

# The Diffusion of the Work of Adam Smith in the French Language: An Outline History \*

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Ken Carpenter's recent publications on the translation of *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* into the French language during the period 1776 to 1843 have shed a great deal of light on Adam Smith's translation history.<sup>1</sup> If we add to this record what we know of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, we can summarise the various translations into French as in Table I,<sup>2</sup> supplemented by the listing given in Table II of other writings by Smith.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth E. Carpenter, *The Dissemination of the Wealth of Nations in French and in France 1776-1843*, The Bibliographical Society of America, New York 2002; and his earlier essay, "Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations d'Adam Smith et politique culturelle en France", *Économies et Sociétés*, no. 10 (1995) pp. 5-30.

<sup>2</sup> Large caps indicate original translations, small caps reprints, the translation number serving also to indicate the translator. The suffix (a) indicates an abbreviated edition, although the name of the editor concerned is not given here for the sake of clarity; (e) indicates substantial extracts in a periodical, encyclopedia or other serial publication. It is worthwhile distinguishing those extracts published in the eighteenth century from abbreviated editions which, from the late nineteenth century, were conceived for an entirely different purpose. In the former case (and leaving to one side encyclopaedia entries), extracts were designed to make the work of an author better known, preceding publication as a book and a complete reading. In the nineteenth century the publication of "select extracts" related to works already considered to be classics of their kind, and intended as a substitute to a complete reading. (i) indicates an incomplete translation; (m) indicates a manuscript only.

<sup>3</sup> For further details of these different editions see Richard Sher's essay above; and also Carpenter, *Dissemination for Wealth of Nations to 1843*.

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Table I — Translations of Smith in France and in French (1764-2002)

	TMS		WN
1764	T1 Eidous		
1774	T2(m, i) La Rochefoucauld		
1774-75	T3 Blavet		
		1776	W1 (m) Morellet
		1778	W2(e) Reverdil
		1778-79	W3 [Anonymous]
		1779-80	W4 Blavet
		1781	w4, w4
1782	t3		
		1782	W5 (m) Nort
		1784-88	w4(e)
		1786	w4
		1788	w4
		1789	w3
		1790	w6(e) & w4(e)
		1790-91	W6 Roucher
		1791-92	w6
		1792	w6
		1794	w6
1798	T4 Grouchy		
		1800-1801	w4
		1802	W7 Garnier
		1806	W6
		1810	w7
		1822	w7
1830	t4		
		1843	w7
		1859	w7
1860	t4		
		1881	w7
		1888	w7(a)
		1908	w7(a)
		1950	w7(a) & w7(i)
		1966	w7
		1976	w7(a)
1981	t4		
		1991	w7
		1995	W8 Taieb
1999	T5 Bizieux et. al.		
		1999-2003	W9 ed. Jaudel

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Table II— French Translations of Smith’s Philosophical Writings

<b>Date of Edition</b>	<b>Translator</b>	<b>Translated Text</b>
1796 <i>Considérations sur la première formation des langues, et le différent génie des langues originales et composées</i>	A. M. H. Boulard	Dissertation on the Origin of Languages
1797 <i>Essais philosophiques</i>	Pierre Prévost	Essays on Philosophical Subjects, including Stewart’s “Account” and Smith’s letter to the authors of the <i>Edinburgh Review</i>
1798 <i>Considérations sur l’origine et la formation des langues</i>	Sophie de Grouchy	Dissertation on the Origin of Languages, appendix to <i>Théorie des sentiments moraux</i> (see Table I for subsequent editions)
1809 <i>Essai sur la première formation des langues et sur la différence du génie des langues originales et des langues composées</i> [followed by] Book I of <i>Recherches sur la langue et la philosophie des Indiens</i> (reprinted 1971)	Jacques-Louis Manget	Dissertation on the Origin of Languages, followed by the translation of a text by Friedrich Schlegel
1997 <i>Essais esthétiques</i>	P.-L. Autin, I. Ellis, M. Garandeanu, P. Thierry	Of the Nature of that Imitation which takes place in what are called The Imitative Arts; Of the Affinity between Music, Dancing, and Poetry; Of the Affinity between certain English and Italian Verses; A Letter to the Authors of the <i>Edinburgh Review</i>

The following account is divided into three distinct periods:

1764-1802

1802-1888

1888 to the present

This periodisation arises from the “material” aspect of the Smith reception: the translations themselves, whether complete or in part, made accessible to a francophone public. Within each of these periods we have briefly examined this material dimension

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of the reception, but also taken account of another history, that of the intellectual translation of the work – the province of the history of ideas, whose phasing does not exactly correspond to that of the material publication history.

### **The First Period: 1764-1802**

The translation history of Smith's work, and importantly, that of its reception, is rich and varied during this period. One has only to look at the figures – taking into account of all translations, we are talking of not less than twelve translators working over a period of forty years; and seven of these translators, over a period of twenty years, directed their efforts to *Wealth of Nations*. By the end of the period canonical translations had been made of *Moral Sentiments* and of *Wealth of Nations*, and all later interpretations and editions would be based on these versions.

At the close of the *ancien régime*, this flurry of activity was first directed to *Moral Sentiments*, two complete translations of this work appearing in succession – that of Marc-Antoine Eidous (1764) and the *abbé* Jean-Louis Blavet (1774-1775), the latter being reprinted in 1782. Besides this, we know that Louis-Alexandre de La Rochefoucauld prepared an incomplete manuscript translation in 1774. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, originally published in 1759, reaching its sixth edition in 1790, was also published in a completely new translation during the revolutionary period: Sophie de Grouchy, Condorcet's widow, published her own version in 1798, based on the seventh English edition.

Besides translations of this major text, there are a number of other philosophical writings that can be added, all of which appeared during the revolutionary period. Smith's "Considerations concerning the first formation of Languages, and the different genius of original and compounded Languages", published in the *Philological Miscellany* of 1761 and then appended to the 1767 third edition of *Moral Sentiments*, was translated twice. The first was by A. M. H. Boulard, who published the text under a direct translation of the original title in 1796; the second was by Sophie de Grouchy, who appended the text to her translation of *Moral Sentiments*, following exactly the English edition upon which she based her translation.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the writings that Joseph Black and James Hutton brought together in 1795 under the title *Essays in Philosophical Subjects*, together with Dugald Stewart's "Account" and Smith's 1755 letter to the *Edinburgh Review*, were translated and published by Pierre Prévost as *Essais philosophiques* in 1797. Prévost added ten notes in the form of commentary directed to specific points, as well as a more general essay "Réflexions sur les œuvres posthumes d'Adam Smith".

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<sup>4</sup> In 1809 Jacques-Louis Manget published another new edition

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But it was the *Wealth of Nations* that attracted most attention from translators, reflecting in great part the intensity of intellectual activity prevailing in France during the second half of the eighteenth century, turning on the philosophical, economic and political questions raised by the Enlightenment. It also reflected a certain personal rivalry between translators who were themselves reformers by persuasion; and these conflicts have to be considered if we are to reach a more exact understanding of the diffusion and reception of Smith in this period.

Up until 1789 there are no less than five separate translations:

1. two translations were never published: the almost complete translation of *abbé* Morellet – the manuscript that has survived lacks the last two chapters of Book V;<sup>5</sup> and that of the comte du Nort, mentioned by Adam Smith in a letter of 1782 to Blavet,<sup>6</sup> but for which no manuscript has ever been found;
2. a very partial translation by Élie Salomon François Reverdil was published in 1778 under the title *Fragment sur les colonies en général, et sur celles des anglais en particulier*. This is a translation, with some modifications,<sup>7</sup> of Book IV Ch. VII “Of Colonies” from *Wealth of Nations*;
3. two complete translations were printed, the first from 1778-1779 being anonymous, republished in 1789; and the second being by Jean-Louis Blavet (1779-1780). This was first published as a serial in *Journal d’agriculture, du commerce, des arts et des finances*, republished in book form in 1781, then reprinted in 1786, 1788 and in 1800-1801 (in a revised and corrected edition).<sup>8</sup>

During the revolutionary period there were two new complete translations of *Wealth of Nations*: the first in the early days of the Revolution being that of Jean-Antoine Roucher (1790-1791, republished three times, in 1791-1792, in 1792, and in revised form in 1794); and the other, published during Bonaparte’s Consulate in 1802, is that of Germain Garnier.

In sum, twelve years after the death of Smith in 1790, the two key editions for the diffusion of his work in the French language had been published: de Grouchy’s *Moral*

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<sup>5</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination* p. 1. Morellet also prepared an extract intended for separate publication, but had no more success than with the complete manuscript (see below).

<sup>6</sup> E. C. Mossner, I. S. Ross (eds.) *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1987 Letter 218, pp. 259-60.

<sup>7</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination* p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> It might be added here that in referring to a “complete edition” this does not imply what it would today. Although a translation might present itself as “complete”, in practice there were often omissions made on religious or political grounds, so that censorship of the entire work might be avoided. For example, the anonymous version of *Wealth of Nations* lacks the section in Book V that deals with expenditure on educational institutions. On the other hand, when passages that could possibly attract the attention of the authorities were retained, as in the Blavet edition, some “explanatory” was added, or a comment such as “il ne faut pas oublier que c’est un Anglais qui parle” (Carpenter, *Dissemination*, pp. 22-5, 28-31).

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*Sentiments*, and Garnier's *Wealth of Nations*. In this way a line was drawn under three decades of polemic over the existing translations.

### **The Second Period: 1802-88**

This second period is characterised by a process of critical assimilation on the part of economists working in the French language. There are two features of this phase of the reception that need emphasis:

1. The *Wealth of Nations* was the almost exclusive object of critical attention, Smith's moral philosophy being almost entirely neglected; it was only philosophers, notably Victor Cousin and Théodore Jouffroy, that paid any attention to this part of Smith's work. This is quite paradoxical, since French economists had, since the time of the Physiocrats and the creation of the Institute during the Revolution, considered political economy to be a part of the "Moral and Political Sciences".
2. Following Jean-Baptiste Say and Sismondi, French-language economists opted for Smith against Quesnay. But in so doing they did not simply adopt Smith's ideas; the ideas underwent a profound modification. Say, for example, did not accept Smith's theory of value, complained of the gaps in the argument of *Wealth of Nations*, and denounced its confused organisation. The interpretation of Smith offered to the French public was one that had undergone a reconstruction, incorporated into systematic "treatises",<sup>9</sup> where the approach had mainly pedagogical concerns; this was also the case with Say, whose scientific claims are well-known. Despite this, liberal French economists during this second period assigned a central place to Smith's work; it was through this allegiance that they marked themselves off from adversaries, whether theoretical (Ricardo and the Ricardians) or political (protectionists and socialists).

As regards translations of *Wealth of Nations*, this second period is characterised by the supremacy of Germain Garnier's translation over the three preceding translations published. The new, revised edition presented by Adolphe-Jérôme Blanqui in 1843 consolidated the standing of this translation as the definitive French language version.

A rather similar course was followed by Sophie de Grouchy's translations of *Moral Sentiments*: it was republished in 1830, and then published in a new edition with an introduction by Henri Baudrillart in 1860. During the period 1860-80 the work emerged from the shadows to which liberal economists had hitherto consigned it. This development is due to the contributions made by Baudrillart at the time that the

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<sup>9</sup> A form of which Say was a leading exponent – his *Traité d'économie politique* went through six editions from 1803 to 1841.

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celebrated “Adam Smith Problem” began to dominate discussion; although Baudrillart differed quite profoundly from the terms of that debate.

### **The Third Period: 1888-2002**

The third phase reaches from the later nineteenth century to the present. Smith no longer plays a role in theoretical debate and his writings become an object of specialised interest. It is noteworthy that from 1888 to 1976 all accessible editions of *Wealth of Nations* are either *abbreviated* versions – that of Jean-Gustave Courcelle-Seneuil in 1888, of Georges-Henri Bousquet in 1950, and of Gérard Mairet in 1976 – or, if not condensed, then truncated, as with the Costes edition of 1950.<sup>10</sup> Smith’s work is not only re-worked in the style of an economic treatise, but with the development of teaching in the history of economics this is associated with a professorial view that reading the complete text of *Wealth of Nations* is unnecessary. *Theory of Moral Sentiments* endures a lengthy eclipse in this period: it is not republished until 1981, some one hundred and twenty years after the Baudrillart edition.

This third period ends with a re-evaluation of Smith’s work; following the publication of the bicentennial Glasgow edition, the accessibility of Smith’s work in French is dramatically improved:

1. Garnier’s classic translation of *Wealth of Nations* is made available once more (in 1991) in its complete form as a handy paperback aimed at a potentially wide market; while two new complete translations are put forward – one by Paulette Taieb(1995)<sup>11</sup> and another by a team of translators under the general direction of Philippe Jaumel.<sup>12</sup>
2. The Grouchy translation of *Moral Sentiments* is republished in 1981, and then in 1999 an entirely new edition appears translated by Michaël Biziou, Claude Gauthier and Jean-François Pradeau.

Hence these new translations made available good quality French-language editions of Smith’s work, besides the ready availability of the original texts in the bicentennial Glasgow edition. But there is no doubt that today’s readership has changed; it is unlikely that many students of economics in contemporary French universities would

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<sup>10</sup> The Garnier translation was, it is true, republished in 1966 in Germany, but this was not distributed to the French public; it was part of a facsimile edition of French economists’ work published by Guillaumin in the nineteenth century, mainly purchased by libraries.

<sup>11</sup> Apart from the high quality of her translation, Paulette Taieb’s edition is noteworthy for its being based on the first edition, with Smith’s later revisions being flagged and translated in notes and in an appendix. The translator also contributes an entire volume composed of tables, glossary and index.

<sup>12</sup> Publication of this latter edition is in progress at the time of writing.

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be inclined to read, in any depth, the work of Smith. The decline in the teaching of the history of economics is as marked in France as elsewhere. Nor is it likely that readers of Smith are academic economists, who are less and less inclined to cultivate a curiosity in the history of their discipline. The work of Smith is instead today the almost exclusive province of historians of ideas.

This essays falls into two broad sections. The first probes the later eighteenth century, a period so important for translations. The second covers the period following the appearance of canonical editions of *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*. We seek to provide merely the principal outlines of this history.

### I

#### **“L’excellent ouvrage de M. Smith est devenu un livre classique”**

**1764-1802**

We have already seen that the later eighteenth century is rich in translations of Adam Smith’s writings; the final phases of the *Ancien régime* are quite exceptional and mark the French case off from that of other countries. Why such a variety of translation? Does it indicate the speedy adoption of the economic and philosophical ideas of this Scottish writer? If so, what form might this take? Although we have no complete answer to this question, we can sketch the scenery and identify some important and useful details.

#### **1. The Reception of *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in Translation**

In France, as everywhere else, Smith was first known and appreciated as a philosopher. Given the publication of *Theory of Moral Sentiments* it could not have been any different. But the speed with which this reputation spread in the cosmopolitan *République des lettres* is very striking. In October 1760 the *Journal encyclopédique* published a laudatory review. Morellet’s retrospective judgement certainly reflects one that was widely held at the time, and which would later open for Smith the doors of the most prestigious Parisian salons:

...his *Théorie des sentiments moraux* ... had impressed me with his wisdom and depth. And ... I still today regard him to be one of those men ... whose analysis of all the questions with which he deals is the most complete. M. Turgot, who was as fond of metaphysics as me, also



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had a high regard for his talent.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, favourable reception of the book was not a foregone conclusion; reflection on morals had for a long time in France followed the rationalist track of Malebranche. But things were beginning to change; in 1747 Louis Jean Lévesque de Pouilly published his *Théorie des sentiments agréables*,<sup>14</sup> a work of which Smith thought highly – it had been published in Britain in 1749 as *The Theory of Agreeable Sensations*, but Smith read the work in the original French<sup>15</sup> – and Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* had familiarised French readers to some extent with the ways of thought prevailing in the British isles. Smith welcomed this shift: writing anonymously in 1755 to the first and short-lived *Edinburgh Review* he expressed his great pleasure that the French seemed at last “to be pretty generally disengaged from the enchantment of that illusive [Cartesian] philosophy.”<sup>16</sup>

The original and inventive genius of the English, has not only discovered itself in natural philosophy, but in morals, metaphysics, and part of the abstract sciences. ... This branch of the English Philosophy ... has of late been transported into France. I observe some traces of it, not only in the Encyclopedia, but in the Theory of agreeable sentiments by Mr. De Pouilly, a work that is in many respects original; and above all in the late Discourse upon the origin and foundation of the inequality amongst mankind, by M. Rousseau of Geneva.<sup>17</sup>

During this period, from mid-century to its close, we might also note that the work of all Smith’s French translators met with criticism. In the eighteenth century translation was not characterised by the rigour customary today. Fidelity to the original text was not the prime concern; sometimes the translator thought more of being true to the author by adapting his work than sticking to the letter of the text. However, things seemed to have begun to change, above all since the authors themselves become increasingly involved. For whatever reason, quality of translation became an important

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<sup>13</sup> André Morellet, *Mémoires de l’abbé Morellet sur le dix-huitième siècle et sur la Révolution*, revised ed., 1822; Mercure de France, Paris 1988 p. 206.

