Kantian Review (2026), **00**, 1–23
doi:10.1017/S1369415425101179

KANTIAN REVIEW
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Richard Price and His Contemporaneous Left-Kantianism

Huw L. Williams

Cardiff University, UK and Cardiff University, UK
Email: williamsh47@cardiff.ac.uk

Abstract

Those who have engaged with the moral and political thought of Richard Price have often commented on the striking similarities with Kant. Price, as much a polymath as he was a philosopher, was nevertheless a very different intellectual figure, widely admired at the time in Europe and America as a radical, but sporadic rather than systematic in his writing. This paper will consider his thinking holistically, in particular drawing on recent research on his economic commentaries and work on insurance. This expositional work around Price's nascent political economy lays the basis for defending his positioning as a proto-socialist thinker – whose commitments also fit with the key tenets of 18th-century Left-Kantianism. It is argued that these claims, and his extant anti-capitalist thought, make Price an important and intriguing foil against which to consider Kant's own leftist credentials, and for expanding the debate around the latter's political economy and Left-Kantianism more generally.

Keywords: Richard Price; Left-kantianism; Political Economy

1. Introduction

According to Concordet, he was one of 'the formative minds of the [eighteenth] century' (Cone 1952: 5), whose deontological ethical theory was once described as having 'no statement . . . comparable in merit' (Broad 1944: 131). Francesco Allegri recently declared he was 'One of the greatest moral philosophers of the eighteenth century' (2023: 9), whilst his latest biographer described him as a 'benefactor of humanity' (Frame 2015: 1). Such statements would not be unbefitting of Immanuel Kant himself, and indeed, the essence of this paper is to reflect on the continuities between the Prussian and the subject of those quotations – the Welshman Richard Price. The discontinuities are of equal interest and justify Price being presented here as a figure of importance in and for himself, and not only as a foil against which we can consider Kant's left credentials within the wider context of the discussion around Left-Kantianism.

Price, according to his intellectual biographer D.O. Thomas, was 'an expert in the field of insurance' and 'an expert in financial matters [who] advised Shelburne and Pitt', whilst he was also 'active in the movement for parliamentary reform and won

fame in Europe and America as a political pamphleteer, especially in defence of the . . . revolutionaries' (1977: vii). Indeed, according to Quentin Skinner, he defended the cause of the Americans against colonial rule with 'exceptional courage' (Skinner 2012: 50). These point towards, in particular, Price's political activism and his efforts in the field of what we might broadly term political economy. It is this latter activity that will become the focus of the discussion in weighing up his left credentials – and providing the grounds for potentially expanding the discussion around Left-Kantianism.

After some brief biographical notes, I will endeavour to provide a short summary of Price's moral philosophy, reflecting in particular on why it is that a number of thinkers have drawn parallels between him and Kant, and suggested that his ethics prefigured the Prussian's.[1] In elucidating the key threads of Price's ethics, there will be a particular emphasis on those aspects that connect to his later political thought, with the concept of liberty interwoven throughout. This will lead into an exposition of his key political arguments, again with a view to drawing parallels with the ideas of his contemporary. These two sections will provide the foundations for the latter part of the paper where an analysis of his nascent political economy will be presented. This will draw first on Marx's views on Price and latterly the recent work of both Nicole Whalen and Rachel Friedman. They expound, respectively, his thoughts on the change from feudal to capitalist society (with reference in particular to the impact of land enclosure in Britain) and the grounding principles of his work in insurance.

Taken together, this exposition will substantiate two key points with regard to Price. First, that he can in significant and important ways be regarded (as others have argued) as a philosopher whose political thought bore a striking resemblance to that of Kant, both in terms of its deontological, rationalist foundations and in terms of its broad vision for domestic and international society. Second, that Friedman and Whalen's analysis of his seminal political economy corroborates the claims of thinkers such as Geoffrey Claeys (2002): that Price can be regarded as a precursor to the socialist thought that would emerge and develop in the early nineteenth century, and as such he should be regarded as a proto-socialist.

Taking these arguments together, Price arguably emerges as a figure who stands in a wider Republican tradition, going back to Harrington and the sects of the Civil War, and as an embodiment of an extant eighteenth century anti-capitalism in the Anglophone world. As such, Price can provide an important and insightful foil with respect to Kant, in particular within the context of Left-Kantianism. Indeed, it will be explained how Price can be situated (albeit somewhat anachronistically) as a contemporaneous Left-Kantian, specifically with respect to the key tenets articulated by that emerging school of thought towards the end of the eighteenth century. And whilst a definitive comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, the initial evidence suggests that at first blush Price is the more radical thinker in terms of his egalitarian aspirations. With respect to Left-Kantianism this leaves us with two core – if perhaps tentative – claims. First that Price's anti-capitalist political economy and proto-socialist political theory, in being built upon a moral theory that is Kantian in essence, makes Left-Kantianism, broadly construed, more plausible. Second, that the distinctive elements and innovations in his political economy potentially extend the parameters of Left-Kantianism and connectedly, discussions around Kant's political economy.

This paper is therefore significant in at least three senses. First and foremost, it is a contribution in the context of Left-Kantian scholarship in drawing Kant into an explicit dialogue with arguably his closest cognate thinker in the Anglophone world of the eighteenth century and with some insightful results. There will be some reflection, in conclusion, on their differences in particular, engaging with Price's biography in seeking to explain how his political economy seemingly developed in a more radical direction than Kant's, on the basis of a comparable moral philosophy. As a corollary, the paper elaborates the case for the broader comparative study of Price and Kant, strengthening the recognised parallels drawn between the two whilst drawing out important contrasts. Connectedly, for Price scholars in particular, it may be regarded as buttressing the case for restoring Price to his eighteenth century status as one of its foremost philosophical and political thinkers.

2. Recovering Richard Price

In introducing Price and his life and times to a contemporary audience, it behoves the author to address how it is that man so feted by his peers became a rather peripheral figure.[2] It is possible that at least part of what accounts for his diminution to the margins of our intellectual history is that he was, in his own time, a man drawn from the periphery.[3] Price's family home, where he was born in 1723, still stands above the village of Llangeinor, South Wales, at the bottom of the Garw Valley. Behind the farmhouse, symbolically, there remains common ground that escaped the gradual enclosure Price would rail against. As well as being geographically and psychologically distant from London, Price was also on the periphery in a spiritual sense, as part of a Welsh Dissenting family with roots in the Puritanism sequestered following the Restoration of 1660. This placed him in a nonconformist tradition that had its own native Welsh forms, in its own native Welsh language – and would subsequently lead him to a major dissenting community as an adult in Newington Green, London.

He began his education in one of the Academies of that dissenting tradition in the Neath valley, where alongside the Swansea valley, copper smelting had begun in 1720. This encroaching industrialisation and the emerging capitalist system within which it would unfold provide important context for Price's emerging political views. From there he would transfer further west to Pentwyn Academy, only some thirty miles from the Teifi valley, that would by the end of the century be known as the 'Smotyn Du' – the *Black Spot* – because of the preponderance of Unitarianism. As early as 1720s, there appears to have been Arian and Arminian ideas circulating in this part of west Wales that were anathema to the likes of Price's father, Rees. There is a story Price himself told about his High Calvinist father losing his temper with Price after finding him in the scullery reading the work of the late Rationalist Samuel Clarke, throwing the book into the flames. Price was removed from Pentwyn and sent north-east over the mountains of Bannau Brycheiniog to Talgarth, an epicentre for Calvinist thought, where the Methodist Revival would soon begin its transformation of Welsh religious life through the inspiration of leaders such as Price's contemporary, William Williams Pantycelyn. Before the revival took hold, however, Price's father died, as did his mother shortly after. With his sisters' circumstances properly seen to, Price decided in 1740 at the age of seventeen to follow the path of many an ambitious Welsh person to the streets of London town. There he completed his nonconformist education at

Moorfields Academy, and armed with an intellectual hinterland characterised by Arminian and Arian – one might even venture Pelagian[4] – sympathies, Neo-Platonist tendencies[5] and a millenarian zeal, Price embarked on his remarkable career as a polymath. This hinterland we will return to in conclusion, in attempting to account for the similarities and differences between Price and Kant.

