. (Boston, 1852), p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Adam Sutcliffe, “Can a Jew Be a Philosophe? Isaac de Pinto, Voltaire, and Jewish Participation in the European Enlightenment,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (3) (2000), pp. 31-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Arnold Ages, “Tainted Greatness: The Case of Voltaire’s Anti-Semitism,” *Neohelicon* 21 (2) (1994), pp. 357-67, p. 359. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1990), p. 286. Passages from Foissac, Guénée, Richard, and Voltaire’s *Oeuvres complètes* and *Correspondence* have been translated by Hertzberg. The theologian Charles-Louis Richard also made a fictional Voltaire lament “my bad faith, my calumnies, and all the other errors into which I had fallen when I spoke of the Jews,” in his 1775 *Voltaire parmi les ombres*. Richard, *Voltaire parmi les ombres* (Paris: 1775). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Shmuel Feiner, “Review: *Judaism and Enlightenment*,” *European History Quarterly* 35 (4) (2005), pp. 609-11, p. 610. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Henrich Graetz, “Voltaire und die Juden,” *MGWJ* 17 (1868), pp. 200-23; Wayne Andrews, *Voltaire* (New York, 1981), p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Voltaire, *Un chrétien contre six Juifs*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 29, p. 558. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Peter Gay, *The Party of Humanity* (New York, 1964), p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ages, “Tainted Greatness,” pp. 362-7; Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Herzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*,p. 286. See also Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, pp.39-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, pp. 181, 67-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Muller, *Capitalism and the Jews*, pp. 31-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Paul Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce: Globalization and the French Monarchy* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), pp. 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., p. 22. See also Paul Butel, *L’Economie française au xviiie siècle* (Paris, 1993), pp. 12, 80-7; and Giullaume Daudin, *Commerce et prospérité: La France au xviiie siècle* (Paris, 2005), p. 219 (both cited in Cheney). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 2006), p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), pp. 22-37, 57-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Bernard Lepetit, “Urbanization in Eighteenth-Century France: A Comment,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1) (1992), pp. 73-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue*, pp. 16-7. See also Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, “The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Berg and Eger (New York, 2003), pp. 7-27; Cissie Fairchilds, “The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London, 1993), pp. 228-49; Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600-1800*, trans. Brian Pearce (Cambridge, 2000); and William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Past and Present* 206 (1) (2010), pp. 81-120. On monetary exchanges and market behavior among the aristocracy (though he considers the seventeenth century the most pivotal one for the growth of these behaviors), see Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715* (Berkeley, 1993), p. 147. On markets in rural France, see Philip T. Hoffman, *Growth in a Traditional Society: The French Countryside 1450-1815* (Princeton, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Harvey Mitchell, *Voltaire’s Jews and Modern Jewish Identity* (New York, 2008), p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Leon Kahn, *Les Juifs de Paris au dix-huitième siècle d’après les archives de la Lieutenance générale de police à la Bastille* (Paris, 1894), pp. 5-38, 72-2 (cited in Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Roger Clément, *La condition des Juifs de Metz dans l’Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1903), pp. 38-40 (cited in Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. They were finally permitted to “come out” as Jews in 1723. Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Jonathan I. Israel, *Diasporas Within a Diaspora* (Leiden, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, pp. 83-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, pp. 19, 25, 28, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Jonathan Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce: Economic Ideology and Emancipation in Europe, 1638-1848* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 2. On the conflation of “bourgeois” and “Jew,” see also Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 184 (cited in Muller, *The Mind and the Market*). Ironically enough, Jews were not even readmitted to England until the following year. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Bernardino Ramazzini, *Diseases of Workers* (New York, 1964), p. 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. François Hell, *Observations d’un Alsacien sur l’affaire présente des Juifs d’Alsace* (Frankfurt, 1779); see Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, pp. 67-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Comte de Mirabeau, *Sur Moses Mendelssohn, sur la réforme politique des juifs: Et en particulier sur la révolution tentée en leur faveur en 1753 dans la grande Bretagne*, vol. 1 (London, 1787), p. 56; this passage trans. Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Abbé Henri Grégoire, *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs* (Paris: 1789), pp.95-99, 184-85, 168-70. See Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, pp. 91-2. A similar treatise on regeneration (like Grégoire’s, a winner of an essay contest sponsored by the Royal Academy in Metz) is Thiéry, *Dissertation sur cette question: Est-il des moyens de rendre les Juifs plus heureux et plus utiles en France?* (Paris: 1788). See also Derek J. Penslar, *Shylock’s Children* (Berkeley, 2001), pp. 27-9; and Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, “A Friend of the Jews? The Abbé Grégoire and Philosemitism in Revolutionary France,” in *Philosemitism in History*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 111-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris: 1751-72), “Juif,” 9:25; this passage trans. Mitchell, *Voltaire’s Jews*, pp. 70-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Israel Bernard de Valabrègue*, Lettre ou réflexions d’un milord* à *son correspondant* à *Paris, au sujet de la requ*ê*te des marchands des six-corps, contre l’admission des Juifs aux brevets* (London, 1767), pp. 8, 70-1; this passage trans. Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, pp. 116-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Muller, *Capitalism and the Jews*, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. If Voltaire had influences in this regard, they were more likely to be found in the popular press, theatre, and politics. For instance, the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble in 1720 saw the publication in Amsterdam of a volume containing “anonymous letters violently attacking the role of ‘Jews and *smousen* [stock jobbers]’ and attributing the entire bubble to their sharp practices.” Margaret Jacob, “Was the Eighteenth-Century Republican Essentially Anticapitalist?,” *Republics of Letters* 2(1) (2010), available at arcade.stanford.edu/rofl/was-eighteenth-century-republican-essentially-anticapitalist. *Cato’s Letters*, also published in the wake of the bubble, similarly displaced the blame for the crisis onto “that class of ravens, whose wealth has cost the nation its all…a conspiracy of stock jobbers”—although these stock jobbers had no explicit ethnicity. John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, November 19, 1720, in *Cato’s Letters: or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious*, vol. 1 (London: Wilkins, 1737), p. 11 (cited in Jacob). Later in the century, Bolingbroke’s habit of distinguishing between honest merchants and the “parasitic element” of stockjobbers borrowed from this tradition; Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Queen Anne* (New York, 1967), p. 167. See also Michael Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation: Jews and Other Outlandish Englishmen in Georgian Britain* (Philadelphia, 2010), p. 97 (cited in Francesca Trivellato, “Credit, Honor, and the Early Modern French Legend of the Jewish Invention of Bills of Exchange,” *Journal of Modern History* 84 (2) (2012), pp. 289-334). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Voltaire, “The Man of the World,” in *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty*, ed. Henry C. Clark (Indianapolis, IN, 2003), p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. In fact, Voltaire’s contemporaries were willing to read a great deal into his verse. When this poem’s predecessor on the same theme (“The Worldling”) was published without Voltaire’s authorization, it was denounced as scandalous and its author briefly fled France. Henri van Laun, *History of French Literature*, vol. 3 (New York, 1877), p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Muller, *Capitalism and the Jews*, p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Usury had a number of definitions, ranging from any lending at interest (the official Church position) to lending above a specified lawful interest rate (e.g., 5%). Voltaire generally used the looser meaning of the word: usury meant lending at especially high interest, and in defending (gentile) usury, he argued that interest rates should be set by the market. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford, 1995), 1258a. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Deuteronomy 23:19-20; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London, 1918), pp. 330-40; Ambrose, *De Tobia*, 15.51; Second Lateran Council, Canon 13, available at www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum10.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Zosa Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions* (New York, 1970), p. 152. See also Marcel Marion, *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1923), p. 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., pp. 161, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Pope Benedict XIV, *Vix Pervenit*, 3.1, available at www.papalencyclicals.net/Ben14/b14vixpe.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, p. 152; Jean Bouchary, *Les Manieurs d’argent à Paris à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1939), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Mitchell, *Voltaire’s Jews*, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Voltaire, *Sermon du Rabbin Akib*, p. 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Foissac, *Le cri du citoyen* (Metz: 1786), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions*, pp. 178-201; Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Modern European Thought* (New York, 2002), pp. 10-13 (which includes Francis Bacon’s assertion that usurers “do Judaize”); and Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (New Haven, 1943), p. 191, cited in Muller (on “*Judenspiess*” or “Jew”s spear” as a Central European synonym for usury). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Gertrude Himmelfarb agrees that Voltaire’s criticism of specifically Jewish usury “is all the more egregious because Voltaire himself staunchly defended the principle of usury against the Catholic Church.” Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity* (New York, 2004), p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Michael Sandel, *What Money Can’t Buy* (New York, 2012), p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Richard Steele, *The Spectator*,August 28, 1711, in Joseph Addison and Steele, *The Spectator: A New Edition*, ed. Henry Morley, vol. 1 (London, 1883), p. 532. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ferdinando Galiani, *On Money*, in *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty*, pp. 316, 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, February 3, 1721, in *Cato’s Letters*,vol. 2 (London, 1755), p. 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for instance: “What are we to think of the soundness of this modern system of political economy, the direct tendency of every rule of which is to denationalize, and to make the love of our country a foolish superstition?” See Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 2, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge (London, 1835), p. 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. William Robertson, *View of the Progress of Society in Europe*, in *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty*, pp. 508-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Voltaire, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, ed. Theodore Besterman (Geneva, 1953-65), pp. 146-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Voltaire, *Correspondence*, vol. 86, p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, pp. 70, 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. For instance, commerce was held to be a bulwark against the intolerance of the Inquisition: “Trade and the inquisition are incompatible. Were it to be established at London, or at Amsterdam, those cities would neither be so populous nor so opulent. We find that when Philip II would fain introduce it into the Netherlands, the interruption of commerce was one of the principal causes of the revolution of that country.” In another instance of *doux commerce* thinking, trade was credited with softening manners in Renaissance England: “The manners of the people were more gloomy in England [than in France], where a capricious cruel prince sat on the throne; but London at the time was beginning to taste the sweets of commerce.” Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History, The Manners, and Spirit of Nations* (translation of *Essai sur les moeurs*), trans. Thomas Nugent (London, 1759), vol. 3, p. 179; vol. 2, p. 379. On the *doux commerce* thesis in general (a phrase popularized in modern historiography by Albert O. Hirschman), see Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1996), pp. 59-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Mitchell, *Voltaire’s Jews*, pp. 64, 79. To be fair to Voltaire, he did number Jews among the peoples mingling peaceably in his well-known account of the London Exchange; Muller, *The Mind and the Market*, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. That exclusion might be explained by the fact that the *Essay* was originally published ten years before the *Dictionary*; perhaps Voltaire only discovered Montesquieu’s argument in the intervening period. Against that possibility, though, are the facts that *The Spirit of the Laws* had been in print for six years before the publication of the *Essay*; that Voltaire’s work on the *Essay* and *Dictionary* overlapped; that Voltaire continued to revise the *Essay* throughout his life and did not see fit to include this salient fact, of which he was aware; and the fact that the notion crediting Jews with the invention of letters of exchange in fact preceded Montesquieu and had been in circulation since the mid-seventeenth century. See Trivellato, “Credit, Honor,” p. 304; and Benjamin Arbel, “Jews, the Rise of Capitalism and *Cambio:* Commercial Credit and Maritime Insurance in the Early Modern Mediterranean World,” *Zion* 69 (2) (2004), pp. 157-202. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Luxury, Commerce, and the Arts,” in *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty*, p. 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Dublin, 1767), pp. 238, 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue*, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, p. 181. Incidentally, this schema for the body politic echoes Plato’s account of the tripartite soul: the Greeks correspond to the logical part, the Romans to the spirited part, and the Jews to the appetitive part. Thanks to Turkuler Isiksel for this observation. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Voltaire, *Lettres de Memmius à Ciceron*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 28, pp. 439-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, p. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, p. 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Consider also his dismissive treatment elsewhere of the “criminally proud” patricians who “considered the plebeians as a wild beast whom it behooved them to let loose upon their neighbors.” This is nearly Machiavelli’s interpretation of Roman history in the *Discourses*, only transvalued to read as sordid rather than glorious. Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, ed. Nicolas Cronk (Oxford, 1994), letter 8, pp. 33-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. In fact, the record of Voltaire’s contemporaries and near-contemporaries who attempted such a complete endorsement bolsters this point. Early in the century, Bernard Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* was greeted as a scandal and “was not widely accepted.” Four decades later, Jaucourt’s philo-Semitic writing on commerce failed even to persuade many of his fellow *encyclopédistes*, as seen in the recurrence of entries that pit the idealized pastoral Jew of the Bible against the degraded Jew and degrading commerce of the present. And mid-century also saw the retreat of full-throated defenses of *luxe* in the face of Rousseauian and republican critiques. In fact, some of the most influential French political economists of mid-century, the “Gournay Circle,” responded to these critiques by moderating their defense of commerce, distinguishing between healthy and pernicious luxury. Voltaire, as we have seen, responded in a different manner entirely. See Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue*, pp. 24-6, 44-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Antoine Guénée, *Lettres de quelques Juifs portugais et allemands à M. de Voltaire*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1769), pp. 302-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Trivellato, “Credit, Honor,” p. 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, pp. 388-9. On the stress Montesquieu placed on “mobile wealth,” see Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, pp. 59-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ibid., pp. 616, 416-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ibid., p. 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ibid., p. 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ibid., p. 492. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ages, “Montesquieu and the Jews,” *Romanische Forshungen* 81 (H. 1/2) (1969), pp. 214-9, p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Montesquieu shared, to a certain extent, Voltaire’s identification of the Jews as the people of commerce. Jews appear most often in a commercial capacity in *The Spirit of the Laws*, and in the *Persian Letters*, he claimed that “wherever there is money, there are Jews.” While this latter statement does carry some connotations of Jewish greed, it is also offered without further comment and in a more neutral light than any of Voltaire’s statements on the same subject. The implication seems to be that Jews play an outsized role in finance, not (as Voltaire would have it) that they are uniquely money-grubbing. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* in *The Complete Works of M. de Montesquieu*, vol. 3 (London, 1777), Letter LX. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Anoush Fraser Terjanian, *Commerce and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century French Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, 2007), p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Sharon R. Krause, “The Uncertain Inevitability of Decline in Montesquieu,” *Political Theory* 30 (5) (2002), pp. 702-27, p. 709. Merle L. Perkins adds that Montesquieu stood out among his contemporaries in seeing “the multiple effects of international exchange, including the wealth it engenders, the poverty it generates, the power, exploitation, suffering, and glory implicit in the unlimited drive of man”s passion for goods, knowledge, and power”; Perkins, “Montesquieu on National Power and International Rivalry,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 238 (1985), pp. 1-95, p. 53. For another account of Montesquieu’s ambivalence—in this case, between the social spheres of “oceanic” and “agricultural” France, between which he divided his time—see Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, pp. 73-86. On the oceanic/agricultural distinction, see Edward Whiting Fox, *History in Geographic Perspective: The Other France* (New York, 1971), pp. 54-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. For Montesquieu, the classical republics were a relevant foil, not a nostalgic one: see Nannerl O. Keohane’s argument against the supposition that “he took [the virtuous republic] to be a phenomenon of the classical past irrelevant to modern man.” Keohane, “Virtuous Republics and Glorious Monarchies: Two Models in Montesquieu’s Political Thought,” *Political Studies* 20 (4) (1972), pp. 383-96, p. 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Ibid., p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ibid., pp. 43, 116, 36, 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid., pp. 48, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Keohane, “Virtuous Republics and Glorious Monarchies,” p. 388. See also Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, pp. 338-9, 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Judith N. Shklar, “Putting Cruelty First,” *Daedalus* 111 (3) (1982), pp. 17-27, p. 21. Yet Shklar also argues that the Jews’ role as the bringers of commerce was central to Montesquieu’s idealized image of them. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, p. 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Martha Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity* (New York, 2010), pp. 16, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs* in *Oeuvres de Voltaire*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1821), pp. 233-4; this passage trans. Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. On rhetoric as the appeal to the “situated judgment” of “others wherever they stand,” see Bryan Garsten, *Saving Persuasion* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), pp. 3, 119ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. John Kenneth Galbraith, *A Short History of Financial Euphoria* (New York, 1993), p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)