<sup>14</sup> *Théorie des sentiments agréables, où, après avoir indiqué les règles que la nature suit dans la distribution du plaisir, on établit les principes de la théologie naturelle et ceux de la philosophie morale*. According to D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie in their “Introduction” to the Glasgow edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1976 pp. 14-15) the French title of Pouilly’s book prompted Smith’s own choice of title.

<sup>15</sup> See Raphael, Macfie, “Introduction”, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> “A Letter to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*”, in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects and Miscellaneous Pieces*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1980, p. 244.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 249-50.

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element in French debates. Moreover, Smith knew French,<sup>18</sup> even if he spoke it badly.<sup>19</sup> Did he take account of the mediocre quality of the translations, or did he just echo the opinions of those with whom he mixed and corresponded? The story begins with the version of *Moral Sentiments* that Marc-Antoine Eidous published in 1764 under the title *Métaphysique de l'âme*.<sup>20</sup>

The circumstances of this translation were propitious, since it came from the circle around Baron d'Holbach. Hume announced the news to Smith:

The Baron d'Holbac [sic], whom I saw at Paris, told me, that there was one under his Eye that was translating your Theory of moral Sentiments; and desird me to inform you of it: Mr. Fitzmaurice, your old Friend, interests himself strongly in this Undertaking: Both of them wish to know, if you propose to make any Alterations on the Work.<sup>21</sup>

Smith was obviously pleased by this, but suggested to Hume in reply that the translation should be based on the second edition of 1761, even though he considered it imperfect; he had given the matter serious consideration, but had not had sufficient opportunity to revise it.<sup>22</sup>

When it appeared in 1764 Eidous' translation was far from satisfactory. Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* attributes the limited circulation the work had in France to the poor quality translation. Smith also raised complaints, if one can believe a letter later published by Blavet:

I was greatly mortified to see the manner in which my book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, has been translated into the language of a nation in which I certainly aspire to be esteemed to no greater degree than I

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<sup>18</sup> "I have heard him say, that he employed himself frequently in the practise of translation, (particularly from the French), with a view to the improvement of his own style... The knowledge he possessed [of languages], both ancient and modern, was uncommonly extensive and accurate". Dugald Stewart, "Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.", revised ed. in D. Stewart, *Biographical Memoirs of Adam Smith, William Robertson, and Thomas Reid*, (1811); Smith, *Essays*, pp. 271-2. We should not forget that Smith visited France and spent ten months in Paris.

<sup>19</sup> According to the account of the Duchesse d'Enville, see the opinion reported to Smith by Adam Ferguson, *Correspondence*, p. 173; and also Morellet's own report in his *Mémoires*, p. 206.

<sup>20</sup> Eidous is described in the *Biographie universelle ancien et moderne* Vol. 12, Paris 1855 p. 324 as ... "a tireless translator, but often inexact and above all rather lacking in elegance."

<sup>21</sup> Hume to Smith, 28 October 1763, in *Correspondence*, pp. 97-8.

<sup>22</sup> Smith to Hume, 12 December 1763, in *Correspondence*, pp. 413-4. See note 4 pp. 413-4 which reviews doubts concerning the identity of this translator; we believe that the translator cannot be anyone other than Eidous, there being quite plausible reasons for the date of official approval preceding the date of Smith writing to Hume.

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merit.<sup>23</sup>

The poor quality of this translation prompted thought on the need for another. This was undertaken by a member of the circle around Madame de Boufflers, a correspondent of Hume, an important figure among the anglophiles and the mistress of the Prince de Conti. Jean-Louis Blavet was the Prince's librarian, and he was given the task of preparing a new translation from the third edition of 1767.<sup>24</sup> In his letter of February 1772, Smith expressed his thanks to the countess:

Your generous kindness has rendered me the greatest assistance that one could to a man of letters. I look forward to the pleasure of reading a translation made because you desired that it be done.<sup>25</sup>

Blavet later confirmed that Madame de Boufflers had checked the translation.<sup>26</sup> The book was published in two volumes in 1774 and 1775, then again in 1782.

Parallel to the efforts of Blavet another translator set to work.<sup>27</sup> Louis-Alexandre de la Rochefoucauld, son of the Duchess d'Enville, both of them having made Smith's acquaintance in Geneva during 1765. But as soon as Blavet's translation was published he ceased work, as he told Smith in 1778.<sup>28</sup> He did not give up on the project entirely, however, for in 1779 he returned to it:

I receive with great pleasure the announcement of a new edition that you are preparing ...: and if the changes that you have made there render a new French edition necessary, and M. l'Abbé Blavet does not provide

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<sup>23</sup> Smith to Madame de Boufflers, February 1772, in *Correspondence*, p. 161 [translated from the French, K. T.]

<sup>24</sup> The translation is dedicated to the prince. It also includes a lengthy systematic table of contents (Vol. I pp. xiii-lvi.) Blavet declares, somewhat surprisingly, in his preface that he did not know that "there already had been one of them" - J.-L. Blavet, "Préface" to A. Smith, *Théorie des sentiments moraux*, Valade, Paris 1774 Vol. 1 p. xi.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. [translated from the French, K. T.]

<sup>26</sup> "Madame de Boufflers, known to be a woman of spirit and of taste, who both understood and spoke good English, compared this translation from beginning to end with the original." J.-L. Blavet, "Préface du traducteur", in A. Smith's *Richesse des nations*, Laran, Paris 1800, vol. 1, p. xxiv and in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 158.

<sup>27</sup> Blavet also tells us that "Mr. Turgot had begun a translation of the same work", *ibid.* p. xxiv. But it is also true to say that Turgot "began" a great many things without getting beyond the first few pages, or the draft of a project.

<sup>28</sup> He wrote to Smith on 3 March 1778: "I have had perhaps the temerity to undertake a translation of your Theory; but as I was finishing the first part I saw that M. l'Abbé Blavet's translation had appeared, and I was forced to abandon the pleasure I would have had of rendering into my language one of the best works in yours." *Correspondence* p. 233 [translated from the French, K. T.]

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one, perhaps I might dare to take up my work once more, but your consent would be necessary, as would an assurance that you would look over the translation before it saw the light of day.”<sup>29</sup>

Would Blavet’s translation have been badly received? For the French text remained faulty and was subsequently considered to be unsatisfactory. According to Dugald Stewart, Smith himself blamed the poor circulation of his book on the translation.

The Theory of Moral Sentiments does not seem to have attracted so much notice in France as might have been expected, till after the publication of the Wealth of Nations. Mr. Smith used to ascribe this in part to the Abbé Blavet’s translation, which he thought was but indifferently executed.<sup>30</sup>

Happily for Smith, some of the lettered public of the time was able to read the work in the original English. For it was only towards the end of the century that Sophie de Grouchy’s version was published.

The approach to the text adopted by Sophie de Grouchy, together with the various remarks devoted to Smith in the “Letters on Sympathy” that she appended to her translation of *Moral Sentiments*, is quite typical of the French understanding of the text, as well as highlighting the different perspectives on the nature of moral philosophy existing either side of the Channel. This reception would be repeated during the following century, both by French philosophers and economists. Commentators just did not understand a key point of Scottish philosophy: the construction of a moral theory that did not derive from reason. We have already seen that Smith complained of the French rationalist tradition, although he could see that this was at last changing. But he was mistaken about the extent of this change. Although *Moral Sentiments* was admired in France, it was generally thought to be unfinished: according to the commentators, Smithian sympathy could not in itself provide adequate foundation to his argument, but had to be derived from something else – from reason. This is why the response of Sophie de Grouchy – and there are others, although we lack the space to deal with them - is of interest. There are not many remarks in her “Letters on Sympathy”, but they are quite plain.

Smith, recognising that reason is incontrovertibly the source of general rules of morality, but finding it impossible to deduce from reason the first ideas of justice and injustice, asserts that these initial impressions

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<sup>29</sup> La Rochefoucauld to Smith, 6 August 1779, *Correspondence*, p. 238.

<sup>30</sup> Dugald Stewart, “Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.,” revised ed. in his *Biographical Memoirs of Adam Smith, William Robertson, and Thomas Reid*, 1811; reprinted in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects and Miscellaneous Pieces*, Oxford University Press, Oxford Press, 1980 p. 338 – note F added to the original 1794 version in 1811.

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are the object and the result of an immediate sentiment, and supposes that our knowledge of justice and injustice, of virtue and of vice, partly derives from their propriety, or impropriety, with a kind of intimate sense, which is assumed but not defined. However, this kind of intimate sense is not one of those primary causes that must be recognised, but whose existence cannot be explained. ... We should, my dear C[abanis], beware of this dangerous tendency to suppose the existence of a intimate sense, a faculty, a principle, every time that we encounter a fact whose explanation escapes us.<sup>31</sup>

Grouchy's criticism culminates in the sixth letter, and is also expressed quite unambiguously in the "Avertissement" to the works of Smith that was placed – probably by the publisher – at the front of her translation:

Some of Smith's opinions are examined, revised, and even confronted. The letters seemed an appropriate way of tracing the line separating the Scottish from the French school of philosophy.<sup>32</sup>

A little later Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis returned briefly to the topic in his important work *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* of 1802. In the tenth part, "Considérations touchant la vie animale, les premières déterminations de la sensibilité, l'instinct, la sympathie, le sommeil et le délire", he stated characteristically:

...sympathetic tendencies can easily mislead even the most attentive observer ... The great difficulty in relating their effects to their true cause can lead to the idea that unspecifiable faculties are needed to be able to conceive of such phenomena. Such tendencies are what is meant by *moral sympathy*, a well-known principle in the writings of Scottish philosophers..., for which Smith has put forward an analysis of great wisdom, but nonetheless incomplete, ... and which Madame Condorcet, through simple rational deliberation, was able to make much clearer than Smith had achieved in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Marie-Louise Sophie de Grouchy, "Lettres à C\*\*\* [Cabanis] sur la Théorie des sentiments moraux," in Adam Smith, *Théorie des sentiments moraux*, Paris: Buisson, 1798, Vol. 2; published separately as *Lettres sur la sympathie*, L'Étincelle, Montréal et Paris 1994 pp. 151-52.

<sup>32</sup> Adam Smith, *Théorie des sentiments moraux*, Paris: Buisson, 1798, Vol. 1 p. viii.

<sup>33</sup> Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, Crapart, Caille et Ravier, Paris 1802; reprint of the 1844 edition, Slatkine, Geneva 1980 p. 549.

## **2. The Reception of the *Wealth of Nations* in Translation**

In 1776 the ground had been prepared for a very favourable reception of *Wealth of Nations*. Smith was well known in intellectual circles and appreciated by reformers: his work could be of use to the latter in the propagation of Enlightenment and in support of their policies. The ground had also been prepared for a French translation of the book. But while the reception of the work was on the whole favourable, successive translations provoked serious disagreement and debate.

### **The *Wealth of Nations* at the end of the *Ancien régime***

The publication of *Wealth of Nations* in Britain was noticed immediately in France. Smith probably had copies of his new book sent to friends and correspondents: Jean-Louis Blavet and André Morellet, among others, were among these, if their reports are to be believed. Reviews followed quickly. The first, in two parts, was published in the *Journal encyclopédique* of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> October 1776. Another followed a few months later in the February 1777 issue of the *Journal des savants*.<sup>34</sup>

The first review is anonymous. It consists of a substantial but rather neutral résumé of the book, embellished with some translated paragraphs, but also with some comments, considered below. In many respects this review already lays down the main themes that will be characteristic of the *Wealth of Nations*' reception in eighteenth century France.

The second review has been attributed by Ken Carpenter to Blavet.<sup>35</sup> By contrast with the first, it amounts to an extended puff for the work. It reproduces the "Introduction and Plan of the Work", prefacing this extract with two general points. One relates to the importance of a "great work" in which one can see "that superiority in genius and talent to which we owe the Theory of Moral Sentiments":

The most important economic questions are dealt with in all possible nicety, order and profundity; and the author ... displays everywhere a degree of discernment and wisdom that one cannot but admire, since it is extremely rare.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> These reviews are reproduced, with many others, in Ken Carpenter's book. Since access to the original sources is so difficult for French readers as well as English, we cite from the new edition. As everywhere else in this essay we have modernised the spelling.

<sup>35</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> J.-L. Blavet, Review of the first English ed. of the *Wealth of Nations*, *Journal des savants*, February 1777; in Carpenter (*Dissemination*, p. 14).

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The other issue raised – and so soon after the book’s appearance in March – concerned the material problems presented by a future French translation:

Some of our men of letters who have read the work have decided that this is not a book to be translated into our language. They say, among other things, that no individual would underwrite the cost of printing, given the uncertainty of sales, and that booksellers would be even more reluctant to do so.<sup>37</sup>

But as regards translations, things turned out well enough, at least with respect to the quality and competence of the translator. André Morellet immediately set to work. A friend of Turgot, close to the Physiocrats but also to Necker, having met Smith in Paris,<sup>38</sup> Morellet was closely acquainted with economic issues. He had already published a great deal on the subject and so seemed made for the job.<sup>39</sup> And so, according to his account, he set to work in the autumn of 1776, when he was staying in Champagne with the Archbishop of Sens, Étienne-Charles Loménie de Brienne; we can disregard the date Morellet gave for its completion, since he possibly gave an earlier date on polemical grounds.

There I worked very assiduously on a translation of Smith’s very excellent work *Wealth of Nations*, which one might regard as a truly classical work of its kind. ... As soon as the work appeared he sent me a copy through Lord Shelburne; I took it with me to Brienne and threw myself into its translation.<sup>40</sup>

The translation went well, but remained a manuscript; Morellet found it impossible to raise money for it and find a publisher, even when, much later, Loménie de Brienne became “principal minister”.<sup>41</sup> The work was too lengthy, printing would have been too costly, and its marketing too risky in the face of censorship.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, potential

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Morellet also kept in occasional contact with Smith, sending for example in 1774 a copy of his refutation of Galiani’s *Dialogues sur le commerce des grains* – see *Lettres d’André Morellet*, Vol. 1, The Voltaire Foundation, Oxford 1991 p. 227. For his part Smith valued his relationship with the abbé – see for example in Smith’s *Correspondence* p. 295.

<sup>39</sup> It is true that Morellet had ten years earlier sparked controversy with his translation of Cesare Beccaria’s *Dei Delitti e delle pene*; he suggested that Beccaria expressed his views badly, and he had sought to remedy this defect by altering the order of presentation of the book.

<sup>40</sup> *Mémoires*, pp. 206-7.

<sup>41</sup> “Much later, during his ministry, I requested 100 louis from the Archbishop de Sens [Loménie de Brienne] so that I might chance publishing the work at my own cost; he refused me the money, as had the booksellers” *Mémoires*, p. 207. Brienne was “principal minister” - and Controller-General of Finance, but without the title – from August 1787 to August 1788.

<sup>42</sup> Carpenter, “*Recherches*” p. 13; *Dissemination*, pp. xxx-xxxi.