Likewise in considering the roots of their continuities and discontinuities, Price's polymathy and practical orientation is of importance. In 1740, Britain had only been in formal union since 1707 and much of Price's life can be seen as an attempt to steer this amalgam of peoples on a progressive course. His efforts were animated both by his Christian faith and the suppression of his dissenting community, which had been legally enforced by the Test Acts and had denied them certain civil rights (including access to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge). He would write numerous tracts on Economics, Finance, Mathematics, Philosophy, Politics and Theology. Among his most famous publications were his *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* published in 1758, an essay (1763) on probability that brought Bayesian theory to the world (and that remains a staple of technological advances of the 21st century), Four Dissertations on Theology (2013) that would establish him as one of the foremost Arian thinkers of the era, a book (1771) on finance titled *Observations on Revisionary Payments* (that partly inspired the invitation led by his close friend Benjamin Franklin from the US Senate, for him to be part of the United States' first government (Frame 2015: 128)) – and political pamphlets (1992) that would establish his reputation as one of the most notable political radicals and writers of the time, celebrated in France and America as the Apostle of Liberty.

Indeed, Price's final pamphlet in 1789 – *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* – would be hugely influential as the initial stone cast in the Revolution Controversy, inciting the ire of one Edmund Burke, who could not stand by and allow the confidante of Lord Shelburne and the major radical and dissenter of the time to fan the flames of revolution in Britain. For Richard Price is the infamous Dr Price whom Burke (2014) responds to in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* and whose rebuke does much to explain Price's public memory, and the lack thereof.[6] Price's ill-health and subsequent death transpired before he mustered a response to Burke, and before a Terror in France that would have horrified him. His disciple Mary Wollstonecraft (2008) took up the mantle in her defence of Price and their ideas, whilst other contributions followed from the likes of Thomas Paine and Wollstonecraft's future husband, William Godwin. Price's millenarian republicanism and Godwin's incipient anarchism – as argued by the socialist historian Claeys (2002: 30–35) – would provide the springboard for the ideas for early socialist thinking in Britain, most notably Price's fellow Welshman, Robert Owen.

3. Price's ethics

> The considerable philosophical similarities and parallel practical agendas of Price and Kant certainly deserve further attention, and especially in ways related to their being the major spokesmen of progressive thought in their respective countries, right in the era of the most dramatic shifts from feudal to enlightened modes of political structure Ameriks (2021: 5–6).

Before turning to an assessment of Price's left credentials, we will garner a brief overview of Price's oeuvre that accounts for Ameriks's assessment and establishes him as an appropriate foil for Kant. First, in terms of what might be held to set them apart, the most obvious contrast lies in Price's vocation as a Minister for a Presbyterian Meeting House (that would move towards Arianism and latterly Unitarianism). In their personal and intellectual attitudes toward Christianity and religion, we see where the limits of their sympathy of outlook arguably lie. However, despite Price's zealous religious commitment, his moral thought is notable not only for its autonomy from our sentiments (thereby escaping the naturalistic fallacy) but also its autonomy from God (Gealy 1991: 140): broadly defined, right is derived not from God's will but the autonomous Moral Law, which is 'the source and guide of all the actions of the Deity himself' (Price 1948: 109).

The fundamentals of this ethical thought are summarized adroitly by Korsgaard (1992).[7] Price is described as a critic of the moral sentimentalism associated with Hume, which he attacks most directly in the figure of Frances Hutcheson. In this regard, Price's own contributions can be understood as the culmination of a somewhat forgotten 'native' Rationalist tradition in Britain that includes Samuel Clarke, Joseph Butler and John Balguy and earlier thinkers such as Ralph Cudworth and his fellow Cambridge Platonists (a background that is relevant with respect to claims around Price's prefiguring of Kant and the latter's synthesis of empiricism[8]).

Fundamentally, Price rejects the sentimentalist idea that right and wrong are derived from sense and reflection and that which pleases us and that which displeases us. There are rather two different types of ideas, those which are affectations of the mind derived through sense and reflection and those distinct from sensation that 'imply real and independent existence and truth' (Price 1948: 38). The latter are the ideas, including moral truths, that are deducible to us through what Price terms our *understanding*. As such Price wants to afford the good and the bad the quality of universal, first-order truths and can be described in this respect as a moral realist. Moreover, tied to the idea of our innate ability to intuit what is morally right is the obligation that follows from it: '*Obligation* to action, and *rightness* of action, are plainly coincident and identical . . . we are *obliged* to do what we *ought* to do' (Price 1948: 105). The basic moral motive is this perception of rightness.

This does not imply the idea that sentiments have no role to play in our moral action. Our actions are accompanied by sentiments whereby right action appears beautiful and is accompanied by emotions of approval, and wrong action appears deformed and is accompanied by emotions of disapproval. As imperfect beings, with limits to our rational capabilities, God has implanted in us 'sensations and instincts' to provide our rational intuitions with 'greater weight and force' (Price 1948: 62).

Moral virtue therefore cannot be reduced to actions taken on account of benevolence (Price 1948: 191). Rather it is the case that values such as justice and veracity are right in themselves. Our virtue is grounded in rectitude, namely taking the right action on account of our understanding of what is morally correct and true: '*rectitude* is a *law* as well as a *rule* to us; that it not only *directs,* but *binds* all, as far as it is perceived' (Price 1948: 108). Choosing the right action, according to Price's account, is not always straightforward. This in part stems from his positing of the 'heads of virtue': multiple, irreducible and ultimate principles of rectitude. He holds that we intuit these principles and they determine what action is fitting in any given

circumstance. It is not unusual, however, for the right action to be ambiguous, as different principles may be in competition.

Price is steadfast in his view that there must be one course of action that is objectively in accordance with the moral law – but it may not always be possible for us to discern it. In this context, it is interesting and important to note that for Price what is important is that we act upon the 'sincere conviction of our mind' (Price 1948: 179). Price wishes to provide a certain latitude by holding that to take the wrong action is not necessarily to be blameworthy. This applies, however, only insofar as we have done our level best to identify the most fitting action according with our consciences, 'after we have taken care to inform them in the best manner we can' (Price 1948: 179). As well as indicating slightly less stringency than Kant's categorical imperative, what is most notable about this approach is the value and importance placed on the autonomy of the individual and their right and duty to act according to their own convictions, even where they may be wrongheaded.

Connectedly, Price is a staunch defender of the idea of free will (1948: 182) as the grounds for the possibility of moral action, in particular in response to his friend and Socinian Joseph Priestley (1778). The latter argued that freedom of the will requires action without a motive and so without a cause. Price's argument, however, is that freedom does not require action without a motive – insofar as the motive is not conceived as a mechanical or physical cause, and he '*himself* be the cause of the action, and therefore not necessarily determined to act.' (Price 1948: 181) The cause of free action and the foundation of morality is the self-determining agent, and so in Kantian terms, Price is expounding the autonomy of the will in opposition to the heteronomy of the will. He concludes 'the virtue of an agent is always *less* in proportion to the degree in which natural temper and propensities fall in with his actions, instinctive principles operate, and rational reflexion on what is right to be done, is wanting' (1948: 195). We require the physical liberty to be able to be responsible for our own choices, whilst moral liberty is being able to exercise that capacity in line with the moral law – which as noted is derived independently from the will of God.

It is self-evident that the duty of rectitude provides the basis for an ethical approach that demands virtuous action in the public sphere and Price's politics, as we will see, is constructed around these assumptions. There is also a clear continuity between his view of individual liberty and collective liberty, most famously set out in *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty,* a pamphlet published in 1776 in support of American independence, which sold 60,000 copies and was released in Philadelphia in the week of the Declaration of Independence. In a notable opening passage he states:

> By Physical Liberty I mean that principle of *Spontaneity,* or *Self determination,* which constitutes us as *Agents* . . . Moral Liberty is the power of following, in all circumstances, our sense of right and wrong . . . Religious Liberty signifies the power of exercising, without molestation, that mode of religion which we think best . . . In like manner; Civil Liberty is the power of a *Civil Society* or *State* to govern itself by its own discretion; or by laws of its own making, without being subject to any foreign discretion, or to the impositions of any extraneous will or power (1992: 21–22).

Price here argues that every human being has a natural right to all forms of liberty, which all constitute forms of self-government and freedom from arbitrary intervention (or *non-domination*, in contemporary parlance). We only secure liberty when the will is able to rule on the basis of autonomy and is protected from other, external forces. Where the former three forms of liberty issue from the claims of his earlier moral philosophy, the latter concept civil liberty – the liberty of a people to rule over themselves – extends explicitly into the field of political philosophy, with his defence of the American cause and the identification of colonial rule as servitude. So far as any restraint on self-government occurs, 'so far slavery is introduced' (1992: 23).

Of equal significance to his views on the liberty of peoples, such as the Americans, are the implications of Price's perspective for the liberty of citizens. Thomas emphasises that 'Price also thinks of liberty as the possession of a power: to be free is to be able to follow one's own sense of right and wrong, to be able to worship as one thinks fit, or to be able to participate in the government of society' (Thomas 1977: 158). He further draws attention to how Price expands on the importance of liberty in the follow-up pamphlet, *Additional Observations on the Nature and Value of Civil Liberty and the War with America.* There moral liberty is emphasised as 'a power in every one to do as he likes' (Price 1992: 81) and where civil liberty is presented 'as the possession of those legal rights which secure to us the quiet enjoyment of our lives' (1977: 158).

The sense in which Price takes a strong line on the separation of the right and the good with respect to the state is perhaps most strongly articulated with regard to religious liberty. In Thomas's view, Price's rejection of state authority on these matters is 'much more rigorous than that of Locke' (1977: 174), and he advocated freedom of worship for all faiths, referencing in particular Islam (1977: 177) – a theme that would be consistent across all his writings (1977: 183). This view of civil liberty is rooted in his ethics, and his emphasis on the idea that it is the individual who is the ultimate arbiter. Persons must be allowed to articulate their view of the moral and the good, even if they get it wrong (a priority on Price's part that appears particularly significant on his own terms, but also with regard to potentially more detailed and nuanced comparison and discussion with respect to Kant's ethics[9]). As Thomas puts it: 'it is a defining characteristic of the human situation that every individual ought to rest upon his own judgement' (1977: 185).

4. Political thought

In turning to his political thought, it is worth pausing at the outset to consider Price's ethics with respect to Left-Kantianism, specifically its eighteenth century iteration. As Duncan Moggach notes, these political theorists 'inspired by Kant contended that the mission of the state is not to impose a particular idea of happiness on its subjects, but rather to leave the quest for felicity open to individual initiative under common rules of coordination' (2021: 186). There is every indication in the preceding analysis that Price would accord with this view. In addition to the emphasis on moral and religious freedom, the other key principle that Left-Kantians attended to was the role of the state in promoting such freedom. Moggach continues, 'The state is to be the vehicle of freedom; its legitimate interventions in economic and social life are to be animated by a new spirit of enhancing individual and collective capacities, not paternalistic

oversight' (2021: 187). Whilst Price exhibits elements of libertarian scepticism, his politics mirror this belief in the state as the vehicle of freedom, underpinned in particular by a Christian Millenarian belief in progress, towards the thousand year reign of peace and justice on earth (a tradition revitalized by the Puritans of the seventeenth century and that continued to inform the dissenters of Price's generation[10]).

Indeed, if clear parallels in their moral thought can be discerned, the continuities in Price and Kant's political thought are stark. Price in this respect is a Republican thinker who emphasizes self-government and non-domination, popular sovereignty, patriotism and civic virtues. Although he tended to deny the label in an attempt to avoid being regarded as overtly anti-monarchical, he sets out a number of political principles that the Prussian would come to affirm.[11]

Ameriks, in his comparison of their politics (2021), draws attention to a number of such attributes in Price's thought that attest to the continuities with Kant. One can look to both Price's domestic and international perspective in order to draw out these parallels: the separation of the church and state; the separation of powers; political authority as deriving from the will of the people, and government that can be replaced in accordance with this will; expansion of the franchise to all those who have independent means; a theoretical presumption in favour of direct democracy where representative democracy is the practical alternative; a rejection of political realism at the international level, advocating for patriotism ruled by reason and rejecting chauvinism; a rejection of the idea of competition between states replaced by the ideal of a peaceful international federation grounded in co-operation and moral cosmopolitanism, to the extent that all political action should ultimately be subject to the universal good.

Many of these ideas come to the fore in perhaps his most famous, if not infamous, aforementioned publication, at the dawn of the French Revolution. Ostensibly, a meditation on what we might now term proper patriotism, the *Discourse* was an address that sought to welcome the revolution and locate it historically as an emancipatory event, spreading the values of the Glorious Revolution. It also serves as a mature statement of Price's key ideas and evidences his emphasis on the role of the state as a guardian of individual freedom and the need for radical reform. A key theme that emerges is that this reform is a civic duty and a practical necessity for the people, in view of the tendency of authority towards despotism. He emphasizes 'our whole duty to our country; for by endeavouring to liberalize and enlighten it . . . we shall endeavour to do all that is necessary to make it great and happy' (1992: 184). Later in the text, he even challenges his readers thus: 'Do you always give your vote on the side of public liberty; and are you ready to pour out your blood in its defence?' (1992: 193).

Much of Price's reforming zeal is directed towards addressing ignorance and censorship and emphasizing the importance of the public educating themselves with respect to civil government and the necessity of fighting for it. He describes it as 'an expedient for gaining protection against injury' (1992: 181) and 'for securing to the members of a community that liberty to which all have an equal right' (1992: 184). Indeed, ignorance is described as the parent of slavery. In his advocacy for political action, he is also careful to tread the line between the extremes of anarchy and idolatry. Obedience to the law is a duty, but the people must avoid falling into

adulation, which 'is always odious, and, when offered to men in power, it corrupts them, by giving them improper ideas of their situation' (1992: 185).

For this reason, it is no surprise that Price identifies the most important principle inherited from the Glorious Revolution as 'the right to chuse [sic] our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for ourselves' (1992: 190). In this context, inequality of representation is described as 'the most important instance of the imperfect state' because when 'representation is partial, a kingdom possesses liberty only partially' (1992: 192). This is a situation that is destined to lead to disaster given the invidious influence of those who hold power. A government 'corruptly chosen, and under corrupt influence after being chosen . . . produces the worst of all forms of government – a government by corruption – a government carried on and supported by spreading venality and profligacy' (1992: 192). Taken together, the arguments in the pamphlet leave one in no doubt as to the importance of political reform in the eyes of Price, and the extent to which the state's protection of freedom rides on a republican ideal of the active citizen.

He is optimistic, however, more so than Kant one senses, about the prospects for emancipation. He sees 'the ardor for liberty catching and spreading; a general amendment beginning in human affairs; the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws' (1992: 195). He finishes his address with a warning to those who should try to extinguish the flames of freedom:

> Tremble all ye oppressors of the world! Take warning all ye supporters of slavish governments, and slavish hierarchies! . . . Struggle no longer against increasing light and liberality. Restore to mankind their rights; and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together (1992: 196).

Whilst the commonalities between Price and Kant are various and subject to debate it is the religious, millenarian zeal underlying these sentiments on the part of Price that provides the clearest contrast between the two. Korsgaard comments, he interpreted the event of the eighteenth century as portentous: 'like Kant, to whom he is often and justly compared, Price celebrated the revolutions as harbingers of the ultimate triumph of liberty and justice on earth' (1992: 3). Ameriks, however, draws attention to the particular mode through which Price espouses this interpretation, which by dint of its millenarian framing has a far more religious tone than anything presented by Kant. He notes,

> His extreme enthusiasm for the revolutionary events of his time spilled over into eschatological exclamations that went so far as to announce an imminent "Second Coming," comparable to the initial appearance of Jesus – albeit on the optimistic assumption that slavery would soon be eliminated. Kant's assessment of the era was definitely more cautious, and he backed away from arguing for anything stronger than an at least not ruled-out possibility of significant political improvement in the faraway future . . . Price, in contrast, could not hold back his optimistic enthusiasm regarding the French Revolution (Forthcoming).