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competitors quickly appeared in the market. Morellet's translation did nevertheless circulate as a manuscript.<sup>43</sup>

There is a curious incident here that has never fully been explained. As Carpenter emphasises,<sup>44</sup> Morellet's correspondence shows that poor fortune also played a part, for he was not able to publish as intended an extract from Smith relating to corporations – this was from Book I Ch. X, “Of Wages and Profit in the different Employments of Labour and Stock”.<sup>45</sup> It was impounded by the police. But if the dating of the correspondence is right, then this occurred during February 1776 while Turgot was still minister; hence this event took place before the publication of *Wealth of Nations* on 9 March 1776. This raises two issues: firstly, that the translation and publication of an extract from *Wealth of Nations* would have been thought useful in the pursuit of Turgot's policies;<sup>46</sup> and secondly, Turgot (or one of those close to him)<sup>47</sup> already had a copy of the work before its publication, most likely sent to him by Smith. The correspondence shows that Turgot pressed Morellet for the translation – “I have made haste with everything that you wished to speed the printing of the extract from Smith” wrote Morellet to Turgot on 22 February 1776;<sup>48</sup> and Morellet expressed on the same day, and then again on 30 March, the idea of translating the whole book, “which would be good for our present times.”<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, the fall of Turgot probably delayed matters. Morellet made a prophetic statement; writing to ask Turgot for two thousand pounds to facilitate the preparation of a good translation, he added,

The work seems to me so useful that it merits such encouragement, without which it will not be translated at all, or if so then by some poor

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<sup>43</sup> According to C. Salvat, “Histoire de la traduction inédite de la *Richesse des nations* par l'abbé Morellet. Une traduction manuscrite toujours célébrée et toujours obstinément refusée au public”, *Storia del pensiero economico*, no. 38 (1999) p. 125, Morellet later revised the manuscript to take account of Smith's changes to the second and third editions.

<sup>44</sup> “*Recherches*” p. 12; see Morellet's letters to Turgot between 22 February and 20 March 1776.

<sup>45</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 1. This mishap is confirmed by the correspondence of Métra.

<sup>46</sup> Salvat's (“Histoire de la traduction inédite” p. 124) hypothesis is quite plausible. Turgot was planning his edict abolishing *jurandes* together with other commercial and craft associations.

<sup>47</sup> Most likely Turgot himself, since Morellet made clear that he received his copy of the book after its publication through the offices of Lord Shelburne. And in any case he wrote to Shelburne on 12 April 1776 that “I have been lent a copy of the first volume of Mr. Smith's new work” *Lettres*, p. 339. See also on this Richard van den Berg, Christophe Salvat, “Scottish Subtlety: André Morellet's Comments on the *Wealth of Nations*”, *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, Vol. 8 (2001) pp. 146-185. See Richard Sher's discussion (p. 00 above) of the printing history of *Wealth of Nations* – publication records for the first edition do not exist, but roughly three months separated the printing and publication of the second edition, and one for the third.

<sup>48</sup> *Lettres*, p. 309.

<sup>49</sup> *Lettres*, p. 330.



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incompetent in Holland.<sup>50</sup>

The first French translation was in fact printed outside France, in The Hague, the translator remaining anonymous – he is simply known as M\*\*\*. It was published quickly, the text appeared in 1778-79. It was poor quality work, but was nonetheless reprinted ten years later, in 1789, on the eve or at the outbreak of the Revolution. According to Carpenter,<sup>51</sup> it is the most literal of all French translations, sold mainly outside France, and thus not penetrating the French market. At the same time as this first complete translation began to appear, the fragment on colonies was published in Lausanne and Basel, translated by É. S. F. Reverdil.<sup>52</sup>

Here we meet up once more with the abbé Blavet. Having already made available a French version of *Moral Sentiments*, he embarked upon a translation of Smith's new work. He lived in part from his work as an occasional translator, and he either was, or had been, friendly with prominent Physiocrats such as the abbé Nicolas Badeau, and François Quesnay himself.<sup>53</sup> He had discovered that Hubert-Pascal Ameilhon's *Journal de l'agriculture, du commerce, des arts et des finances* was short of material and that the serial publication of Smith's work would allow him to alleviate this shortage. His translation was therefore published serially from January 1779 to December 1780. In the final instalment Blavet included a seemingly unassuming letter to the editor in which he stated that he had only completed the translation "to teach myself", and that he wished

...to occasion the publication of a new version more faithful to the original, or if a bookseller would undertake to reprint my own, that he would ensure that someone more versed in economic matters and the art of writing than myself would revise and correct the whole, for such a person would not be hard to find.<sup>54</sup>

Subsequent events showed however that Blavet clung tooth and nail to his original translation. This version of *Wealth of Nations* was reprinted several times as a

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<sup>50</sup> *Lettres*, p. 310.

<sup>51</sup> *Dissemination*, p. 20, and pp. xxxv, 24.

<sup>52</sup> Reverdil prefaced the work with an "Advertisement" that concisely conveyed a sense of the contents of *Wealth of Nations*, and explained the separate publication of the chapter on colonies by pointing to interest in recent events in America, and as a spur to a complete translation: "I hope above all that this sample will render the entire work sufficiently desirable to French readers that a suitable patient and capable translator will be engaged." Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> Together with the abbé Nolin he published in 1755 an *Essai sur l'agriculture moderne*, although the title could not conceal that the work was really a "small essay on gardening".

<sup>54</sup> Letter to the *Journal de l'agriculture, du commerce, des arts et des finances*, December; in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, pp. 25-26.

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complete work, at first in Switzerland and then in Paris<sup>55</sup> - not always accurately, even in relation to the rough original – or as extracts,<sup>56</sup> until Blavet finally revised his translation for the Paris 1800-1801 edition.

Despite republication, Blavet did not get off so lightly with *Wealth of Nations* as he had with *Moral Sentiments*: his translation was generally thought to be faulty. Morellet – both judge and jury – was unforgiving:

The abbé Blavet, a poor translator of the *Moral Sentiments*, has snatched up<sup>57</sup> Smith's new treatise, and every week sent to the *Journal* whatever he had put together; which was good for the journal, for it filled its pages, but poor Smith was more traduced than translated. ... Blavet's version, scattered through the journal, was soon reissued by a bookseller, and this became a hindrance to the publication of my own translation. Originally I had proposed to do the work for one hundred louis, and then for nothing; but the competing edition prompted refusal.<sup>58</sup>

Morellet underlined that in Blavet and Roucher (he is writing after the Revolution) “everything that is a little abstract in Smith is unintelligible”, both of the them disregarding the content, that is to say, knowing nothing of political economy.

Controversy surrounding Blavet's translation did not remain confined to aspersions cast in Parisian salons. It burst into the open at the time that it was republished in 1788. Jacques Mallet du Pan, during a somewhat lively exchange in the pages of the *Journal de Paris* with Constantin François de Volney concerning some points of interpretation with respect to *Wealth of Nations*, stressed in the issue for 13 October 1788 that he had called for a “decent translation” of Smith's work. Volney, responding on 24 October, seized on this:

I also would wish that we had a good translation of this admirable work;

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<sup>55</sup> It seems that Blavet only acknowledged the *Journal* version. The other editions – Yverdon 1781, Paris 1786, Paris 1788 – remained unacknowledged, presumably on account of their faults. The 1781 Paris version appeared in an extremely brief printing of 20 copies; it was in fact an offprint of the text published in the *Journal*.

<sup>56</sup> Extracts from the Blavet translation appeared, without naming either author or translator, in the four volumes of Pancoucke's *Encyclopédie méthodique* wherever it dealt with “political economy and diplomacy” (see the list in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, pp. 42-53, where he notes (p. 41) that of the total 1,097 pages of the first English edition of 1776, translations from 524 pages appear in Vols 2-4 of *Économie politique et diplomatique*). Other extracts from this edition appeared in the *Bibliothèque de l'homme publique*, t. 4 (1790).

<sup>57</sup> Morellet here uses “emparé”, implying at once brutality, greed and the illegitimacy of the action.

<sup>58</sup> Morellet, *Mémoires*, p. 207.

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the author of the existing translation not only has a poor understanding of Smith's ideas, very often he fails to understand them entirely.<sup>59</sup>

Volney then gave an example: the beginning of Book I Ch. V on the real and nominal price of commodities, where he had no trouble in showing that the French text was incomprehensible.<sup>60</sup> He concedes that much of this is also probably the result of numerous printing errors, but insists that the translation is itself at fault, ending with a eulogy to Morellet's manuscript version:

I read an excellent translation of this excellent work in manuscript; by abbé M[orellet]. The task of translating M. Smith was entrusted to this *académicien*, to our excellent *Économistes*.

This controversy in the columns of a well-known journal compelled Blavet to respond. In the issue of 5 November he published a letter giving his version of the facts. Blavet began by stating that Smith had been quite satisfied with the translation of *Moral Sentiments* (although according to Dugald Stewart this was not entirely correct), had sent him a copy of *Wealth of Nations* and asked him to act as translator; he also claimed once more that Morellet, among others, had sought to dissuade him from taking the task on:

Mr. Smith, satisfied with the new translation I made of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, did me the honour of sending a copy of his work *On the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* and obligingly indicated to me that he wished that I would also act as translator. The abbé M[orellet] and others who move in the best circles with which I am little acquainted told me that the work would not be readily taken up in France, for it required too much effort and study; and so I restricted myself to the project of translating the work, not for the public, but for my own instruction.

He then maintained that he had consented to its publication to help Ameilhon and the *Journal de l'agriculture*, that the following editions were printed without his knowledge – a statement that does not entirely match the known facts – and added to

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<sup>59</sup> C. F. de Volney, Letter to the *Journal de Paris*, 24 October 1788, in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 77.

<sup>60</sup> “Ce qu'une chose vaut pour vous qu'il avez acquise, la peine et l'embarras qu'elle vous épargne et qu'elle peut coûter à d'autres. (It is obvious that a verb has been forgotten here, and it should read *c'est la peine*.) Le travail a été le premier prix de la monnaie originaire qu'on a payé partout. (It cannot be understood how labour can be the first price of money. In the English it reads: Labour was the first price, the original purchase-money that was paid for all things.) C'est au travail et non pas à l'or et à l'argent que le monde est redevable de toutes les richesses, et sa valeur, pour celui qui en est l'auteur et qui a besoin d'en échanger le produit, est précisément égale à la quantité de travail qui le met en état d'acheter. (it is obvious that it should read *qu'il le met en état d'acheter*.)

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the numerous faults of the original text. He then implied that Morellet had been avaricious – that the 1788 edition would have been printed from Morellet’s translation, except that the publisher and the author “could not come to an agreement on the price”. In conclusion, he announced a corrected translation – in fact it did not appear until twelve years later – which would also incorporate the revisions that Smith had made to the text through its various editions.

Ashamed ... for my nation, which had nothing but an imperfect translation of a masterpiece of political economy, I obtained permission to provide a new edition of my own translation, revised, corrected and augmented with the considerable amount of material that Mr. Smith had added to the second edition of the original. ... I therefore corrected a great number of errors ... but I regarded my efforts merely to be a stopgap, for among those far more skilful than myself I did not have the good fortune to know of a single person prepared to take on the work himself; it would be better, and I would like it one hundred times more if the abbé M[orellet] gave us his version.<sup>61</sup>

But this letter to the *Journal* did not close the debate, which started up anew with the publication of Roucher’s translation. We might note in conclusion that Blavet returned to the issue once more in 1800, writing in his preface to the revised version of his translation. Here he did something he had not done in 1788: he quoted at length from two of Smith’s letters for which today an original no longer exists. The first, dating probably from 1772, is to Madame de Boufflers concerning the poor quality of Eidous’ translation of *Moral Sentiments* (discussed above); the other is from 23 July 1782 to Blavet himself and deals with his translations. Smith here thanks Blavet for his “excellent translation” of *Wealth of Nations*:

I am extremely satisfied with your translation of my first work; but I am all the more so with the manner in which you have rendered the second. I can tell you, without flattery, that everywhere that I have cast my eyes ... I have found it in every respect equal to the original.<sup>62</sup>

From this same letter we know of the existence of another translation, that of the Comte de Nort. But Smith was supposedly so satisfied with Blavet’s translation that he had specifically discouraged Nort from publishing his own! “I wrote to him by the next post that I was very satisfied with your own, and that I am so much obliged to you, that I am not able to encourage or favour any other.”

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<sup>61</sup> Blavet, Letter to the *Journal de Paris* 5 November 1788, in Carpenter, *Dissemination* pp. 78-9.

<sup>62</sup> Smith, *Correspondence*, p. 260. [Translated from the French, K. T.]

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We lack reliable and incontrovertible evidence for Smith's reactions and opinions regarding these translations. It is however certain that he was always troubled about the translation of his work. In 1784 he was under the impression that Morellet had published his translation in Holland, and he immediately asked his publisher, Thomas Cadell in London, to obtain a copy for him.<sup>63</sup> Cadell did not respond to this request, and Smith repeated the request on 10 August 1784.<sup>64</sup> Having heard no more, he took the issue up once more on 18 November – “But you say nothing to me of the Abbé Morellet's translation of my Book, which I am extremely desirous of seeing. I am sorry to give you so much trouble, but I beg you would endeavour to procure me a copy of it for Love or Money”<sup>65</sup> – before realising in the spring of 1785 that he had been misinformed in the first place.<sup>66</sup>

### **The *Wealth of Nations* during the Revolution**

The *Wealth of Nations* was published in England at a time when in France, following the fall of Turgot, many reformers had lost faith in their ability to influence, in whatever way, the course of events: the reform of France's political and economic system seemed to be continually put off to the morrow, the urgency of problems remained while a succession of Controllers General of finance pussy-footed around with them. In political economy, innovation and publication marked time, and priority was given to the political debate. This phase ended with the convocation of the Estates General for 1 May 1789, and the publication of Sieyès' celebrated pamphlet *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers état?* Several months later, when the Estates General transformed themselves into the Constituent Assembly, and with the Revolution, matters appeared in a different light. The radical change of political regime in France permitted in principle every citizen to participate in power and influence decision-making. In this context, each should seek to inform himself the better to perform this new role.<sup>67</sup>

The state of mind during this period is caught by a quotation taken from Rousseau's *Social Contract*, and used as an epigraph to the *Bibliothèque de l'homme public*: “Whatever feeble influence my voice might have in public affairs, the right to vote is sufficient to impose upon me the duty to instruct myself.” In the Introduction to the first volume of the *Bibliothèque* we find that among the knowledge to be acquired by

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<sup>63</sup> Smith, 19 June 1784, *Correspondence*, pp. 276-7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>66</sup> Letter of 21 April 1785, *Correspondence*, p. 281.

<sup>67</sup> See for an account of the evolution of economic thinking during the French Revolution Gilbert Faccarello, “L'évolution de l'économie politique pendant la Révolution: Alexandre Vandermonde ou la croisée des chemins”, in *Politische Ökonomie und Französische Revolution*, Schriften aus dem Karl-Marx-Haus, Trier 1989 pp. 75-121, and Faccarello and Steiner (eds.), *La pensée économique pendant la Révolution française*, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, Grenoble 1990.

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the citizen the importance of economic matters is acknowledged: the study of political economy “is becoming in France the concern of all the best minds” – something that the Physiocrats had dreamed of many years before. The writings of Smith, and especially his *Wealth of Nations*, assumed a topicality they had not previously had. And it all begins with a new translation...

As the Estates General were convened the two published editions – the first anonymous, the second by Blavet – were republished, in 1789 and 1788 respectively. In 1790 a third, competing, translation appeared by Jean-Antoine Roucher. The new translation had some important advantages: it was well-advertised, it was well presented, and it was given the *imprimatur* of Condorcet, who was to write a volume of notes to follow Smith’s text.

Roucher was a renowned poet – his long philosophical poem *Les mois* was especially well-known – close to the reformers. He had known Turgot, who had helped him financially by making him receiver of the salt-tax, and who had also introduced him to the salon of Madame Helvétius; but he was above all close to Charles Dupaty, a magistrate who continued Voltaire’s battles, a defender of the rights of man, and to whom the translation of *Wealth of Nations* was dedicated. Besides this Dupaty was Elder of the masonic lodge of the Nine Sisters, where many Parisian intellectuals met and of which Roucher was the secretary. It was through Dupaty that Roucher came into contact with Condorcet, and through whom in turn Condorcet met Sophie de Grouchy.<sup>68</sup> Roucher and Condorcet followed similar paths of political evolution, at least up until the early years of the Revolution.<sup>69</sup>

From 1786-1787 Roucher contemplated a new translation of *Wealth of Nations*, probably with the encouragement of reformers with whom he mixed, using as a base for the translation the most recent edition that he could: the 4<sup>th</sup> of 1786. The revolutionary events seems to have made up his mind for him. The first three volumes were published in 1790, the final volume appearing the following year. This edition was immediately pirated – editions appearing during 1791-92 in Avignon, and in Neuchâtel in 1792. The translation was corrected by Roucher and then republished in

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<sup>68</sup> Sophie de Grouchy married Condorcet in 1786; Dupaty was her uncle.

<sup>69</sup> They for example both became members of the Society of 1789, founded in 1790. Later, in 1791-92, the paths diverged: Condorcet became more radical, while Roucher became more conservative. See on Roucher, A. Guillois, *Pendant la Terreur. Le poète Roucher (1745-1794)*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris 1890; and M. Bréguet, “Le poète Roucher et les Condorcet: rencontre et réseau d’amitié”, *Lekton*, Vol. III, No. 1 (1993), pp. 243-257; “Un ‘météore éclatant’: le poète Roucher”, in J.-P. de Lagrave (ed), *Madame Helvétius et la Société d’Auteuil*, The Voltaire Foundation, Oxford 1999 pp. 87-101. Both Roucher and Condorcet fell victim to the Terror, dying in 1794. Roucher was executed two days before the 9<sup>th</sup> Thermidor.

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Paris in 1794, after his death.<sup>70</sup> A few significant details shed some useful light on the history of this translation.

First of all, as the reviews of this new translation were appearing, Morellet's manuscript version became a talking point once more. On 24 August 1790 *Le Moniteur* marvelled at the sad fate that had befallen a work of supposed quality: "A man of letters, whose talent and knowledge made him the one person capable of producing a suitable work, M. the abbé Morellet, took on the task, but –almost unbelievably - he could find no publisher prepared to take the work up. Today there would be no risk in such an undertaking."<sup>71</sup>

It also has to be said that substantial extracts from Roucher's translation also appeared in 1790 in the *Bibliothèque de l'homme public*. This review, which had begun publication at the beginning of that year from the same publisher – Buisson – as Roucher's new translation, was co-edited by Condorcet. His aim, at a time that every citizen might be introduced into public decisions and encouraged to assume his responsibilities, was to contribute to public instruction by publishing analyses of well-known works, both ancient and modern. These "analyses" were presentations of classic and modern texts followed with extracts linked by commentary. *Wealth of Nations* was presented in this way in numbers 3<sup>72</sup> and 4<sup>73</sup> of 1790. The first extracts printed were taken from Roucher's translation, later extracts coming from Blavet's version, as Ken Carpenter notes.<sup>74</sup>

The volume of notes that Condorcet was meant to place after Roucher's translation never appeared – nor was any manuscript copy of such notes ever found – and the republished edition of 1794 dropped all mention of them. It would have been extremely interesting to have a detailed account from the pen of someone who had known the main protagonists of the later eighteenth century and who had himself participated in the debates. The volume was anticipated at the time: "The assent or opposition of two writers whose thought is marked by such profundity are equally instructive for the public" wrote the *Mercur de France* on 31 July 1790.<sup>75</sup>

The friend of Turgot, d'Alembert's worthy equal, one of our greatest

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<sup>70</sup> There is also an 1806 edition, which is a reissue "with a new title page, of the sheets of 1794" – Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 219.

<sup>71</sup> The passage is echoed in the *Journal encyclopédique* of the month of November.

<sup>72</sup> Pp. 108-216; summary of and extracts from Books I, II, and III.

<sup>73</sup> Pp. 3-115: summary of and extracts from Books IV and V.

<sup>74</sup> This substitution was made in all likelihood because Roucher's translation was not quite finished at the time. In a letter of July 1790 the poet's daughter, Eulalie Roucher, noted that her father was busy once again with the translation – Guillois, *Pendant la Terreur*, p. 140.

<sup>75</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 95.

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political writers, was perhaps the one person who could successfully clarify or rebut the author of the *Wealth of Nations*.<sup>76</sup>

Condorcet's commentaries were repeatedly advertised in the press. Taking *Le Moniteur* as an example of a widely-circulated journal, it announced on 24 August 1790 the publication of the first two volumes of the Roucher translation and talked in flattering terms of the volume of notes to come – which it did again on 25 October on the occasion of the publication of the third volume. In the number of 26 May 1791 it announced the appearance of the fourth volume, adding:

One can only await the fifth volume with impatience, where we are informed that notes are to appear by a writer who is a statesman, worthy commentator to a text which he could have written himself.<sup>77</sup>

Everything points however to the fact that Condorcet lacked the time to write the notes, busy as he was politically; and that his name was, at least in part, used as a means of lending publicity to the launch of the new translation at a time that the market was already burdened with the revised Blavet edition. “This advertisement only served to support to the work.”<sup>78</sup> Jérôme de Lalande, in the biographical notice that he published shortly afterwards, also reveals that Condorcet “spent little time” on the notes for Smith, and sanctioned the use by others of his name for commercial ends: “It was thought that his name would lend more prestige to the enterprise.”<sup>79</sup>

A final point must be raised: the quality of Roucher's translation. Did he escape the criticism directed at those of his predecessors? The answer is yes, if the contemporary press is to be believed. Reviews praised the accuracy and style of the poet, and disparaged previous versions – or rather, “the” previous version<sup>80</sup> since the first

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<sup>76</sup> *Chronique de Paris* 9 April 1790 p. 393 (cited in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 94). This periodical took up the question again the following year, on 9 May 1791: “To name the author of these notes is to inspire among wise men and good citizens fervent hope of seeing them published. It is known that philosophy, healthy reason and consequently the Revolution are obliged to M. Condorcet, who has spent his life fighting error, and preaching the truth.” P. 513 (Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 113).

<sup>77</sup> *Le Moniteur*, Vol. 8, p. 490. References here to the *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel* (May 1789–November 1799) are to the edition later published by Plon, Paris 1847.

<sup>78</sup> M. B. Desrenaudes, Review of Germain Garnier's translation of the *Wealth of Nations*, *La Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique*, 30 fructidor an X (17 September 1802); in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 213.

<sup>79</sup> Jérôme de Lalande, “Notice historique sur la vie et les ouvrages de Condorcet”, *Mercure français*, 20 January 1796, p. 155. On these points, see G. Facarello, “Troisième partie: Économie. Introduction”, in Pierre Crépel and Christian Gilain (eds), *Condorcet: mathématicien, économiste, philosophe, homme politique*, Minerve, Paris 1989, pp. 121–149.

<sup>80</sup> That of Blavet; in his preface to the revised translation of 1800–1801, he stated, inexactly, that: “I am the author of the first to appear” (Blavet 1800, p. ix). This error is repeated in a review appearing in *La Décade philosophique*, 31 December 1801.



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anonymous translation was ignored. Having been published in The Hague, it does not seem to have been widely distributed in France, and the printing of the new 1789 edition, without naming the author and under a curiously revised title, was covert.<sup>81</sup> On 30 March 1790 *Le Spectateur national* declared:

We already had a translation of Smith, but it was inexact, obscure and incorrect. This one has the two prime merits of a work of this kind: precision and clarity.<sup>82</sup>

The *Chronique de Paris* noted on 9 April 1790 that the previous translation is “ill-formed, full of anglicisms and errors” while that of Roucher “leaves nothing to be desired in respect of style”. The *Journal de Paris* of 4 June concurred, as did *Le Moniteur* of 24 August.

Nonetheless, we should consider whether, here as elsewhere, reviewers had really thought about the question seriously, or whether they simply echoed widespread, or orchestrated, opinion. For a lengthy unsigned article that appeared in the *Journal encyclopédique* for November 1790 complained exactly of this:

It seems to us that the original text has never been so completely disfigured. Errors, numerous mistranslations ... awkward sentences and a whole crowd of obscure expressions in a highly-structured work possessing a language of its own, all these faults place ... this translation is of a standard well below that of the first.<sup>83</sup>

This author cited many examples from Book I Chapters VIII and XI, and showed quite easily that his claims were well-founded. The criticism is clearly quite blunt, even raising an accusation of plagiarism at one point: “the new translator only makes himself understood where he borrows expressions employed by his predecessor.” The *Journal*, while publishing the article, partially disassociated itself from its reviewer’s opinions.<sup>84</sup>

This attack prompted Roucher, during his imprisonment, to attempt a revision of his translation, resulting in a partially corrected new edition in 1794. But Desrenaudes still

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<sup>81</sup> “Whereas the La Haye edition of 1778-1779 identified Smith as the author, this reissue of those sheets did not. Instead, the new title, *Recherches très-utiles sur les affaires présentes, et les causes de la richesse des nations*, emphasises that this work is very useful in the present circumstances; and the omission of Smith’s name might have enhanced the emphasis on current relevance by giving the impression that the author was French.” Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 79.

<sup>82</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 93.

<sup>83</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 101.

<sup>84</sup> “If anyone has cause to complain about this article, sent to us from Paris, such complaints should be addressed to us and we will publish them as soon as is possible. We have neither the original, nor any translation of the work of Smith”. (See Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 105)

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talked in 1802 of “his very faulty translation”,<sup>85</sup> and in his *Mémoires* Morellet placed Roucher on the same level as Blavet.<sup>86</sup> Blavet also intervened in the dispute. Writing in the preface to his revised 1800-1801 edition, he made a scathing attack on Roucher, suggesting that he was claiming to translate the work of an author whose language was unfamiliar to him. Roucher was supposed to have plagiarised Blavet – “It is no more than a travesty of my own translation, which he had constantly in front of him,”<sup>87</sup> although, Blavet went on, Roucher’s efforts at placing his own stamp on the work made the text incomprehensible in places.

Blavet’s accusations were echoed in the press – in *Le Publiciste* of 15 December 1800, and then later in *La Décade philosophique* of 31 December 1801 – and this impelled the publisher Buisson to react in honour of Roucher’s memory (in the issue of *Le Publiciste* for 21 December 1800). The affair stopped there. A few months later the publication of Germain Garnier’s new translation<sup>88</sup> quickly eclipsed all predecessors, as we shall shortly see.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Desrenaudes, Review, p. 213.

<sup>86</sup> Morellet, *Mémoires*, p. 207.

<sup>87</sup> J.-L. Blavet, “Préface du traducteur”, in A. Smith’s *Richesse des nations*, Laran, Paris 1800 vol. 1, p. xiii, and in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, pp. 153-159.

<sup>88</sup> Garnier had at least one point in common with Roucher: the latter had, in the translator’s preface to his 1790 edition written provocatively: “...there has long been a demand for a French translation of Mr. Smith’s work” – an assertion for which he was criticised. Some years later, Garnier took up this judgement in turn, discounting entirely preceding translations. In his preface to *Abrégé élémentaire des principes de l’économie politique* (1796) he stated that the *Wealth of Nations* was “a work which we still lack in our language” (p. v). A lawyer, Garnier was made reserve deputy for Paris in the Estates General, but never sat. He was close to the monarchists. After the fall of the monarchy in 1792 he was forced to take refuge in Switzerland and it was during this period of exile that he began translating *Wealth of Nations*. “I wrote this preface and the subsequent translation in 1794. Proscribed and a fugitive of the times, I sought to console myself regarding the misfortunes of my country” - “Préface du traducteur”, in A. Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Agasse, Paris, an X [1802], vol. 1, p. lxxxvii. He did not return to France until after Thermidor, in 1795. A supporter of Bonaparte, he became a prefect, a Count in the Empire and President of the Senate from 1809 to 1811. After the restoration he was made [GarnierTitle]

<sup>89</sup> Here we arrive at the point when the frenetic pace of translation slows. Unfortunately there is no space here to compare different translations. But the interested reader who lacks access to the editions in question can form a preliminary opinion by opening the website of the PHARE Research Centre – <http://phare.univ-paris1.fr> - and visiting the general catalogue of the virtual library under the name “Smith”. Paulette Taieb, herself a distinguished translator and designer of this website, has placed there Book I Ch. II of *Wealth of Nations* in its different versions, including the manuscript version of Morellet.

### 3. The Theoretical Horizon

How was *Wealth of Nations* perceived in France at the end of the eighteenth century? Some idea can be gained by considering in turn the reaction of authors who wrote in periodicals or more specialist works; and that of journalists, literary figures and politicians who followed debates at some distance without becoming really involved, and whose opinions can be found in the more everyday press titles. The latter will be dealt with first.

#### General Opinion

In the periodical literature of the time many articles appeared that were immediately very favourable to *Wealth of Nations*, but it is striking that such authors were, in one way or another, involved in the business of translation – which is at once an intellectual and a commercial enterprise. Blavet's short article in the *Journal des savants* of 1777 is an example of this: his opinion – Smith “displays everywhere a degree of discernment and wisdom that one cannot but admire, for it is extremely rare” – was everywhere repeated.<sup>90</sup> Another case concerns Ameilhon who, in January 1779, prefaced the first instalment of the translation in the *Journal de l'agriculture* with the statement: “We do not believe that there is anything more solid and profound on this matter.” But general articles are in fact relatively scarce at the beginning of the period and views such as those expressed during 1776 in the *Journal encyclopédique* represent the exception more than the rule.

Ten years later opinions remained divided. For example, following the new 1786 edition, the *Journal historique et littéraire* for 1 March 1787 considered the work “a collection of political, economic and philosophical observations, many of which are well-founded and perfectly reasonable, while others are the fruits of convoluted and tiresome speculation, from which one can hardly hope for clear and certain results”.<sup>91</sup> For its part the *Mercur de France* stated on 14 July 1787 that “...the best works of economics, such as that of Adam Smith in England, and Forbonnais and Necker in France, are more books for the use of their respective states than general treatises”.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Blavet's declaration was reproduced almost word for word in the February 1782 number of the *Tableau raisonné de l'histoire littéraire du dix-huitième siècle* (see Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 39). It was cited once again in 1787, on 5 December in the *Journal de Paris* (Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 62). Much later, in 1790, Roucher employed a related formulation in the preface to his own translation – Smith had rendered political economy “more profound and developed it with exceptional wisdom”, a phrasing which can be found in the same *Journal* for 4 June 1790, the new formulation also being repeated in the *Feuille de correspondance du libraire* during the spring of 1791 (Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 116).

<sup>91</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 56.

<sup>92</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 76.

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However, with time opinion altered for the better. The *Journal encyclopédique* returned to the question. A moderate review of the 1788 edition concluded that “There are *longueurs* ...; but there is order, precision and profundity.”<sup>93</sup> Barely a week later the *Mercure de France* had no hesitation in

...placing these Inquiries alongside those works that have done the greatest honour to our century and to the human spirit, considering on the one hand the vigour and extent of the genius they require; and on the other, the extreme importance of truths generally ignored, upon which the author has shed great light.<sup>94</sup>

An allusion is made to the English comparison of the standing of Smith with that of Montesquieu. In conclusion, the article notes the contemporary relevance of the work. “The current intellectual and political situation of this kingdom gives grounds to hope that this important work will find among us readers capable of profiting from it.”<sup>95</sup> Volney went even further in the *Journal de Paris* for 11 October 1788:

Great Britain, by bringing forth Smith, has equalled a France which has given birth to Montesquieu. It is therefore desirable that Smith is much read, much studied and that his work prompts reflection at this time when all minds, occupied with objects of government, are there generating more heat than light.<sup>96</sup>

One year later Pierre-Louis Rœderer, also wrote in his first work of “the excellent work of M. Schmitt [sic.] on wealth, a work which is to the science of public economy that which the *Esprit des lois* is to the science of political and civil government.”<sup>97</sup> This comparison with Montesquieu was repeated.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> 15 March 1788, Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 69.

<sup>94</sup> 22 March 1788, *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> 22 March 1788, *ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>96</sup> C. F. de Volney, Letter to the *Journal de Paris*, 24 October 1788, in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 74.

<sup>97</sup> P.-L. Rœderer, *Questions proposées par la commission intermédiaire de l'Assemblée provinciale de Lorraine, concernant le reculement des barrières, et observations pour servir de réponse à ces questions*, s.l., 1787 p. 26.

<sup>98</sup> At the beginning of this period *Le Spectateur national* wrote on 9 April 1790: “Smith’s work must be a milestone in the history of political science, as was *Esprit des lois*. There is no need to seek in Smith the brilliant imagination and the energetic style ... of Montesquieu. Smith is a wise and profound calculator whose only ornament is utility. Do you wish great images for your imagination, great thoughts, strong and ingenious expression that entirely sate your spirit? Close the *Treatise on the Wealth of Nations* and open ... *Esprit des lois*. But if you are seeking the true foundations of the prosperity of empires, if you require exact ideas on the relationship of agriculture and commerce, wages and work, on industry, banks, money, credit and all the many complicated

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During the Revolution Smith's name recurred in political discourse and in the press – where the number of titles had meanwhile increased. It was the hour of reform. It was time to dismantle the elaborate and increasingly overwrought centuries-old system of ancien régime regulation, to read how things were done better abroad, and to seek help in such reflection by dipping into encyclopedias or works of synthesis. Economic debates in France had produced many new ideas, but no single work satisfactorily covered the entire theoretical and practical range of these ideas. From this point of view Smith's ideas were “in the air” and *Wealth of Nations* could be presented as required reading:<sup>99</sup> “No book contains a more comprehensive system of social economy, and ... as a consequence none can offer more in the way of instruction and usefulness” stated *Le Moniteur* in its issue of Tuesday 24 August 1790. The book would not be easy reading for everyone: “Smith is one of those books [sic.] in which each page contains enough material for a whole book; it has to be read several times to properly understand it, to grasp, with any exactness, the entirety of its system.”<sup>100</sup> But syntheses were rare.