The contrast can perhaps be best appreciated through comparing Price's 1787 essay *The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind* (1992) and Kant's *The Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmopolitan Plan.* Kant's comparably cautious deployment of the term providence and the general secular tone provides a sharp contrast with Price's open conviction about the second coming. Price, nevertheless, does not present an unsophisticated understanding of history. In some senses, he echoes Kant's dialecticism regarding the unfolding of events, which points to the ultimately progressive impact of what appear as disastrous events in the shorter term. However, Price's unshaking belief in the eventual realisation of a reign of peace and justice is in sharp contrast with the Prussian's more demure optimism surrounding the prospects of perpetual peace.

It is one reason why we might regard Price as the more radical of the two, specifically with respect to how his politics were a precursor to the socialist thought of the early nineteenth century. In this regard, in particular, the commentary of Claeys is significant in emphasizing the relationship between Price and Priestley's millenarian republicanism and early forms of utopian socialism (2002: 30–35), in particular the thought and work of Robert Owen, whom Claeys regards as a seminal figure in British Socialism. It is not difficult to see how Price's religious millenarianism and other beliefs such as his concern with urbanization 'would be crucial . . . to the origins of communitarian socialism' (2002: 32). These explicit claims about Price's direct influence on early socialism mark him out in comparison to Kant.

Taken together, the foregoing outline of Price's Ethics and Politics begins the work of setting out his credentials as a radical and proto-socialist, whilst also justifying the move to draw him into dialogue with Kant on account of their numerous similarities. This is especially so in the context of Left-Kantianism, with respect to which it can be reaffirmed that Price reflected the preoccupation of Left-Kantians at the time, and key principles they regarded as animating Kant's political thought. Moggach's neat summary can be readily applied to Price's aspirations: 'emancipated subjectivity seeks to bring about the closer accord of thought and being through the progressive transformation of the objective world' (2021: 185). As we have seen, the centring of the autonomy of the individual's beliefs and convictions is striking, with Thomas claiming that the principle 'that every man has a duty and a right to do what he thinks he ought to do' is one of two basic themes in Price's political philosophy (1977: ix). Moreover, his reforming zeal with respect to the state is extensive, even if sometimes directed towards the governed, as much as those who govern.

It is important to clarify, nevertheless, that as we move to a more detailed analysis of the economic arguments, aligning Price with the broad Left-Kantianism of the 18th century is not a prelude to endorsing any particular interpretation of Kant's own leftist credentials. The focus here will be on Price's socialist tendencies, with minimal commentary on Kant reserved to some reference points rather than engaging with later reconstructions of his thought as elaborated by the Marburg Left-Kantians and others. Offering a definitive position on Kant's egalitarianism is beyond the scope of this paper. The aim is rather an elaboration of Price's views, with some initial indications as to how Price's development of his "Left-Kantianism" can throw critical light on interpretations of Kant and provide a foil against which others may (re) consider the extent of Kant's own proto-socialist tendencies. To this end, we turn to a substantive analysis of Price's political economy and the manner in which it expanded

on the possibilities of his time for emancipation, reflecting more closely on his own socialist pedigree.

5. Price's political economy?

Accepting Price as broadly Left-Kantian by the lights of their contemporaries, we may ask what precise implications are there in his work for later interpreters of Kant, such as those in Marburg, who 'defended socialism and left-wing ideals on the basis of Kantian principles' (Widmer, 2024: 1). Whilst not committing to a particular interpretation of Kant, emerging in this next section will nevertheless be a substantive claim: the fact Price is able to articulate identifiably left-wing policies on the basis of a moral philosophy aligned with Kant, itself renders the retrospective Left-Kantianism of Marburg and others more plausible. Moreover, while foregoing an extensive comparison with Kant, if we can reasonably hold that their political philosophy is similar, we have the basis for bringing them into a critical dialogue that will raise questions around what appears to be Kant's comparative conservatism.

Price is an intriguing figure in this respect because he offered ideas that arguably constitute a nascent political economy, less developed in Kant's own thinking. This is not only in terms of Price's general engagement with the politics of the day. His thought in this field issues also from his practical interests in finance and the economy and his work as an actuary (ideas expressed most clearly in his pamphlet *Observations on Revisionary Payments* (1771)). These more concrete incursions into the field of political economy not only render Left-Kantianism more plausible, but potentially extend the extent of its parameters.

In weighing up Price's nascent political economy and his left credentials, it is instructive to begin with Marx's assessment. His engagement is limited to some brief references, but they are revealing in the sense of locating Price in the political-historical context. According to Howard Williams, 'Marx regards Price as a defender of the working class' (1984: 91) with respect to issues such as the working day and as a leading commentator 'in English political economy between those who sought to defend the interests of the labourer against those who sought to defend the interests of capital' (1984: 92). Price's views on political economy are revealed through his engagement with the question of enclosure. He rails generally against the cost-of-living crisis facing the labourer in Britain and poor working conditions, whilst lamenting also many of the consequences of industrialisation and the free market economy. Marx quotes him enthusiastically with regard to his general conclusions on the emerging economic order: '*modern* policy is, indeed, more favourable to the higher classes of people; and the consequences may in time prove that the whole kingdom will consist of only *gentry* and *beggars,* or of *grandees* and *slaves'* (Price 1771: 158–159) – or in Marxist vocabulary, we might suggest the Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

Specifically with respect to the enclosures, Price, in Marx's view, sees clearly the relations of dependence forged and how the minority class can dominate the majority class. To deploy a quote from Williams to summarize, Price argues that

> Enclosures stimulate rural depopulation, poverty among labourers (which is aggravated by rising prices) and this, in turn, has its effect on the public through the increased poor rates which have to be paid. Agricultural wages

> decline under the pressure of the newly 'released' labourer on the market. Deprived of the means of eking out their own subsistence the dispossessed labourers are obliged to take what work they can obtain. They fall prey to the allures of urban life once they turn, out of necessity, to manufacture (Williams 1984: 93).

We will turn in a moment to the wider issues of enclosure and how they link to Price's broader political philosophy and thinking around independence, but it is worth noting here the general ethical critique that Price offers of industrialisation and capitalism, which as Williams notes brings him notably close to Rousseau in this regard (and aligns him also with the Marburg Kantians and their emphasis on the ethical foundations of socialism, one might suggest).

> In the refined states of civilization property is engrossed, and the natural equality of men subverted; artificial necessaries without number are created; great towns propagate contagion and licentiousness; luxury and vice prevail; and, together with them, disease, poverty, venality, and oppression. And there is a limit at which all liberty, virtue, and happiness must be lost, and complete ruin follow (Price 1771: 145).

These criticisms are revealing and lead to any number of hypotheses on Price's motivations. Certainly, there is the basic concern with independence and equality, and further to this, it is clear that he sees the dangers in terms of people's ability to lead virtuous lives and live in accordance with rectitude. The puritan strain in his thinking provides an impulse for his opposition to wealth in and for itself, and he regards its accumulation as problematic not only in terms of inequality but also the corrupting effects on the individual themselves and their ability to lead a virtuous life. One can easily read these sentiments as those of a puritan brought up in rural surroundings, shocked by the conditions of urban life in London (and may provide some context for Price's enduring attachment to Wales and his insistence on his regular trips home to enjoy the countryside and sea swimming). His moral condemnation of the new capitalist society he is witness to certainly goes a good deal further than Kant's more philosophical analysis, which – although condemning poverty, providing the moral case for its alleviation through taxation and arguing for reforming the land distribution of the feudal order[12] – stops short of a critique of the emergent system. It is in this context, we may conjecture about the impact on Price's thought of witnessing more directly the effects of the capitalist economy and developing an analysis of the emerging issues.

Such is the nature of Price's censure of capitalism that Claeys has no doubts about positioning the radical dissenter in the socialist canon. In particular, Claeys regards Price's critique of large cities and the extolling of small urban conurbations as important in the emergence of early socialist ideals, with their high regard for small co-operative communities, such as the one that Owen would establish in New Lanark, near Glasgow. Price elaborates that

> Moderate towns, being seats of refinement, emulation, and arts, may be public advantages, but great towns, long before they grow to half the bulk of London

> become checks on population of too hurtful a nature, nurseries of debauchery and voluptuousness; and in many respects, greater evils than be compensated by any advantages (1771: 360n).

Taken together, his commentary on the impact of enclosure on the poor, the industrial urbanization of early capitalism and corrosive effects of wealth accumulation support a reasonable conclusion that Price was anti-capitalist in his general outlook. In this manner, he arguably presents a more holistic and developed appreciation than his Prussian contemporary of the pitfalls of capitalism. In order to substantiate the further claim that Price was a proto-socialist, we now turn to two specific aspects of his political economy.

6. Price, property and agrarian republicanism

Price's socialist pedigree is substantiated in the work of Nicole Whalen. In particular, she sets Price up as an adversary of Adam Smith, who has recently undergone revisionary study with a view to rebuilding his reputation as an egalitarian who advocated redistribution, state intervention and economic regulation (2020: 2). This has occurred in the context of contemporary scholars seeking insight into how political ideas formed around the emergence of the free market. Whalen is sceptical of the idea that some form of proto-egalitarianism can be prized out of Smith. She turns to Price as a contemporary to outline what authentic egalitarian ideals looked like at that time.

A key argument in distinguishing the two perspectives is the relationship between the market and society. Where the more liberal perspective may limit the role of markets to some extent, thinking in the socialist tradition and contemporary economic democracy theories fully subordinate the economy to 'the governance of non-market institutions or actors (i.e. the state or civil society)' (2020: 2). As well as foregoing such subordination, figures such as Smith were in their less stringent approaches guilty of refuting the structural, long-term factors at play that were articulated by their opponents: 'that free markets allow power to amass to the *owners of property and capital* – i.e. grain merchants and suppliers, employers, and landlords' (2020: 4). Given these tendencies the amassing of wealth and capital needed to be regulated especially because of the ill effects of such monopolization on the liberty of the masses.

Whalen further argues that a key normative aspect is the understanding of wage labour at play. Smith interprets independence 'in terms of control over the ability to alienate or sell one's labor – not control over the governance of one's laboring activity' (Whalen, 2022: 220). Price on the other hand regards wage labour to be a form of servitude, where one loses agency over one's activity, impacting independence and political liberty. For Price, the prospect of 'establishing economic equality assured people the opportunity to be self-sufficient – to not be forced into the arbitrary governance of others for whom they labor' (2022: 220).

The rationale of his position is that 'if a person is self-reliant, they are protected from domination in interpersonal relations of dependency' (2020: 19). Price's emphasis on the idea of independence and his opposition to wage labour was clearly connected with the contemporary, common place republican idea of freedom. Nondomination required economic self-sufficiency. This view could be found in the republican canon, and in the work of the likes of Harrington, who supported 'reforms

that increased opportunities for land ownership (by opposing the unequal distribution of property) and self-employment.' (2020: 3)

With respect to situating Price vis-a-vis Kant, it is worth considering the fact that Whalen places the latter on the same side as Smith on the matter of wage labour. Moreover in her view, despite Kant's emphasis on property and criticisms of the feudal order, neither did he properly advocate for agrarian reforms that would allow for a more equal distribution of land. Alternatively, she argues, in adopting a contractarian view of labour relations, he understood commercial employment and wage labour to be *compatible* with republican freedom. From this perspective, as long as a person is in possession of their labour power (not property), they are held to be economically independent. An attendant piece of evidence suggesting Kant's embracing of the emerging capitalist order is his 'identification of commerce with peace'[13] (2020: 155). Whalen does point out, however, that rather than reading these views as an unqualified endorsement of the emerging system, we might consider them as pointing to tensions in Kant's views.

Indeed, she is not convinced that Kant is consistent by his own lights, and her criticism is suggestive of a (perhaps understandably) limited appreciation of the material conditions and consequences. 'Despite,' she says 'Kant's assurance that wage laborers remain equal under civil law (even if they are disenfranchised), his description of them as dependents still raises some concern' (2020: 160).[14] To ensure no substantive loss of freedom occurs, Kant contends that contracts must guarantee the quality and quantity of work in order to limit the scope of the employer's authority. Whilst we may follow the rationale and even potentially accept it, there seems to be a blindness here to the material and structural conditions under which such a contract is agreed. Put simply, 'Kant and other defenders of the right of contract overlook structural forms of coercion that put workers and employers on unequal footing' (2020: 164). Whalen's verdict is suggestive: although he 'sided with many aspects of the eighteenth century pro-market outlook' she opines 'he was also an inconsistent or undecided economic thinker – which would account for the several inconsistencies in his texts' (2020: 178). This alleged inconsistency and ambivalence may appear more stark in light of Price's more empirically-informed and strident criticisms. However, we might equally suggest the contrast is admissible considering the immediate, conclusive and historically contextualised evidence presenting itself to Price.

In this regard, and as noted, some of Price's biggest concerns revolve around land and enclosure. Those of a more liberal, capitalist bent, not only rejected the idea of wage labour as a form of domination but also rejected outright agrarian reforms pursuing more equal distribution of land. So long as the individual was in possession of their labour power and able to freely exchange it, they were regarded as economically independent and in a state of non-domination. However, the emphasis in turn of radical republicans on economic independence as a necessary requirement for political freedom and participation provided their justification for equalizing property ownership. In this context, the enclosure of lands was a crucial issue because 'it forced self-sufficient producers into new relations of market dependency and therefore into accepting the authority and governance of the landowners and employers' (Whalen, 2020: 117). Moreover, as Price argues, when they are forced off the land, their livelihood is impacted all the more by high prices because their subsistence relies upon purchasing grain on the open market (2020: 118). Enclosure

and the forcing of the working class into waged labour therefore creates relationships of domination whilst increasing their dependency, because of such economic insecurity. Conversely the greater the independence from the market, the greater the personal security, most especially for the poor (2020: 120). This is why from the radical republican view the market must be subordinated.

This critique was the basis for an alternative view of how society should be organised and land distributed, referred to as agrarian republicanism, a vision of a society of small, independent landowners associated with Harrington and Price (Whalen 2020: 21). It is not only the tendency towards equality that is preferable in such an arrangement, but also the virtuous lifestyle Price believed it would encourage. It is not difficult imagine the possibly nostalgic Welshman holding forth on the view that 'agriculture supplies plenty of the means of subsistence; the blessing of a natural and simple life are enjoyed; property is equally divided; the wants of men are few, and soon satisfied; and families are easily provided for.' (Price: 1771).

Indeed, in his *Observations on the American Revolution and Means of Making it a Benefit to the World* (1992), Price invokes the idea of an agrarian law for the new federation:

> Some great men (Plato, Sir Thomas More, and Mr. Wallace, etc.) have proposed plans which, by establishing a community of goods and annihilating property, would make it impossible for any one member of a state to think of enslaving the rest, or to consider himself as having any interest distinct from that of his fellow-citizens. Such theories are in speculation pleasing, nor perhaps are they wholly impracticable. Some approaches to them may hereafter be made and schemes of government may take place which shall leave so little, besides personal merit, to be a means of distinction as to exclude from society most of the causes of evil. But be this as it will, it is out of doubt that there is an equality in society which is essential to liberty and which every state that would continue virtuous and happy ought as far as possible to maintain (1992: 145).

Price is somewhat reticent with respect to how in practice this might be established, with it not being in his 'power to describe the best method' (1992: 145), but he advocates for the law whilst warning against 'three enemies to equality': hereditary honour and titles, primogeniture and foreign trade (1992: 146). The latter in Price's view encourages venality, corruption and selfishness, while in practice will lead to 'the substitution of a delusive paper currency' and a public bank to circulate it, which ultimately 'depend on the permanence of public credulity' and precipitate inevitable calamity (1992: 149).