At the beginning of the Revolution, therefore, Smith appeared to the public as an authority, more, an authority hard to challenge. The *Annales patriotiques et littéraires* talked of “the immortal Smith” (23 March 1790), the *Chronique de Paris* underlined that “the reputation of Smith is beyond praise. Europe ... has long ranked him first among the philosophers who directed themselves to the great science of political economy” (9 April 1790), and the *Mercure de France* noted on 31 July that “the excellent work of M. Smith has become a classic”, a conclusion that *Le Spectateur national* reiterated on 9 May 1791. Many more examples of this could be found. In 1801 much the same thing was said: “Smith's work, so justly celebrated, has no need of apology: it has become a fundamental book.”<sup>101</sup>

Alongside this barrage of praise some criticism did however emerge, from intellectuals or politicians uncommitted to “freedom of trade” and the absence of state intervention. Jacobins such as Saint-Just and Robespierre are two examples from the National

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and various elements entering into the structure of the modern state, the *Treatise on the Wealth of Nations* is what is needed.”

<sup>99</sup> In 1793 the government bought copies of Roucher's translation for the instruction of its provincial envoys (Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 87). After Thermidor, with the institution of a course on political economy at the École Normale in Paris, and later in the Écoles Centrales, professors such as Alexander Vandermonde or Jacques Berriat Saint-Prix recommended the reading of *Wealth of Nations* to their students (see Faccarello, “Du Conservatoire à l'École normale: quelques notes sur A.T. Vandermonde (1735-1796)”, *Les Cahiers du CNAM*, no. 2 (1993) pp. 17-58). But they did not recommend *Wealth of Nations* alone; both Vandermonde and Berriat Saint-Prix maintained that the works of Steuart were equally important. The works of Arthur Young and Jean Herrenschand are also mentioned. The course of study that Vandermonde followed was more or less that of Steuart. For more on Steuart, see below.

<sup>100</sup> *Le Spectateur national*, 9 May 1791, in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 114.

<sup>101</sup> In Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 165.

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Assembly, especially in the context of the great debate on “subsistence” that took place at the end of 1792. In his speech of 16 November one deputy, Ferrand, cited Turgot in connection with the “freedom of trade”, while on 20 November Roland, Minister of the Interior, praised the “great insights of Turgot” and castigated “Necker’s disastrous errors”. Saint-Just responded in 29 November and mentioned Smith:

One cannot hide the fact that our economy, affected as it is, ... needs extraordinary remedies. Ferrand talked to you of Smith and Montesquieu; but neither Smith nor Montesquieu had experience of what is happening here today.<sup>102</sup>

### **Smith, Quesnay, Turgot... and others**

The first reaction to *Wealth of Nations* by those versed in political economy was to judge the work against the context of French political economy. Here there were some major figures, such as Boisguilbert – to whom Dugald Stewart did not forget to allude in his biographical account of Smith. But two more recent names dominated: Quesnay and Physiocratic doctrine on the one hand, and Turgot on the other.

For Quesnay’s liberal adversaries the publication of Smith’s book served as a lever against Physiocracy. In the editorial preface to the 1781 Yverdon edition of Blavet’s translation, F. B. De Felice’s words were far from gentle.<sup>103</sup> From this point of view the ideas of Smith and English writers in general were presented as a corrective to the supposed errors of French authors. English authors “had got ahead of other nations.” “They have spared nothing in reaching this goal. They seem to have calculated everything, weighed everything, to have grasped all relationships, and considered all sides.” Their views were “new”, their observations “exact”, their research “profound”.<sup>104</sup>

This assessment was made in 1781, at a time when the intellectual impact of Physiocracy was still fresh. But even in 1800 *Le publiciste* was able to publish an article in which the same argument was repeated and also amplified:

The work of Smith has effected a genuine revolution. ... Previously

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<sup>102</sup> All reported in *Le Moniteur*, Vol. 14 (1792) pp. 494, 517, 610.

<sup>103</sup> “In France, where everything begins in a rush of enthusiasm and ends up in the ridiculous, it was thought that this important subject could be rendered more profound by using abstract terms and an enigmatic language – but it was only rendered more obscure. This is the work a species of political sect, whose proselytes honoured the memory of their venerable master with an apotheosis.” . “Préface de l’éditeur” in Smith’s *Richesse des nations*, De Felice, Yverdon 1781 Vol. 1, pp. i-ii; and in Carpenter, *Dissemination* p. 37.

<sup>104</sup> De Felice, *ibid.* p. iv.

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both authors and administrators followed with difficulty the tracks of Quesnay and Forbonnais, and of the *Ami des hommes*; the language used in their explanations was practically unknown to everyone else; it resembled a sacred Egyptian language, understood only by priests and seemingly empty of all sense. Adam Smith was the first to dissipate the obscurity, whether natural or contrived, of economic science.<sup>105</sup>

Those disposed favourably to Physiocracy preferred to underline the positive theoretical connections with the work of Quesnay and his disciples, presenting Smith as a writer who was continuing their work, rather than opposing it. An example of this is Volney who, in the course of his controversy with Mallet du Pan, wrote in the *Journal de Paris* that “even if the Economists had a ridiculous side, they had nevertheless done much to enlighten us. M. Smith, who quite often is of the same opinion, sometimes criticises them, but without relinquishing his high regard for their work. He did not dream of calling them the “scourge of Europe”, as M. Mallet du Pan has done.”<sup>106</sup>

That same year Nicolas Badeau sought to demonstrate in the *Nouvelles Éphémérides économiques* that the differences between physiocratic theory and that of Smith were more apparent than real.<sup>107</sup> This idea was taken up some years later by Germain Garnier and used as the principal axis of his argument.<sup>108</sup>

Roucher also paid homage to the physiocrats in the “Advertisement” to his edition of *Wealth of Nations*:

France has produced ... works which have shed some light on the different aspects of political economy. It would be the greatest ingratitude to forget those services rendered to the country by economic writers. The days of ridicule and disparagement are over; they have given way to those of justice: and whatever might be the exaggerations and consequences dictated by the spirit of system forced upon an association of honest men and philosophers, it is no less acknowledged today that they have given the signal for the study of practical truths,

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<sup>105</sup> 15 December 1800, in Carpenter, *Dissemination* pp. 160-61.

<sup>106</sup> Volney, Letter of 24 October 1788, in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 77.

<sup>107</sup> Nicolas Baudeau, “Explication amiable entre M. Smith, célèbre écrivain anglais, et les auteurs économiques en France”, *Nouvelles Éphémérides économiques*, February 1788 second part, pp. 26-51.

<sup>108</sup> “Préface du traducteur”, in A. Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Agasse, Paris an X (1802), Vol. 1, pp.i-cxii; “Notes du traducteur”, op. cit. Vol. 5, pp. 1-456.

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upon which one might cultivate and found the wealth of Nations.<sup>109</sup>

In his well-known *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* Condorcet puts matters in historical perspective: he writes that political economy

Made little progress until the Treaty of Utrecht promised Europe a lasting peace. At this time one can see that there was an almost general move to the study of this hitherto neglected area; this new science was carried by Stewart [ie. James Steuart], by Smith, and above all by the French economists, to a degree, at least as regards precision and purity of principles, that one could not have hoped to achieve so quickly.<sup>110</sup>

The comparison with Turgot and his writings was generally clear and unambiguous. Smith, who had met Turgot in Paris, and for whom there is every indication of familiarity with *Réflexions sur la formation et la distribution des richesses* (1766), was presented as a direct continuation, especially with respect to a central element of his doctrine: the theory of capital and of competition between capitals. In his *Mémoires sur la vie et les ouvrages de M. Turgot* (1782) Dupont emphasised the brevity and density of Turgot's writing, noting with respect to the *Réflexions*:

Everything that is true in the admirable, although difficult work, that Mr. Smith has since published on the same subject in two large quarto volumes, can be found here; and where Smith has added to it there is a lack of exactness and even of argument.<sup>111</sup>

Several years later in his own *Vie de M. Turgot* (1786) – a work which went through a number of editions, was quickly translated into English and was an important text for reformers in the British Isles – Condorcet also touched in passing on this issue. Praising the simplicity of Turgot's principles and the range of the results that he could draw from them, he suggested that

One can regard this Essay as the germ of the renowned Smith's treatise on the wealth of nations, a work unfortunately to little known in France for the good of the people, an author whom one can only reproach for having taken too little account, in some circumstances, of the irresistible

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<sup>109</sup> Jean-Antoine Roucher, "Avertissement du traducteur", in Adam Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Buisson, Paris 1790, Vol. 1, pp. vii-viii.

<sup>110</sup> Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat de Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, Vrin, Paris 1970 p. 154.

<sup>111</sup> Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, *Mémoires sur la vie et les ouvrages de M. Turgot, ministre d'État*, Philadelphia 1782; in Dupont de Nemours, *Œuvres politiques et économiques*, KTO Press, Nedeln 1979, Vol. 3 pp. 109-10.



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force of reason and truth.<sup>112</sup>

This opinion was shared by other French authors, who often linked the names of Turgot and Smith. Roederer remarked, for example, that he had himself “only developed some principles from the illustrious Smith, or more exactly Turgot, the true author of the theory of capitals.”<sup>113</sup> And importantly, the 1801 Basel edition of *Wealth of Nations* contains an English translation of the 1766 *Réflexions*.<sup>114</sup>

In concluding this survey of the reception of Smith translation in later eighteenth century France we should not stop simply at the registration of linkages that were made between *Wealth of Nations* and French contemporary writers. Foreign writers were also repeatedly mentioned, among James Steuart.

Even if he were not so famous in France as Smith, James Steuart had his own public in the early years of the Revolution. His *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* was translated into French and published during 1789-90 by Didot in Paris under the title *Recherches des principes de l'économie politique, ou Essai sur la science de la police intérieure des nations libres*. Alexandre Vandermonde was behind this initiative;<sup>115</sup> he declared that the work

was translated ... at my request. The translation was completed by an Irishman who knew no French [sic], but it was reviewed by a man of high intellect.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Condorcet, *Vie de M. Turgot* (1786), London 1787 Vol. I p. 54.

<sup>113</sup> Pierre Louis Roederer, *Mémoires sur quelques points d'économie publique, lus au Lycée en 1800 et 1801*, Firmin Didot, Paris 1840 p. 98. See also here p. 78: “Around 1766 he [Turgot] wrote a small work ... in which he established the same principles that I will present; I invite those who love science to read this little-known treatise. ... They will have the satisfaction of discovering there that one of the best chapters from Smith’s book, one of those which has contributed the most to his success, is owed entirely to the work of Turgot, several copies of which were distributed in manuscript shortly after its composition.”

<sup>114</sup> Together with the explanation: “as they [the *Reflections*] are affirmed by the Marquis de Condorcet ... to be the germ from which Mr. Adam Smith formed his excellent treatise on the *Wealth of Nations*, it is hoped the curious reader will not be displeased to find them here in English dress.” Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 174.

<sup>115</sup> On Vandermonde and the first public chair of political economy see Faccarello, “L’évolution de l’économie politique”, pp. 75-121.

<sup>116</sup> Alexandre Théophile Vandermonde, *Économie politique*, lectures published in *Séances des Écoles normale*, Reynier, Paris 1795; new ed., Imprimerie du Cercle Social, Paris 1800-1801; in *L’École normale de l’An III. Leçons d’histoire, de géographie, d’économie politique*, Dunod, Paris 1994, p. 372.

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The latter was General Étienne de Sénovert, who in 1790 also published a collection of John Law's works with Buisson,<sup>117</sup> prefaced by a "Discours préliminaire" dealing with money and credit.<sup>118</sup> How was Smith located in relation to these writers by the French public?

The five volumes of Steuart's book were taken more as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, the *Wealth of Nations*. It was even thought that Smith had drawn upon Steuart for inspiration. In *Le Moniteur* for 24 August 1790 for example we find it suggested that

Mr. Smith has drawn his principles largely from the work of Sir James ... He also owes many ideas to the famous Law, so ill-judged in his time and even today, whose operations, always thwarted by authority, were so little in harmony with his true system, who perhaps deserves to be better-known at this time, as he is to the English.<sup>119</sup>

These suggestions were probably prompted by Sénovert himself. In his translator's introduction to Steuart, he stated that

Mr. Smith ... in his justly famous work ... combined in the first three books everything that our author has said on the same issues, but without elaborating on it in any way, for this is only incidental to his plan, and he presumes that these elaborations are known to his readers.<sup>120</sup>

As far as public debate over money, credit and public debt was concerned, these editions of the writings of Law and of Steuart were timely, for their appearance coincided with the creation of *assignats* – to which Sénovert and Vandermonde were very favourable – and the lengthy debates that ensued. This was echoed in the press.<sup>121</sup> For some participants in the debate a way was thus found of countering some of the

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<sup>117</sup> It should be recalled that Steuart himself revived Law's ideas.

<sup>118</sup> Étienne-François de Sénovert, "Discours préliminaire", in *Œuvres de J. Law*, Buisson, Paris 1790 pp. i-l.

<sup>119</sup> *Le Moniteur* Vol. 5 p. 568.

<sup>120</sup> Étienne-François de Sénovert, "Avertissement du traducteur", in James Steuart, *Recherche des principes de l'économie politique, ou Essai sur la science de la police intérieure des nations libres*, Didot, Paris 1789 Vol. 1 p. vii.

<sup>121</sup> "We doubt that it is possible to find elsewhere, and especially among French writers, any intelligible explanation of Law's famous system; the reader will see, and not without some surprise, that neither writers, nor those orators of the day who have talked of it, have ever studied it, or what is worse, have not understood it." *Le Moniteur* 24 June 1790, Vol. 4 p. 699.

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prevailing liberal ideas, while also questioning some of the arguments advanced by the *Wealth of Nations*.

In his introduction Sénovert betrayed the key to his preference for Steuart – he appreciated this author’s pragmatism, which is to say, his interventionist bent.<sup>122</sup> He appreciated the absence in Steuart of dogmatic and rigid “maxims” which only had to be stated and then applied, whatever the circumstances; this is recognisable as an old criticism directed at the Physiocrats and at Turgot, those who supposed to favour an immediate and uncompromising freedom of trade, imposing a simple system upon a complex reality, without taking account of impediment and the risk of a brutal toppling of social order. According to Sénovert, one of the main advantages of Steuart’s *Inquiry* was that he

...convinced sound minds ... of the difficulty of reducing political economy to a *system*; they will see that administrative *principles* are necessary, but nothing is more treacherous than *maxims* whose rigidity never bends before the numerous inconsistencies which oppose their application. These *maxims* have the inconvenience of favouring ignorance and idleness in a subject which does not permit such accommodation.<sup>123</sup>

These comments were also aimed at Smith, since the opinion of the day considered that criticism directed to the political economy of Physiocrats and Turgot were also directed to the *Wealth of Nations*.

Today we know that this assimilation is an improper one, and that to some degree the criticism is also mistaken with respect to Turgot.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, from the perspective of early Revolutionary politics, whether liberal or anti-liberal, we can note that even Dugald Stewart in his “Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith” (translated by Pierre Prévost and published in French in 1797) sought to purify Smith of any suspicion of dogmatism in economic policy, emphasising prudence and gradualism. Stewart here drew on *Wealth of Nations*, and also on those passages added by Smith to the sixth edition of *Moral Sentiments* concerning the qualities necessary for a

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<sup>122</sup> This position was elaborated by Sénovert almost three decades later in a long commentary on Smith which remained unpublished - “Introduction” to the manuscript “Notes sur les Recherches de la nature et des causes de la richesse des nations d’Adam Smith”, in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, pp. 228-233.

<sup>123</sup> “Avertissement”, pp. ix-x.

<sup>124</sup> See G. Faccarello, “Galiani, Necker and Turgot: a debate on economic reforms and policies in eighteenth century France”, in G. Faccarello (ed), *Studies in the History of French Political Economy: From Bodin to Walras*, Routledge, London 1998 pp. 120-195.

statesman.<sup>125</sup> And on the issue of this distinction between political economy and economic policy he even linked Smith's opinions to those of Necker – without however naming the latter, referring simply to his *Éloge de Colbert*.<sup>126</sup>

#### **4. The Nature of the Theoretical Reception: Some Examples**

We can start by dealing with an issue that increases in importance during our first period – that of Smith's plan of work, or project. There are two aspects to this: firstly, the question of the relationship between *Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*; and secondly, the structure of *Wealth of Nations* itself.