Whalen's analysis is very helpful in deepening our understanding of Price's incipient anti-capitalism and the reasons why Marx regarded him as an ally of the working classes. Through the comparison with Smith and the latter's more liberal economic approach, we see Price's deep practical and philosophical commitment to equality and the extent to which he regards it as both ethically and practically necessary to subordinate the market and guard against the corruption of capitalism. Moreover, his ideal agrarian republicanism, imagined against the backdrop of the emerging American federation, clarifies his vision for an egalitarian society, its value and its importance in promoting Republican freedom and moral virtue. With respect

to Kant, we might speculate that although he demurred on the question, given his opposition to the feudal system he may have landed closer to Price on the issue, in the face of the consequences of enclosure. Likewise the understanding of wage labour as a form of servitude marks out Price's perspective clearly and raises some interesting considerations for further comparison with Kant, and how that situates the latter with regard to socialist thought.

Certainly, Whalen echoes Claeys' arguments about Price's status as a socialist precursor, with the agrarian republican ideal 'employed by labor republicans in the nineteenth century to defend collective ownership of the workplace. Rejecting the laissez-faire interpretation of economic independence – and modifying the agrarian ideal to the industrial setting – they endorsed "equal, collective rule over their joint activity"' (2022: 221). Intriguingly, she also suggests its contemporary relevance, both in terms of its similarity to the critique of the capitalist welfare state from the perspective of economic democracy, and its relevance to indigenous agrarian communities' 'struggle to defend communal and customary rights to the land from ongoing forms of privatization. These struggles mimic the injustices faced by small producers in the period of the enclosures' (2022: 221). While the latter point in particular takes us beyond the scope of this paper, generally these arguments buttress a view of Price not only as a proto-socialist but as a figure of historical and contemporary relevance, his political economy presenting further evidence of his significance. In the next section, we will see how Price himself was already adjusting his ideal to the realities of British society and the impact of enclosure.

7. Price and insurance

As a polymath and a thinker who was far from systematic in his output, one of the challenges with Price is understanding how his various exploits hang together and might be understood to reflect an internal coherence in his thought. At first, this might be seen to be particularly the case with his exploits as an actuary. As a philosopher and political thinker, his devotion to this industry might appear somewhat surprising. However, recent work by Rachel Friedman in particular does a great deal to illustrate the place of these endeavours within his broader oeuvre and to expound the case that in Price we have a thinker who, through his work on social insurance and annuities, helped to put in place a key plank of social welfare. In this context, we can identify a continuity with Kant with respect to the latter's advocacy of welfare for the poor (6: 325/467), but emphasise also how Price goes a great deal further both in a practical and ethical sense.

Indeed Friedman goes so far as to argue 'Price was a key intellectual progenitor of the modern welfare state, the aim of which is not merely to alleviate poverty, but to promote equality of individual liberty, understood as secure self-government for all' (forthcoming). Her insights certainly help us to build a more complete picture of Price the proto-socialist, giving further substance to Claeys claims about his seminal influence. She demonstrates in a concrete manner how in his practice he laid some of the foundations for socialism in a society undergoing industrialisation and subject to enclosure and the loss of land by the masses.

In this regard, we can attribute Price's efforts not only to the fact of him bearing witness to the jeopardy of emergent capitalism but also to what distinguishes him

from Kant as a thinker, namely, his polymathic capabilities and interests. Price grounded his work in his formidable mathematical abilities and faith in science as an emancipatory force. As noted earlier, as executor for Thomas Bayes' papers, he was responsible for bringing Bayes' theory to fruition (indeed, it is claimed by some today that given the effort invested by Price in the work, it would be known as the Bayes-Price Theorem by today's standards). Friedman claims that more generally, 'Price saw probability as a means to individual and political liberation' (forthcoming), encouraging forward planning and the control of one's future, as well as collective enlightenment for the citizenry, promoting good policy and political practice. In a personal capacity, he served as an early mathematical advisor to the Society of Equitable Assurances on Lives and Survivorships, the first life insurance company to rigorously use mathematical probabilities to price its policies. His influence as one of the founders of the field would extend beyond his lifetime, with his calculations becoming the standard reference for friendly society contributions, following a 1793 act of parliament.

In terms of understanding Price's motivations and the connections to his wider economic thinking, he posits a direct relationship with enclosure and the loss of land – and the subsequent threat to the independence of those affected. He stressed that liberty requires not merely the ability to do what one chooses, but 'security for the possession of [that ability] which arises from . . . a free government'. Of necessity therefore, each individual should have 'the quiet possession of his life, person, property and good name . . . secured to him by being his own legislator' (Price 1992: 82). Price was keenly aware of the threat posed by the potentially severe inequality arising from property ownership. With too much property, some individuals will co-opt power and use it for their own interests rather than the common good. With too little property, men fall into dependence and are poorly suited for citizenship. Price had foreseen that enclosure would deprive many of his compatriots of the independence derived from property, with agriculturalists forced into wage labour. He understood the net effect would be increased economic inequality, greater dependency, and ultimately an increase in vice and misery.

In this context, Price regarded insurance and annuities as a form of "mobile" property. They could compensate for the loss of land, avoiding the slide of the depropertied worker into dependence, whilst providing the security for individuals and families to face the future with some certainty. The underlying argument is a fairly straightforward one: successful mutual assurance schemes would guarantee property over time, with this financial security augmenting freedom and guarding against dependency and its consequences. These personal and collective benefits inhere in the parallels identified by Price between insurance and property (Friedman: forthcoming). Ultimately, from a normative perspective, insurance schemes could operate as a mechanism for maintaining the republican ideal of freedom, preventing the individual from falling into political servitude and dependence, maintaining both physical and moral autonomy – sustaining the conditions for virtuous citizens and the promotion of virtue in society in general. 'By encouraging effort and foresight, and securing individuals' earnings, annuities would promote a kind of propertied independence despite the trends toward urbanization, corruption, and inequality that Price elsewhere lamented' (Friedman: forthcoming). Notably in terms of his socialist pedigree, Friedman echoes Marx in asserting Price's support for the working classes,

as he tried to promote the practice across social classes, but most especially the emerging proletariat.

From Friedman's work, we therefore gain an understanding of how Price believed one response to the threat of enclosure and emergent capitalism was to encourage the spread of annuity and social insurance schemes. As much as the technical practice itself, which she regards as anticipating modern welfarism, it is the ethos that can be construed as forging an early socialist spirit. Specifically, there is the schemes' collective aspect and the sense in which they encouraged the exercise of autonomy and mutualism on the part of the working classes, with the potential for forging a sense of class consciousness that could build agency in the face of the ensuing threats. We are therefore presented with a concrete example of Price's proto-socialism and the type of idea and accompanying spirit that one can see infuse the early cooperativism of the likes of Owen.

Whilst there is no doubting Price's pedigree in this regard, Friedman's claim that it is a similar ethos that eventually contributes towards the building of the modern welfare state raises some interesting queries. This is particularly the case with respect to the extent of Price's radicalism and the degree to which he was offering an alternative to capitalism. Modern critics of capitalist welfarism such as Rawls argue that it is not aimed at progressive reform, rather more justifying the system through some minimal redistribution. To attribute this outlook to Price would be unfair, however, especially given the potentially transformative societal impact of the mutualism Friedman identifies in his schemes, and the ideal of independence animating his work. Nevertheless, a not unfounded criticism would be that Price was too ready to cleave to the logic of capitalism and to seek piecemeal reform. Marx intimated as much in his critique of Price's reliance on the compound interest derived from wage labour, which underwrote his insurance schemes.[15] Neither was it the case that other approaches had simply not been imagined: radical alternatives around economic and land reform could be found in the work of Harrington or movements such as the Diggers and Commonwealthmen (which Price arguably subscribed to in spirit, at least in the ideal context or that of America). On balance, however, these concerns do not appear to be grounds for questioning Price's socialist pedigree as one of the early thinkers grappling with the impact of capitalism. Instead we might emphasize the connections between Price and the early utopian socialists who Marx would also be critical of. We can also point to his ethical focus that potentially aligns him with later Left-Kantians and the social democracy that emerged in the late nineteenth century with figures such as Bernstein. More generally, Price's demurring from advocating repossession of the land is indicative of a typically more moderate and gradualist approach to politics than suggested by the caricature created by Burke and other enemies. Indeed, such a reforming spirit might be said to draw him closer to Kant.

8. Reflections

Following an outline of Price's moral and political thought, I have provided an analysis of his nascent political economy with reference to his work on agrarian republicanism and social insurance, both of which are tied to the key economic development of eighteenth-century enclosure and industrial development. As such,

Price has been broadly presented as a precursor to the emerging socialism of the early nineteenth century, as well as being a touchstone for contemporary ideas of property-owning democracy and economic democracy that reject the ascendancy of markets in late modernity. This is on the basis of his rejection of wage labour as a form of servitude, his critique of enclosure and its impact on inequality, the importance of collective ownership and the subjection of markets and capitalist values to civil society and civic virtue. Whilst a thoroughgoing comparison between Price and Kant is the work of another project, in gesturing towards the continuities and highlighting some of the contrasts, I hope to have established the grounds for venturing some tentative conclusions with respect to Kant's leftist credentials and the Left-Kantian debate more generally. I hope in addition to have made the case for the further study of Price in and for himself.

In setting up Price as a foil for our interpretation of Kant and the latter's nascent egalitarianism, the general conclusion is that Ameriks is well justified in regarding them as cognate figures with respect to their moral and political philosophy. I would further venture that Price elaborates on their shared normative insights substantially in his nascent political economy. Whilst it has only been possible to make the more limited claim that Price's work suggests a sometimes more radical approach than Kant, some may see grounds for arguing that Kant is substantively less radical, weakening the case for regarding him as a proto-leftist. More sympathetic, however, would be the suggestion that in the face of capitalism, Price elucidates the practical potential of Kant's own inclination towards land reform, his condemnation of poverty and his advocacy of taxation in support of social welfare.

In presenting them as cognate figures who share an extensive sympathy of outlook (to use Korsgaard's phrase), in conclusion, it is worth pausing for further reflection in trying to explain the differences, especially with regard to the apparent tensions gestured towards by Whalen in their outlook on equality. As noted, Price's intellectual hinterland is no doubt a factor here, both in his adjacency to Kant and in their differences. In his Ethics, Price was swimming against the currents of Empiricism that would come to dominate the British Isles, and the fact that he took up the rationalist tradition of Clarke and others is partly explicable in terms of his background. The intellectual milieu from which he sprung in the Welsh Nonconformist Academies was one that would have had little positive exposure to Philosophical Empiricism, which by its nature remained deeply theologically orientated and, if it exhibited any discernible philosophical proclivities, might best be described as Neo-Platonist.[16] Likewise in terms of Price's politics, the discrimination against his religious community and the peripherality of Wales in the emergent British capitalist system both point in the direction of a more radical politics. This was further underscored by a millenarianism commonplace in Welsh dissent, which in Price's childhood was only half a century removed from the Puritanism of the civil war that had been typified by its obsession with the "year of the beast".

As noted, Price's religiosity marks him out from Kant, most especially in the way this millenarianism animates a political consciousness that is more excitable and more defiant in its expectation of human progress and worldwide emancipation. And whilst single-mindedness is a characteristic of Kant's dedication to philosophy, Price's genius was of a different kind, leaping from one discipline or task to another. This, together with his practical disposition and incessant drive towards active

contribution in various fields, led him towards less satisfactory academic achievement but animated his life and work in ways that surpassed Kant. The same tendency may also account for the more bullish, optimistic and animated political thought that was as much activist as academic. As a pamphleteer, Price addressed the wider public and attempted to stimulate change in a more direct manner than Kant might have felt appropriate to his distinct role as philosopher. Price's polymathy also accounts for the evolution of his economic thought, which allowed him to develop specific aspects to his political economy.

We must also not discount the impact their different environments would have had on their thinking. Price was very much at the heart of the industrial revolution and was witnessing the development of industrial capitalism and consequences of enclosure. Their impact surrounded him, and he could see with his own eyes their effects on those he knew, and no doubt those with whom he grew up in his native south Wales. Such realities must surely sharpen the mind and force a recognition of what is at stake and how those developments play out in their effects on the oppressed. It is perhaps inevitable that the ideas he espoused tended towards advocating for the more radical implications of a shared political philosophy with Kant.

That being so, from a left perspective, Price, as with Kant, reveals his limits with regard to understanding the material, structural factors at work and the contradictions of capitalism, and it is questionable whether either offer any genuinely radical alternatives. Price might be said to get closer in terms of his instincts and exploratory ideas, whilst the emphasis on mutualism and collective ownership does seem to set the scene for socialist developments. Whether they were ever a genuine socialist alternative is a question that could be equally aimed at the contemporary ideas of economic democracy and property-owning democracy. Nevertheless, in situating Kant and Price in relatively close proximity, it behoves us to consider the former within a wider republican and radical tradition, in which more radical ideas had been circulating for some time – including the agrarian republicanism articulated by Harrington and at this time by Price. Kant in this respect might be regarded on a spectrum of "fellow travellers" in the eighteenth century who were themselves part of a republican tradition prefigured in previous centuries.

Finally, and most importantly with respect to the aims of this article, some conclusions may be drawn with respect to Left-Kantianism. Price is a figure who fits squarely with the key tenets of its eighteenth-century interpretation, in respect to the focus on individual emancipation from state prescription and the impulse to reform the political world to enhance liberty. More significantly, the fact that a cognate thinker developed applied egalitarian ideals consistent with his proto-Kantian ethical foundations – whereby proto-socialist ideas are regarded as necessary in order to realise republican freedom – potentially renders later Left Kantianism more plausible as a project. Price's emergent political economy arguably corroborates their interpretations of the more radical implications of Kant's (and Kantian) thought, as well as the argument that Kant's own views of republican freedom are consistent with leftist, socialist outcomes. Indeed, Price's more substantive economic thought, in the context of the more developed capitalist society of eighteenth-century Britain, provides contemporaneous insights into how Kant's thought might have been

developed. Moreover, the distinctive elements and innovations in Price's arguments on capitalism, enclosure and insurance potentially extend what we call Left-Kantianism and the debates surrounding it, and may open up avenues in the attendant literature on Kant and political economy.

Price undoubtedly took the implications of his republican freedom in a more radical direction than Kant. Partly, as suggested, this is a consequence of their context and their preoccupations. Characteristic also is Price's tendency to conceive of reform as issuing as much from below as from high, with the state viewed not so much as an agent of change, so much as the predominant agent that must be changed. Given his almost anarchic tendency to assert the corrupting tendencies of power, his socialist instincts cleave more obviously towards communitarianism rather than state capture as the means for reform. Price in this respect is also a gradualist (Frame 2015: 175) who regarded the political world as one where lasting change would be achieved across, rather than within, generations. All told, a playful, if provocative note on which to end, would be to suggest that Price was a more thoroughgoing Left-Kantian than Kant himself.