The first of these questions was not directly confronted during this period. Generally speaking, reviewers of the various editions of *Wealth of Nations* in translation confined themselves to the observation that Smith was also the author of the famous and important work *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. There is only one exception to this; a rare false note was sounded in the *Mercure de France* which, in 1800, published a rather curious article at the time that the corrected edition of Blavet's translation of *Wealth of Nations* appeared.<sup>127</sup> The article contends that *Moral Sentiments* is a minor work. "The *Wealth of Nations* is one of the leading works of the genre. ... *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, from the same writer, is a very inferior work. Everything is positive and substantial in the first; everything is vague and subtle in the second, if you disregard some chapters."<sup>128</sup> But at this stage of the reception no mention was made of the relationship between Smith's two books.

The second point was initially touched on but became increasingly important in approaches to *Wealth of Nations*. As early as 1781 the publisher De Felice had considered "English authors" to be, in spite of their qualities, sometimes lacking in clarity and without the talent to outline their ideas:

Their pace is difficult and crabbed. They have insufficient method to

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<sup>125</sup> In Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects and Miscellaneous Pieces*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1980, pp. 317-8.

<sup>126</sup> Stewart, op, cit. pp. 318-9.

<sup>127</sup> As Ken Carpenter remarks, (*Dissemination*, pp. 138, 165-6) this article silently repeated the review by Victorin Fabre that had appeared five years before in *La Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique* on the occasion of the publication of the revised Roucher translation. Some new paragraphs are however added, and it is these that are of interest here.

<sup>128</sup> *Mercure de France*, 1<sup>st</sup> Brumaire Year IX, 23 October 1800, in Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 166. The author of the article also goes so far as to claim that, for the most part, the substance of Smith's *Moral Sentiments* had already appeared in the well-known philosophical poem "The Seasons" by Charles-François de Saint-Lambert – except that the poet is more precise, exact and striking (Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 166, note). But the poem actually appeared in 1769, ten years after *Moral Sentiments*.

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deal with many ideas and much knowledge. They show more acuity in forming a plan, but they are not exact in following it.<sup>129</sup>

If a partial exception were made for Smith – this was of course in the preface of the Blavet translation and copies had to be sold – there was nevertheless some room for scepticism: “Insofar as Mr. Smith has filled his own work by reinforcing his material, and if he has avoided many of these defects, are there yet no criticisms that can be made of him? We cannot say so, but if an author, having struggled with all difficulties, surmounts a great number of them, severity in his case becomes an injustice.”<sup>130</sup> Other authors also made comments concerning the structure of *Wealth of Nations*. But the most direct attack came from Germain Garnier. He challenged the idea that one could use the work as a treatise for instruction in the science of political economy, for the treatment of different themes and the rendering of principles was confused.

Garnier formulated this argument in his *Abrégé élémentaire des principes de l'économie politique* of 1796, a work intended to fill a large gap in teaching material. Although Smith's work was “the most perfect and complete” in political economy, it

lacked order and method. ... It cannot be given to beginners. ... The author has marked out ... a plan too limited for the vast distance he has to cover; and thus his genius, discontented with these narrow bounds, makes an excursion at every step. Most of the interesting elements of his work are thrown up as if by chance, and placed under titles that seem alien to them.<sup>131</sup>

This reproach was repeated often enough afterwards, by Jean-Baptiste Say in particular. But Garnier came back to it in the long preface which he placed at the beginning of his translation: “One cannot hide that the defect identified in English writers, a want of method and a neglect ... of those didactic forms which relieves the reader's memory and directs his acumen, can be sensed in the *Wealth of Nations*.”<sup>132</sup>

Defects in exposition were held to be of three types. Firstly, Smith began his book by placing before the reader “the complex machine for the multiplication of wealth” and its main source – the division of labour – instead of outlining “preliminary notions” such as the “definition of values” and the “laws which govern them”. Secondly, “the line of reasoning is often interrupted by long digression” through which the reader loses

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<sup>129</sup> De Felice, “Préface de l'éditeur”, p. iv.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. pp. iv-v.

<sup>131</sup> Germain Garnier, *Abrégé élémentaire des principes de l'économie politique*, Agasse, Paris an IV (1796) pp. v-vii.

<sup>132</sup> Garnier, “Préface du traducteur”, in A. Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Agasse, Paris an X, vol. 1, p. xxiv.

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track of the argument. Thirdly, “all of Smith’s doctrine was contained within the first two books; ... the three remaining books could be read separately, for while they confirmed and developed his doctrine, they did not serve to complete it.” And so Garnier inserted into his long preface a section entitled “Method for Facilitating the Study of Smith’s Work”, as an aid to reading and studying the text.<sup>133</sup>

If we consider matters a little more closely we could say that the parts of *Wealth of Nations* that struck contemporaries most strongly were placed towards the beginning and the end of the work. Taking the latter first, Book IV, on systems of political economy, had a natural interest, since it contained an analysis of the Physiocratic system. But Book V also attracted attention because of its relevance to France’s problems. The problems of taxation and public debt were at the centre of debate and a moving force in the convocation of the Estates General. It is easy to see why in this context that final chapters of Smith’s book aroused such interest.

Regarding Book IV, one can doubt whether it had much of an impact upon firmly-established opinion regarding Quesnay’s theory. Partisans and adversaries had by this time each selected an emblematic figure suited to their cause. Adversaries naturally gravitated towards the *bête noire* of Boisguilbert and Quesnay – Colbert. During the second half of the eighteenth century the Academie française intervened in debate by announcing prize competitions on Sully and Colbert. It was the poet Antoine-Léonard Thomas, himself close to the Physiocrats, who carried off the first prize in 1763 with his *Éloge de Sully*. Ten years later Jacques Necker, an enemy to the Physiocrats and to Turgot, took the second of the prizes with his *Éloge de Colbert*.

The interest that Book IV attracted is therefore understandable. An anonymous review published in the *Journal encyclopédique* of 1776 adopted a moderate tone. The reviewer expressed the hope that, thanks to Smith, all would now consider the real opposition to be between agriculture and commerce, and not agriculture and manufacturing – although this seems to rest on a misinterpretation.

In his treatment of the agricultural system he concludes that one must neglect neither the cultivation of land, nor commerce; a prudent passage which might reconcile the partisans of Sully and those of Colbert, especially when one reflects that Sully found a France in a state of devastation, where it would have been folly to seek enrichment through commerce, before securing the bread that was needed. Can one engage in commerce before the objects of commerce exist? Under Colbert, France already had such objects in abundance, and this minister would not have been more prudent in working to increase the sum of these

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<sup>133</sup> Op. cit. pp. xxiii-xlix. Garnier added that he believed himself able “to indicate the order which seemed to conform most closely to the sequence of ideas, and for this reason most suited for teaching” (p. xxvi).

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objects, without considering their circulation and sale. It seems to us that this is the nub of the difficulty that separates the Sullyists from the Colbertists; a central issue that has not yet been grasped.<sup>134</sup>

On 20 March 1791 the *Journal* returned to this question in another anonymous review of the third volume of Roucher's translation, devoted to Book IV. "Which of the two systems should one prefer? Smith dedicated the work translated here to the solution of this problem."<sup>135</sup> Having summarised the chapters at issue, the reviewer summarily dismissed both schools: "How is our author's investigation concluded? He will tell us himself." There then follows a quotations from Smith concerning "the system of natural liberty, so simple and so consistent, which will establish itself. Every man, so long as he does not violate the laws of justice, must be perfectly free to follow his interests as he sees fit."<sup>136</sup>

For the partisans of Quesnay and Turgot the tone is obviously quite different. Condorcet for instance, in his brief but laudatory assessment of Smith included in his *Vie de M. Turgot* (1786), commented in a note that Smith's arguments concerning the agricultural system lacked "the exactness and the precision that one admires in the rest of his work". In particular, "the authors whom he calls French Economists ... and the question of the imposition of a single tax" are dealt with superficially, involving some error, and does them some injustice."<sup>137</sup> But he does not elaborate on these comments.

The single tax was of course a controversial idea, and the opponents of Physiocracy could find in Smith several useful arguments against it. However, Book V was not so greatly admired as the remainder of the work; perhaps Smith disappointed because he furnished no immediate solution to the pressing problem of public debt. This was emphasised by the reviewer in 1776:

The final chapter of this work, where one otherwise finds new perspectives, is devoted to the topic of national debt, but bewilders one with the banality of its views. There is no doubt that the most important issue here is to find a way of discharging them, but Smith shows no such way. It is not enough to have a ball of thread to get out of the labyrinth.<sup>138</sup>

The first book of *Wealth of Nations* was no less read than the last. Commentators were mainly struck by two themes. The first of these was dealt with only in passing, in

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<sup>134</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination* p. 13.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* p. 106.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* p. 111.

<sup>137</sup> Condorcet, *Vie*, Vol. I pp. 54-5.

<sup>138</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 13.

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contrast to later discussion: this concerned the relation of value and price. Much ink was however spilt over the second: this concerned the emphasis placed upon the “annual labour of a nation” and the role of the division of labour in the production of wealth.

Generally, those reading Smith’s discussion of the relation of exchange among commodities did not understand the conception of natural price which this involved – this was a constant factor in the French reception of the work, to the end of the eighteenth century and beyond. The distinction of use value and exchange value seemed to be a curio of little use, and commentators directed all their attention to the nature of value and utility. This can broadly be attributed to the influence of sensualist philosophy, defined by Turgot and circulated by Condorcet. The reaction of the *Journal encyclopédique* in 1776 is quite characteristic in this respect.

The word *value* has a dual meaning; it expresses both the quality of a particular object, and the faculty that enables this object to be used as a means for the purchase of others; a distinction which appears to us to have greater subtlety than importance, for it is always utility, the real merit or opinion which makes this object the price of another. The one, the author suggests, can be called value in use, and the other value in exchange; let us accept that one merges into the other; for there is no use without exchange, nor exchange without use.<sup>139</sup>

Some commentators did touch on the question, such as Vandermonde in his course at the École Normale, or Garnier in his *Abrégé élémentaire*. But the first lacked coherence and the second rigour, and it can be said that the issue aroused little interest among readers at this time. Characteristic is the attitude of the author (or authors) of the summary published in *Bibliothèque de l’homme public*, where the matter was summarily dispatched. More interesting perhaps is the response of Morellet, which remained unpublished.

Turning to Smith’s emphasis upon “the annual labour of a nation” and the means of increasing its productivity, this was certainly the topic that struck most readers – here the impact was important and lasting. The topic recurs in all commentaries, especially the example of the fabrication of pins. This is not surprising – Turgot among others had touched on the issue at the beginning of his *Réflexions*, and Smith had in any case taken the example from the *Encyclopédie*. But the power of Smith’s exposition, and the role played by the division of labour in his book, endured. In 1800 for instance the *Mercure de France*, in an article from 23 October already discussed above, wrote that

...all enlightened readers concur ... that the best volume of Smith is the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p. 6.



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first. His theory of the *division of labour* is novel, illuminating, and fruitful. It is true that to discover this theory Smith only had to cast his eyes around him. A developed *division of labour* is in England the source of *universal opulence*. Whoever has *read* Smith well, sees England; and he who has seen England understands, without effort, Smith's entire system.<sup>140</sup>

Germain Garnier also referred quite unambiguously in 1802 to the “innumerable marvels brought about by the division of labour” that constituted a “magnificent and imposing scene”.<sup>141</sup> Of course, during all this period, some authors extended the field of the principle of the division of labour, and others stressed the negative effects of this division: but they cannot, unfortunately, be taken into account here.

## II

### “Maintenant je ne suis plus d’aucune école”

1802-2002

#### 5. French Economic Liberals and Smith, 1802-1888

The developing history of French translations of Smith's two books ends in 1802 following Sophie de Grouchy's 1798 translation of *Moral Sentiments* at Garnier's translation of *Wealth of Nations*. This made two good quality texts available to French readers for the first time, and these two versions were the basis for all subsequent editions until the new translation of the late twentieth century. Nonetheless, there was a long process of assimilation during the nineteenth century, a sifting process in which some elements were to be retained, some allowed to become dormant, and others discarded.

There are three characteristics in this reception process: firstly, Garnier's translation of *Wealth of Nations* became the standard text in respect of its formulation of the principles of political economy; secondly, during the debates prompted by the Ricardian interpretation of *Wealth of Nations* the work returned to centre stage for French economists, on account of its method, which could be used against Ricardo and the Ricardians; thirdly, if French economic liberals were at first uninterested in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, this part of Smith's work was finally taken up as to contest socialist arguments, and as a consequence of this there were several revisions made in the interpretation of *Wealth of Nations*.

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<sup>140</sup> Carpenter, *Dissemination*, p. 166.

<sup>141</sup> Garnier, “Préface du traducteur”, p. xxiv.

### **Smith praised, against the Physiocrats**

There was no lack of praise for Garnier's new translation, as for instance the review published under the name of Roussel in *Moniteur Universel*. The first began by declaring the work of Smith to be fundamental to the development of societies, and their wealth; it was required reading for men of government, but up until now the work had not been properly understood, because of faulty translation.

However, there are few who thoroughly know this wonderful work of the genius Smith. It is not in a flawed translation, made with an imperfect knowledge of the English language and a lack of acquaintance with the matters discussed by Smith, that one can gain an exact idea of the series of illuminating principles and well-made arguments through which this writer leads his reader to important and useful truths. This is not a matter of elegance, of force of expression, or a striking style ...; the translator, who has in this respect all the necessary advantages, states himself that he has sometimes sacrificed the exact original for the sake of clarity.<sup>142</sup>

Besides mastery of the English language, in the absence of which it was hard to see how a translator could properly do his job, Roussel emphasised the need to understand the text as a work of philosophy – for it was not many years since the Economists had been known as “economic philosophers”. Hence the quality of Garnier's translation was linked to the fact that he was himself an economic philosopher, that is, he was closely acquainted with the subject matter so that, beyond the *language* of Smith, he was in a position to reconstitute Smith's *arguments*, which were themselves those of an economic philosopher. What follows is quite explicit in this respect:

We do not hesitate to assert that this work of Smith, a monument to the rarest wisdom and an exact and all-embracing spirit, will not have been properly known to us as it merits before the date of this new translation, which we owe to citizen Garnier, and which could only be properly completed by a man of distinguished talent and the most varied knowledge, joined with that which is special to Smith's work, that is, a knowledge of political economy.<sup>143</sup>

Garnier also had the merit of providing both a reading guide and a critical appreciation: the first being needed because of the way that the detours in *Wealth of Nations* made it seem hard to follow, the second relating Smith's text to those of physiocratic economic theory, which if not known at first hand by the contemporary intellectual elite, was

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<sup>142</sup> *Moniteur universel* floréal an X pp. 891 col. 3, p. 892 col. 1.

<sup>143</sup> P. 892 col. 1.

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known through the impact that this theory had had during 1760 to 1774 and in the political and economic debates of the revolutionary assemblies. This dimension was not without its difficulties in the reception of Smith's work. Roussel here put his finger on a problem, even though he was not trying to make trouble for Garnier.

The advantage [knowledge of political economy] that we find in Smith's translator sometimes leads to the modification of this writer's ideas, lending them a veracity or clarity that they lack, correcting assertions made on false information, and this is what citizen Garnier has done in his instructive and interesting notes ... they should be treated as the necessary complement to Smith's doctrine.<sup>144</sup>

Garnier's preface was not presented only to French readers. During the nineteenth century a translation of this preface appeared in a great number of English and American editions of *Wealth of Nations*.<sup>145</sup> The Preface is important in two respects: firstly, its translation indicated that this form of approaching Smith's work had found an audience beyond its francophone readers; and secondly, its diffusion lent validated a conciliatory interpretation which sought to demonstrate that, despite all appearance, the Physiocrats and Smith were basically in agreement. What did Garnier do to bring this about?