Notes

1 See for example: Allegri (2023: 19 n20), Ameriks (2021), Cone (1952: 25), Gealy (1991: 143), Hudson (1970: 168) Korsgaard (1992), Raphael (1948: ix-x), Rashdall (1907: 81, ft) Roland Thomas (1924: 34–37).
2 Paul Frame's (2015) 'magisterial volume' as it is described by David McNaughton (2024) provides the most recent and comprehensive account of Price's life and times.
3 For a comparative discussion of Price, Priestley and Franklin as intellectual forces from the periphery see Iwan Morus (2025).
4 See D.O. Thomas's discussion (1977: 13–15) of how Price's rationalist ethics are in tension with his alleged Arianism.
5 See Zebrowski's discussion (1994) on the Platonic aspects of Price's philosophy.
6 On the Controversy, see for example Butler (1984).
7 For book-length treatments of Price's Ethics see Åqvist (1960), Cua (1966), Hudson (1970) and Allegri (2023). Bengson, Cuneo, & Shafer-Landau's recent discussion (2023) of Price's moral epistemology argues the case for his ongoing relevance in the context of current debates.
8 A tangential point is that the occlusion of this tradition is interesting in the context of the history of Philosophy, especially the well-worn narrative introduced to undergraduates of Kant as the synthesiser of continental rationalism and British empiricism. In terms of the remembering of Price, this elision in the story of western philosophy is especially notable when one considers the recognition of the strong empiricist element synthesized within Price's own rational intuitionism (Allegri 2023: 39).
9 I note here a significant point from an anonymous reader that Kant would likely have regarded Price along with Clarke, Wollaston and Balguy as taking "perfection" to be the will's determining ground, and hence to be a heteronomist – and that Price's apparent libertarianism is in contrast to the emphasis in Kantian autonomy on 'a capacity to act upon a self-wrought principle of action'. If indeed this can be seen to open up distance between the two, it may be tentatively suggested that Price's emphasis on the individual's own judgement might bridge the gap somewhat.
10 See Fruchtman's extensive essay (1983) on what he describes as Price and Priestley's 'apocalyptic' politics.
11 D.O. Thomas's review of Fruchtman's essay (1985) not only reflects on the different traditions of millenarianism and Price's relation to them, but it also includes some interesting and telling reflections on the question of Price's republicanism given Price's tendency to distance himself from the tradition.
12 For a discussion of these elements of Kant's thought see, for example, Williams (2011).
13 Although Price himself is not conclusive on this issue; in his 1784 essay he regards foreign trade as an enemy of equality (1992: 146), while in his later 1787 pamphlet commerce is regarded as a force for peace (1992: 162).

14 According to Whalen, Kant seems to admit that the one is at the mercy of the other, in a manner that seems to curtail our civil liberty. Rather than this being a confusion on the part of Kant, one possible rationale is the very particular nature of the private contract: 'The possibility that one can come to acquire another's choice without violating their independence is attributed to the consensual nature of the act. For Kant, contracts are the result of a "united will"' (2020: 162). He makes explicit reference, for example, 'to the employment contract in his discussion of contracts to let and hire (*locatio operae*). These contracts entail "granting another the use of my powers for a specified price"' (2020: 163).

15 See Williams (1984: 94) on Marx's critique of Price's capital fetishism. This has important implications if one considers Price's support for annuities and social insurance, which represent a key policy for trying to circumvent major issues of capitalist society. This proposal, it would seem, still ultimately relies on the exploitation of others with compound interest, according to Marx, ultimately resulting from the surplus value of labour.

16 R.I. Aaron (1928) gives an account of how the thought of Plotinus became predominant in Welsh nonconformism through the seminal influence of Morgan Llwyd, a Puritan and associate of the Cambridge Platonists who was influenced deeply by Jacob Boehme.

References

Aaron, R. I. (1928) 'Dylanwad Plotinus ar Feddwl Cymru'. *Y Llenor*, VII(2), 115–126.

Allegri, F. (2023) Richard Price and the Foundation of Virtue: Some Historical Roots of Contemporary Ethics in a Review of the Principal Questions in Morals. Mimesis International.

Ameriks, K. (2021) 'Dignity beyond Price: Kant and his revolutionary British contemporary'. *Kant Yearbook*, 13(1), 1–27.

—— (2027) 'Kant, Price, and American independence'. In R. Duthille, N. Whalen and H. Williams (eds.), *Recovering Richard Price* Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Åqvist, L. (1960) *The Moral Philosophy of Richard Price*. Copenhagen: Gleerup, Lund, and Munksgaard.

Bengson, J., Cuneo, T. and Shafer-Landau, R. (2023) 'Pricean reflection'. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 31(4), 744–61.

Broad, C. D. (1944) 'Some reflections on moral-sense theories in ethics'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 45, 131–66.

Burke, E. (2014) *Revolutionary Writings: Reflections on the Revolution in France and the First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Butler, M. (1984) *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolutionary Controversy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Claeys, G. (2002) *Citizens and saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cone, C. B. (1952) *Torchbearer of Freedom: The Influence of Richard Price on 18th Century Thought*. University Press of Kentucky.

Cua, A. S. (1966) *Reason and Virtue: A Study in the Ethics of Richard Price*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Frame, P. (2015) *Liberty's Apostle: Richard Price his Life and Times*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Friedman, R. Z. (2020). *Probable Justice: Risk, Insurance, and the Welfare State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

—— (forthcoming) 'Richard Price on the Politics of Probability'. In R. Duthille, N. Whalen and H. Williams (eds.), *Recovering Richard Price*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Fruchtman, J. (1983) 'The apocalyptic politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: a study in late eighteenth-century English republican millennialism'. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 73(4), 1–125.

Gealy, W. (1991). 'Richard Price F.R.S. 1723–1791'. *Traethodydd,* Cyf. CXLVI, 135–144.

Hudson, W. D. (1970) *Reason and Right: A Critical Examination of Richard Price's Moral Philosophy*. London: MacMillan.

Korsgaard, C. (1992) 'Richard Price'. In L.C. Becker and C.B. Becker (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics*. New York: Garland Publishing.

McNaughton, D. (2024) 'Richard Price', The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2024/entries/richard-price/.

Moggach, D. (2021) 'Left-Kantian perfectionism'. *Critical Review*, 33(2), 184–205.
Morus, I.R. (2025) 'Electrifying thinkers'. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 166(1), 1–16.
Price, R. (1763) 'An Essay Towards Solving a Problem in the Doctrine of Chances. By the Late Rev. Mr. Bayes, F.R.S. Communicated by Mr. Price in a Letter to John Canton A.M.F.R.S.', *Philosophical Transactions,* LIII. 370–18.
—— (1771) *Observations on Reversionary Payments; on Schemes for Providing Annuities for Widows, and for Persons in Old Age; on the Method of Calculating the Values of Assurances on Lives; and on the National Debt.* London.
—— (1778) *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity, in a Correspondence between Dr. Price and Dr. Priestley.* London.
—— (1948) *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*. Raphael, D.D. (ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
—— (1992) *Political Writings (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought)* Thomas, D.O. (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
—— (2013) *Four Dissertations (Reprint)*. Galway: HardPress Ltd.
Raphael, D.D. (1948) 'Editor's introduction' In R. Price (ed.), *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, v–xlvii.
Rashdall, H. (1907) *Theory of Good and Evil: Volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Skinner, Q. (2012) *Liberty Before Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Thomas, D. O. (1977) *The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
—— (1985) 'Jack Fruchtman Jr., The Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: A Study in Late Eighteenth Century Republican Millennialism. Pp. iv+ 125. (Philadelphia. American Philosophical Society, 1983)'. *Religious Studies*, 21(4), 608–11.
Thomas, R. (1924) *Richard Price: Philosopher and Apostle of Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Whalen, N. (2020) Freedom, Equality, and Markets in Eighteenth Century Philosophy (Doctoral dissertation, City University of New York).
—— (2022) 'Adam Smith and Richard Price on a free society of equals'. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 52(2), 208–22.
Widmer, E. T. (2024) *Left-Kantianism in the Marburg School*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
Williams, H. L. (1984) 'Karl Marx and Richard Price'. *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 3, 91–98.
—— (2011) 'Towards a Kantian theory of international distributive justice.' *Kantian Review*, 15(2), 43–77.
Wollstonecraft, M. (2008) *A Vindication of the Rights of Men; A Vindication of the Rights of Woman; An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution (Oxford World's Classics)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Zebrowski, M. K. (1994) 'Richard Price: British Platonist of the eighteenth century,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 55, 17–35.

Cite this article: Williams, H.L. Richard Price and His Contemporaneous Left-Kantianism. *Kantian Review*. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1369415425101179