Garnier treated the two doctrines as fundamentally identical – this also went for their errors, since Garnier rejected the distinction between types of labour, on the grounds that it was not possible to tell whether the right or the left foot was more useful in walking – apparent differences fading from view when one took account of the methodological differences between Quesnay and Smith:

The science of political economy, considered from the point of view adopted by the French Economists, belongs to the class of natural sciences, which are purely speculative, and which are able only to present a knowledge of the laws governing the object with which they are concerned; whereas seen in the practical perspective from which Smith presents this science, it rejoins the other moral sciences, which tend to the improvement of their object, carrying it to the highest point of perfection of which it is capable.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> All of which used the original translation that first appeared in the 3-volume 1805 Glasgow edition (#87 in the main Bibliography below).

<sup>146</sup> Garnier, "Préface du traducteur", p. xix.

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The ultimate argument is that the two doctrines, far from being in opposition, are in fact complementary, Smith having the advantage of being practical and useful where the Economists remain abstract.<sup>147</sup>

Having noted these specific features of the translation, we can now examine the manner in which they were taken up by economists working in the French language, in so doing opening the way for a distinctive interpretation of Smith. Jean-Baptiste Say, whose *Traité de l'économie politique* first appeared in 1803, is of central importance to this on account of the four further editions following from 1814 to 1826, not counting the sixth posthumous edition of 1841. But alongside Say there is also Sismondi; his *Richesse commerciale* was likewise published in 1803, in Geneva.

Say had been to England several times, he read English, and had discovered *Wealth of Nations* in the original through the Genevan banker Étienne Clavière when working in his insurance company before the Revolution. Say had cited Smith from the English version in his first work, *Olbie*.<sup>148</sup> Nonetheless, the first edition of the *Traité* has two features that are of interest here: firstly, as regards the principles of political economy, Say chooses Smith against the Physiocrats, making a clear differentiation where important theoretical issues are concerned; secondly, he immediately designates the Garnier translation as the reference work. Let us first examine the second point.

The first edition of the *Traité* is very precise when it comes to the question of the French translation of Smith's economic work:<sup>149</sup> a note in the Preliminary Discourse gets to the point straight away:

Garnier's translation of Smith is the only one worthy of the original. It is unfortunate that the translator in his preface, his notes, and in the

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<sup>147</sup> The concluding part of note XXIX ("Sur le système des économistes") is even more explicit, since Garnier writes: "One could reject the theory of the Economists for being of little use, but not for their error; and at every point where these two great systems of political economic coincide serves to demonstration the truths which they teach, in the same way that the observations of two astronomers placed at opposite sides of the globe mutually reinforce each other." "Notes du traducteur", Vol. 5 p. 283.

<sup>148</sup> Jean-Baptiste Say, *Olbie ou essai sur les moyens de réformer les mœurs d'une nation*, Déterville, Paris 1800.

<sup>149</sup> *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is not referred to by Say, even though he had a strong interest in moral issues and their connection to economic activity. He never mentions the work, except for a brief reference in a note to his "Histoire abrégée des progrès de l'économie politique" which concludes his *Cours complet* of 1828-29; and this comment itself demonstrates his lack of familiarity with the text, for he recalls that Smith had all his manuscripts destroyed after his death, including his first lectures on political economy, adding "The *Theory of Moral Sentiments* which made up another part of his teaching, and several lesser essays, were the only items to be preserved" (Say, *Cours complet d'économie politique pratique*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. II Guillaumin, Paris 1852 p. 560. Doubtless Say's allegiance to Benthamite utilitarian philosophy distanced him from Smith's *Moral Sentiments*.

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*Éléments* that he published a few years previously, has reproduced the principal errors of the Economists; which is not to say that their work is not to be most warmly recommended, and which I have myself never consulted without great profit.<sup>150</sup>

In the main body of his work Say repeats his praise, and he does not fail to discuss some of the interpretation put forward in Garnier's preface, or in the copious notes making up the fifth volume of the translation.<sup>151</sup> Nonetheless, Say does not himself make use of the translation, as an examination of his own quotes from Smith shows.

We do not know which translation of Smith that Sismondi used when he presented his own economic work, like Say also in 1803; he never cites Smith directly. Nevertheless, in his critical evaluation of the Economists he does refer to Garnier as "the translator of Smith",<sup>152</sup> dissociating himself in this way since he also opts for Smith in presenting the principles of political economy.

In subsequent editions of Say's *Traité* he made no further admiring comments concerning Garnier's translation; although this did not prevent him from citing the second 1822 edition of this translation in discussing the new notes that Garnier had added.<sup>153</sup> One could see in this the manner in which Garnier's translation had by this time established itself as the standard translation, without it being any longer necessary to state this obvious fact. That being so, it is no less interesting to see the manner in which this option for Smith is linked to criticisms of Garnier.

The Preliminary Discourse of the first edition of the *Traité* clearly demonstrates this. When Say discusses the boundary between economics and politics<sup>154</sup> he opts for Smith as against the uncertainties of definitions proposed by Rousseau, the Economists and Steuart. Secondly, the question of method – general and particular facts, the nature of observations) gives Say the opportunity of demonstrating the force and originality of Smith to those who ranged him alongside Steuart in a line of "previous authors".<sup>155</sup> And finally, Say decides to make his position clear:

I wanted to do justice to Smith, whom I have only see belittled by those with no hope of understanding him; but I have not closed my eyes to

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<sup>150</sup> J.-B. Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Vol. I Déterville, Paris 1803 p. xxiii.

<sup>151</sup> Say, *Traité*, Vol. I pp. 365, 392; Vol. II pp. 458, 512.

<sup>152</sup> Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *De la richesse commerciale ou Principes d'économie politique appliqués à la législation du commerce*, Vol. I Paschoud, Genève 1803 pp. 31, 268; Vol. II p. 15.

<sup>153</sup> J.-B. Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Vol. II, Rapilly, Paris 1826 p. 206.

<sup>154</sup> Say, *Traité*, Vol. I pp. i-iii.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. iii-xxiii.

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thesoe areas in which he is found wanting.<sup>156</sup>

The unique position occupied by Say in French neo-Smithian political economy in the early nineteenth century can thus be explained by the dual position that he maintains. On the one hand, he makes a decisive choice for Smith:

When one reads this work [*Wealth of Nations*], one can only conclude that political economy did not exist prior to Smith. I do not doubt that the writings of the Economists were of substantial service to him, as were no doubt the conversations with the most respected and enlightened people in France that he had during his visits to Paris. But there is the same gulf that separates his doctrine from that of the Economists as separates Tycho Brahe from Newtonian physics. On more than one occasion before Smith entirely accurate principles had been advanced; he is however the first to have demonstrated the connections existing between them, and how they follow necessarily from the way things are. It is well known that a truth belongs to him who first proves it, not to him who first states it. He did nore than establish truths; he provided a genuine method for revealing error.<sup>157</sup>

But Say does not accept Smith completely. This is evident from the second and third editions of the *Traité*. The Preliminary Discourse, as revised in 1814, contains an impressive list of criticisms of Smith's scientific shortcomings that is carried forward into later editions. We cannot examine all of these, but two can be considered here: the definition of labour, and the importance of machines in relation to the division of labour.

Say's annotations to his copy of *Wealth of Nations* provide some insight into the first. He writes for example: "Labour is the sole basis for the value of things (I believe this is incorrect)".<sup>158</sup> This sets the tone: Say was critical of the central aspects of Smith's theory of value and prices, and of his theory of distribution. We can conclude from the dozen or so critical notes that Say made to *Wealth of Nations* Book I Chapters 5, 6, & 7 that:

1. Say rejects the idea that labour is an invariant measure of value;
2. he fails to see how the quantity of labour commanded can be a measure of the profit of capital;
3. he rejects the idea that market prices tend towards natural prices.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. xxiv.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>158</sup> H. Hashimoto, "Notes inédites de J.-B. Say qui couvrent les marges de la *Richesse des nations* et qui la critiquent", *KSU Economic and Business Review*, vol. 7 (1980) p. 67.

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These are not merely Say's private annotations; the traces of these criticisms is already evident in the first edition of the *Traité*. There he openly declares that the search for an invariant measure of value is chimerical, and that Smith was in error if he thought that labour could perform this function. This view leads him to a complete revision of the Smith's concept of labour. On the one hand, the linked sequence of labour costs, production prices and market prices is replaced by a straightforward connection of market price to utility.<sup>159</sup> On the other, "work" is detached from human labour and applied indifferently to nature, machinery or human effort. This homogenisation of diverse productive inputs is in turn related to Say's conception of the payment for productive services, where market prices are determined solely by the prevailing conditions of supply and demand. Finally, where he directly considers price determination Say does away with the concept of natural price and substitutes for it production costs: "The sum of production costs forms what Smith calls the natural price of things."<sup>160</sup>

Say explains that "production" means the production of utility, and utility is measured by price.<sup>161</sup> The production of utility can be considered as an exchange between man and nature, where the sum of utility is increased by men who set productive processes to work: the human labour of workers, the knowledge of scientists, the accumulated capital of capitalists and the land of landowners. By setting these forces to work the *entrepreneur* facilitates the creation of a greater amount of utility than enters into the production process. Say therefore rejects the way that Smith treats labour as the sole factor in the creation of wealth. He advances instead the argument that in conquering the laws of nature man learns how to harness nature for productive ends. The application of scientific knowledge by the *entrepreneur*, dependent for this in turn on men of learning, is embodied by the central role that the machine plays in the production process, a key phenomenon that Smith had overlooked. Say here clearly marks himself off from Smith: while not ignoring the function of the division of labour, which is discussed at length in the *Traité*,<sup>162</sup> Say considers the prime characteristic of industrial society to be the machine. This is not argued empirically, along the lines "there are now more machines than in Smith's time"; instead, Say makes a theoretical argument, in which the machine is the embodiment of scientific knowledge that facilitates the harnessing of nature to the work of production, creating greater amounts of utility for those living in industrial societies. Here it becomes evident that this is not merely a question of economic theory. We can see here the origins of an "industrialist" line of thought than developed in France, a socio-political doctrine that placed industrial factors, as defined by Say, at the core of modern society. And this engendered the line of argument among French economic liberals that *Wealth of*

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<sup>159</sup> Say, *Traité*, (1803) Vol. I Ch. 6.

<sup>160</sup> J.-B. Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 2 Déterville, Paris 1817, p. 8.

<sup>161</sup> Say, *Traité*, (1803) Vol. I pp. 24-6.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* Ch. 1; *Traité* (1817) Vol. I Ch. 8.

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*Nations* was superseded as a means for the dissemination of a new body of knowledge, and that it had to be replaced by a more systematic, rigorous and complete treatment, and here Say had furnished the canonical example.<sup>163</sup>

We can see how this happens by comparing French translations of Smith with the work of French economic liberals. The second edition of the Garnier translation sold for 25 francs, rather more than the cost of buying Say's *Traité*, the three-volume fifth edition of which only cost in 1826 18 francs; while the third 1826 edition of the *Catéchisme* could be had for 3 francs. It was only with the six-volume *Cours complet d'économie politique* of 1828-29 at 42 francs that the cost of Say's treatment exceeded that of Garnier's translation. This is an elementary, but economically relevant, comparison which helps us understand important aspects of the diffusion of political economy in early nineteenth century France.<sup>164</sup> And this situation is also made explicit in the introductions to French translations of *Wealth of Nations* that followed in 1843, 1859 and 1888.

In 1843 Blanqui published an updated and corrected edition of the Garnier translation, and in his own preface argued that *Wealth of Nations* was the decisive work in political economy, to which one could add the work of Say, Malthus and Sismondi:

The great work of Adam Smith remains the classic book *par excellence* of political economy. Study of the science must begin there, where it perhaps is to be found complete, despite the numerous writings of authors who boast that they have renewed the science from top to bottom.<sup>165</sup>

Blanqui added to the revised translation notes of his own, and also notes based on the commentaries to the text elaborated by Buchanan, McCulloch, Malthus, Ricardo, Sismondi, Bentham and Say (the last being unpublished notes made available by his

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<sup>163</sup> See Steiner, "Introduction. L'économie politique comme science de la modernité", in J.-B. Say, *Cours d'économie politique et autres essais*, Flammarion, Paris 1996 pp. 9-46; and *Sociologie de la connaissance économique. Essais sur les rationalisations de la connaissance économique (1750-1850)*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris 1998.

<sup>164</sup> Lucette Le Van-Lemesle has made the following interesting estimate of the space devoted to *Wealth of Nations* in the catalogue of Guillaumin, the publisher for French economic liberals: "The 1841 catalogue devotes 1/15 of its space to the *Journal des économistes*, as much as Smith's *Richesse des nations*, Blanqui's *Histoire de l'économie politique en Europe* or Louis Reybaud's *Études sur les réformateurs sociaux*... But J.-B. Say takes the lion's share with 3/15 of the catalogue to himself, with the emphasis on the *Cours* rather than the *Traité*. That is scientific truth." "Guillaumin, éditeur d'économie politique, 1801-1864", *Revue d'économie politique*, 95 (2) (1985) pp. 134-149.

<sup>165</sup> Adolphe-Jérôme Blanqui, "Introduction de cette nouvelle édition", in A. Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Guillaumin, Paris 1843 vol. 1, p. v.



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son Horace),<sup>166</sup> in this way seeking to create a monument to Smith worthy of his stature, and also place in the hands of those interested in social economy a book “the reading of which had become indispensable.”<sup>167</sup> But he also had a more directly pedagogic concern – he taught at the *École Supérieure de Commerce* and had succeeded Say in the chair for economic policy at the *Conservatoire des arts et métiers* – for he was familiar with the difficulties “facing those beginning study of political economy”<sup>168</sup> and this edition, supplemented so extensively, could serve them as a guide.

In 1859 Joseph Garnier went further in pedagogic preparation for a reading of Smith. Rehearsing first of all the usual praise directed at the work of Smith, whose “logic and argument had a contemporary freshness,”<sup>169</sup> he tempered these remarks with the observation that both the structure of the book and the method employed were defective, for “it was not a methodological treatise”; “and so it was necessary that one prepared for it by a preliminary reading of one of the didactic works in the science today available.”<sup>170</sup> This reflex forces us to consider the developing literature of political economy if we are to properly understand the changing place of Smith within this field.

### **Smith or Ricardo? Principles of Political Economy and the debate on Method**

The publication of Ricardo’s *Principles* in 1817 challenged the interpretation of Smith’s work established by Say and Sismondi. Say responded immediately with notes which the publisher appended to the French translation of Ricardo’s *Principles*. There followed a long discussion between Ricardo and Say, the public part of which made evident some important differences among those economists who saw themselves as Smithian. Two features characterise the relation of French economists to Smith. First of all, Say drew attention to the distance between the letter of *Wealth of Nations* and the issues which preoccupied neo-Smithians.

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<sup>166</sup> Jean-Baptiste Say annotated his own 1789 5<sup>th</sup> edition of *Wealth of Nations*, and they have since been brought together by H. Hashimoto - “Notes inédites de J.-B. Say qui couvrent les marges de la *Richesse des nations* et qui la critiquent”, *KSU Economic and Business Review*, vol. 7 (1980) pp. 53-81; “Notes inédites de J.-B. Say qui couvrent les marges de la *Richesse des nations* et qui la résument”, *KSU Economic and Business Review*, vol. 9 (1982) pp. 31-133.

<sup>167</sup> Blanqui, “Introduction”, p. vii.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* p. viii.

<sup>169</sup> J. Garnier, “Préface de cette nouvelle édition”, in A. Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Vol. I Guillaumin, Paris 1859 p. iii.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* Joseph Garnier was one of the main suppliers of this kind of work, publishing an *Éléments de l'économie politique* (3 editions between 1846 and 1856); an *Abrégé des éléments d'économie politique* (1858); and a *Traité d'économie politique sociale ou industrielle, exposé didactique des principes et des applications de cette science* which went through 8 editions from 1846 to 1880.

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I revere Smith, he is my master. As I took my first steps in political economy, and then, still faltering, poked on one side by the doctors of the balance of trade, on the others the doctors of net produce, stumbling at every step, he showed me the right path. Sustained by the *Richesse des nations*, in which we also discover the wealth of his genius, I learned to walk unaided. Today I am no more of any school, and I will not share the ridicule of the Jesuit fathers who add to their commentary to translations of Newton's elements.<sup>171</sup>

Say then defended Smith's method, dubbing in "experimental", at once both abstract and historical, as a way of rejecting the purely abstract theory of Ricardo in the name of their common point of departure.<sup>172</sup> Sismondi, who opposed Say on other points of economic theory, followed him in this methodological criticism of Ricardo.<sup>173</sup>

It was in this context that the second edition of Garnier's translation appeared, this time with two volumes of notes added to the four volumes of the text proper; and this provided an opportunity to review the interpretation of Smith that Garnier defended against Ricardo or Malthus. The review of this edition in the *Moniteur Universel* that was printed in December 1822 and January 1823 was duplicated by another from the same author that appeared in the *Revue encyclopédique* for July 1823; and together for, it seems, the first time in France, debate over political economy and ethics was joined.

The author signed himself "A.D.V."<sup>174</sup> and mentioned both the poor Blavet translation and the fact that the Morellet translation was prevented from publication – without in either case going into more detail.<sup>175</sup> He then proceeded to the lack of order and method in *Wealth of Nations* and placed the work of Say and Garnier in this perspective.

Smith's book, like nearly all works in English, even the very best, lacks order and method. Instead of translating the work afresh, M. J.-B. Say conceived and then carried out the project of abbreviating Smith's ideas while at the same time presenting them in clearer order and more methodically. The success of his work confirms its merits. ... In France, the work of M. Say, by popularising Smith's doctrine, created a desire for a good translation of his book. This task could not have been done

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<sup>171</sup> J.-B. Say, *Lettres à Malthus*, (1820) in his *Cours d'économie politique et autres essais* (1996) p. 242.

<sup>172</sup> J.-B. Say, *Traité* 5<sup>th</sup> edition 1826 Vol. I pp. xxxiii-xxxvi; *Cours* Vol. I, pp. 44-8; Vol. II pp. 560-62.

<sup>173</sup> Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1826), Calman-Lévy, Paris 1971 pp. 55-8, 229.

<sup>174</sup> Aubert de Vitry, who had published in 1815 *Recherches sur les vraies causes de la misère et de la félicité publique ou la population et des subsistances*.

<sup>175</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, December 1822 p. 1660.

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better than by M. Garnier, already known to be one of the most skilful economists.

This is a strange reconstruction, for it is very hard to see how, in 1822-23, it was possible to regard Say's *Traité* as an abbreviation of Smith done instead of a new translation of *Wealth of Nations*,<sup>176</sup> or even harder to see how the first edition of the *Traité* could have given rise to a need for a previous translation!

The writer characterises the older political economy as “the science studying means of every nature which might render a society flourishing” and he emphasised that, up to the mid-eighteenth century, “the moral part of this science was always the more important element”.<sup>177</sup> First Quesnay, then Smith, had favoured chrematistics – or chrysolology – over social economy, and this was the source of recent error among the heirs.

Smith's aim was not to establish principles of political economy, but to dissipate or foil the dangerous errors that ignorance over the nature and causes of the wealth of nations had introduced or occasioned. ... It was necessary to insist upon this ... Many errors have slipped in with the application of chrematistics or chrysolology to social economy, as with many of the exact sciences, because one wants to be more Smithian than Smith, and more Newtonian than Newton.<sup>178</sup>

This was aimed at Buchanan, Malthus, and above all Ricardo, for

All the reasonings of this new professor rest in effect upon calculation and number. Moral elements do not enter at all into his patterns. He is exclusively a chrysolologist, and thinks the science of the mechanism of wealth as the regulator of the world.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> There is nothing in Say's Preliminary Discourse, in which he explains his motives and intentions, that could prompt the idea that the *Traité* is a summary made instead of a new translation of the original. On the contrary, it is precisely in this first edition that Say expresses his subservience to Smith, implying that he would be happy to have made his work accessible to his readers, “even if I have not advanced [the science] a single step.” Say, *Traité* (1803) Vol. I p. xxvi. Nonetheless, as we have seen this diffidence on the part of Say with respect to Smith is abandoned from the second edition and his debates with English writers.

<sup>177</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, December 1822 p. 1659.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1746; see also *Revue encyclopédique*, p. 49.

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This shows that the writer places himself in a diffuse dynamic of the period. One finds in Sismondi's *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique* of 1819<sup>180</sup> an emphasis on a moral dimension to political economy otherwise neglected, especially in the wake of the Ricardian interpretation of the science; it can also be found in Henri Saint-Simon insofar as he begins by criticising political economy for its blindness to moral phenomena, without which one could not possibly conceive of a new social system.<sup>181</sup> It is also worth noting that the writer refers explicitly to German writers – Garve, Dörrien, Lueder and von Soden, and especially this last, from whom he had translated some extracts of his text of 1815 – who are thought to be superior in this respect.

Apart from the fact that the writer adopts a sometimes conciliatory position between Physiocracy and Smith, in the same way as Garnier, the originality of these two reviews lies in the way that the writer emphasises the necessity of reuniting the moral and the economic dimensions within what was called social economy, arguing that Smith was in this respect wanting - even though this author, like Saint-Simon, Say and Sismondi, do not mention the existence of *Moral Sentiments*.

Despite the eminent merit and undoubted utility of the book *Richesse des Nations*, approached from this point of view [that of chrysolgy] it is no less true that the moral part of political economy is not treated completely in this great work, and where Smith does direct himself to such matters, he lets fall many errors, examination of which will for the third part of this article.<sup>182</sup>

The third part, which appeared in January 1823, underlined the relation of morals to political economy, but also that of politics and religion. These were not only indivisible, it was suggested, but the last could not lay claim to predominance, and it was a mistake of economists, Smith included, to deprecate this dimension of their science.

### **Moral Theory and Political Economy**

These two reviews of the second editions of Garnier's translation show that methodological debate in respect of Smith's work introduced the question of the relation of morals and political economy, arguing that Smith's radical heirs, that is to say, Ricardo and his disciples, though that they were able to leave this dimension of the moral and political sciences to one side. But in this debate no-one called upon the

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<sup>180</sup> The reference to a science of number and calculation directly echoes passages in Sismondi, likewise the emphasis by the writer on happiness and population.

<sup>181</sup> Henri Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, *Du système industriel*, (1821), in *Œuvres de Henri de Saint-Simon*, Vol. 3, Anthropos, Paris 1966.

<sup>182</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, December 1822 p. 1746, see also *Revue encyclopédique*, p. 54.

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support of Smith's own moral theory. Does that mean that *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was ignored? Certainly not. Nonetheless, closer examination shows that the reception of Smith in the first half of the nineteenth century had its own dynamic.

Since the time of the Physiocrats political economy, along with morals and politics, was included among the "moral and political sciences." These separate domains were not run together, and above all political economy was not to be judged from the standpoint of morals. This last often derived from pure ignorance of political economy, as André Cochut emphasised in his entry "Morals (harmony with economy, economic morals)" for the *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*:

Among the adversaries of political economy one can find men who declare their interest to be exclusively religious, and complete novices in religious matters; people seek to immobilise society under the pretext of its preservation, and others who will not shrink from its overthrow, under the pretext of its improvement. Extreme in doctrine, irreconcilable by instinct, they are miraculously at one in denouncing as deceptive, dangerous and immoral a science they have no more studied than anyone else.<sup>183</sup>

How should the economist respond to this situation? According to Cochut, political economy generated consequences "entirely in conformity with moral laws", for "false doctrine is that which, pushed to its extreme, result in immorality."<sup>184</sup> Cochut refers mainly to J.-B. Say for his economic theory and to Joseph Droz<sup>185</sup> for the relation of political economy to morals; Smith is only mentioned in passing, in a note:

It is perhaps not without utility to recall here that the chief founder of economic science, Adam Smith, prepared for his work with profound studies of the nature of the human spirit and of human obligation. His *Théorie des sentiments moraux* is, in the opinion of philosophers, one of the best treatises on morals ever produced.<sup>186</sup>

The reader learns no more of this last work. But it is easy to identify the philosophers alluded to: Victor Cousin, the leading philosopher and, more generally, the dominant force of the University under the July Monarchy; and Théodore Jouffroy, both of them Professors of Philosophy at the Sorbonne, with reputation and influence. Cousin published a detailed commentary on Smith's moral theory in his course on moral

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<sup>183</sup> André Cochut, "MORALE (Accord de l'économie et de la)", in C. Coquelin and G.-U. Guillaumin, (eds.) *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*, Vol. 2, Guillaumin, Paris 1852 p. 239.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. p. 242.

<sup>185</sup> Author of *Économie politique ou principes de la science des richesses*, (1829) Renouard, Paris 1846.

<sup>186</sup> Cochut, *ibid.* p. 239.

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philosophy delivered in 1819-20;<sup>187</sup> and he was followed by Jouffroy in his course on natural law in the early 1840s.<sup>188</sup> The line of argument is very similar in each case; it is probable that Jouffroy read Cousin account and was inspired by it.

In either case, Smith's work is classified as representative of theories basing morals upon sentiment – sympathy – and for this reason Smith is placed between moral theory founded upon interest, and that founded upon reason. The account places emphasis on the role of the impartial spectator, indicating that this moral theory does not solely rest upon changing personal evaluations not comparable one with another, even if both philosophers do criticise Smith on this count. This moral philosophy is praised for its superiority over theories of morals founded upon interest, and on account of Smith discrimination and clarity. The two central criticisms concern the relation between sympathy and moral obligation, and between sympathy and reason.

Both Cousin and Jouffroy note that Smith barely uses the expression “moral obligation”. They raise the problem of the well-intentioned man who incurs public antipathy in acting according to obligation,<sup>189</sup> and see here an important difficulty for his system, for

...sympathy is not a rule to which one can conform; it can be reconciled with the good, but it is not the good in itself; and however agreeable it might be to be surrounded by hearts from which one receives sympathy, that fact of this receipt cannot be the object of a wish, and never of an obligation.<sup>190</sup>

Cousin and Jouffroy reproved Smith for making sympathy the real explanation of morality, which they considered fallacious. To use Jouffroy's phrase,<sup>191</sup> they detected humanity, God, or reason behind this form of sentiment. Cousin argued that the idea of the impartial spectator was a contradiction in terms. He considered that impartiality meant that one evinced no sentiment, positive or negative, with respect to the situation in question. Sensibility is placed to one side: the impartial spectator cannot be impartial if he permits sentiment to interfere, and there can be no question of founding morality on the sentiment of sympathy.

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<sup>187</sup> *Cours d'histoire de la philosophie morale au dix-huitième siècle*, Vol. 2 Ladrangé Paris 1840, pp. 99-183.

<sup>188</sup> *Cours de droit naturel*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Paris: Hachette, Paris 1858 Vol. 1 pp. 406-27; Vol. 2 pp. 1-55.

<sup>189</sup> Cousin, *Cours d'histoire* Vol. 2 pp. 139-40; Jouffroy, *Cours* Vol. 1 pp. 426-7.

<sup>190</sup> Cousin, *Cours d'histoire* Vol. 2 p. 140.

<sup>191</sup> *Cours* Vol. 2 pp. 17-19.

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Is then Smith's system so incoherent that there is no way out of this dilemma? No, but a complete change in the line of argument is needed. Reason has to be restored to its proper place:

Is it therefore necessary to condemn Smith's idea out of hand? Is there no way of making it intelligible? I can see only one such way, in a supposition that the decisions made out of sympathy are controlled by a higher faculty. ... If we introduce into the decisions made out of sympathy a rational element that can make up for this deficiency, we depart from the system of sympathy, it amounts to a confession that it cannot support itself, and has to make resort to a principle not part of itself. His hypothesis is subject to one of two inconveniences: it is unintelligible, or it implies the intervention of reason in decisions made on the basis of a sympathetic instinct. In either case Smith's principles are abandoned.<sup>192</sup>

Cousin's third lecture on Smith touches on the *Wealth of Nations*. He praises this foundational work, considering Smith's principle of labour superior to the manner in which J.-B. Say and Destutt de Tracy lay emphasis upon need when seeking to place a value upon commodities. But he goes on to suggest a superior principle, that of energy:

The freely acting ego is the power of which labour is the product, it is the force manifested in labour, in a word it is the principle of principles for Smith. ... Is this measure superior to that of Smith. Yes. Clearer and more philosophical? Yes. We therefore adopt it; and if we should wish to translate it into a mathematical formula, we would present it by the number that expresses the intensity of productive force added to that which expresses duration.<sup>193</sup>

Doubtless philosophical assurance of the superiority of this measure left economists cold. All the same, there is no trace here of any perspective from which Smith's two works can be contrasted one against another. That is also true for Jouffroy, although part of his project is to understand the way in which interested and disinterested action combines. His teaching of moral theory does not assume that moral interest is the original form of morality, permitting movement beyond the instinctive stage of human conduct by bringing good and evil into relation with the selfishness of the actor.<sup>194</sup> Selfish morality does not get very far: "To do so is thus to span an immense distance,

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<sup>192</sup> Cousin, *Cours d'histoire* Vol. 2 p. 143.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-7.

<sup>194</sup> *Cours* Vol. 1 pp. 40-41.

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the abyss that separates selfish from disinterested morals.”<sup>195</sup> And when he comes to deal with Smith he underlines the extent to which sympathy placed disinterest at the heart of his approach.<sup>196</sup> But in stating this he does not consider there to be a significant emergent problem in relating Smith the professor of morals and Smith the economist. He mentions this second dimension of his work without examining it in any detail, and he opines that the Scottish professor “only had a secondary interest in philosophy”.<sup>197</sup>

The situation changed with the publication of Baudrillart’s work on the philosophy of economics. At the start of his chapter devoted to the relation “la morale du sentiment et l’économie politique”, that is, Smith’s moral philosophy as conceived by Cousin and Jouffroy, he mentions what has since become known as “Das Adam Smith Problem”.

Adam Smith is accused of having, in his political economy, sacrificed too completely that sentiment which he made the unique spirit of his morals. However well-founded this criticism might be; Smith takes little account of charity, but does one need to reproach the economist for a failure to employ the same principle as the moralist? Was he wrong to believe in the profoundly distinctive character of the two sciences? Far from thinking of reproaching him, I would praise him highly, and I fear no contradiction in stating that he would not be the immortal author of *Wealth of Nations* if he were constrained to introduce into the world of interests that principle of sympathy which suffuses *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It would only have set economic science on the road to a mirage.

Baudrillart suggests the Smith’s political economy is founded upon a principle of affinity which arises from the idea of a social convention, of opinion:

...his directing principle in political economy is none other than the principles of *affinity*. Doubtless *affinity* plays a role in the solution of economic questions; but one cannot imagine that it is supreme. Smith recognises for the remainder that it is right that labour be free; justice has a place in his book, but very limited I think.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. pp. 406-9.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. p. 411.

<sup>198</sup> H. Baudrillart, *Philosophie de l’économie. Des rapports de l’économie politique et de la morale*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Guillaumin, Paris 1883 pp. 97-8.



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Baudrillart did see some element of competition between the two books, but in identifying universal harmony at the heart of morals and of political economy he was able to deny the presence of any conflict between Smith's two books.

At this time it was possible that Baudrillart was aware of German writings that had contributed to the formation of an "Adam Smith Problem".<sup>199</sup> But he was not at all certain that this diversion was a necessary one; after all he did not think that Smith stood accused of shifting his conception of human nature in passing from moral theory to political economy. In any case, it is not necessary to follow this particular diversion for in all likelihood Baudrillart was referring to French discussions, either with respect to political matters (the rise of socialism), or social science (Saint-Simonism and Comtean sociology).<sup>200</sup>

From the 1820s a cleavage developed between the industrialism of liberal economists (Say, Charles Comte and above all Charles Dunoyer) and that of Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonians, a cleavage that today would be thought of as between those believing in the spontaneous competitive order and inherent justice of the market, and those who favoured conscious organisation of the social order and the establishment of a just society based upon non-market criteria. This latter movement developed in the course of the 1830s into a number of socialist trends that economic liberals, mediated by the writings of Louis Reybaud,<sup>201</sup> regarded with mixed feelings and some apprehension. One central issue raised by socialist reformers related to the place of disinterested behaviour in the industrial social order. Liberal economists hence reproved Smith on two counts: not having developed a response couched in terms of justice; of having, in *Wealth of Nations*, been vague concerning the remuneration of workers.

Following along the lines already developed by Cousin and Jouffroy, Baudrillart expressed regret that Smith had not developed his reflections on morals to include justice, which could be extended in the form of a natural law covering positive laws that independently specified social and political conventions.<sup>202</sup> The spontaneous order, an expression of economic harmony, represented an order founded upon reason and therefore was beyond Smith's morals since this is understood to be a morality founded upon sentiments and hence, ultimately, opinion. This interpretation did however underpin the manner in which French liberal economists rejected the socialist critique that reproached Smith for having sacrificed morals and justice on the altar of self-interest.

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<sup>199</sup> See the discussion in the following essay.

<sup>200</sup> It might be added here that these ideas are already sketched out in Baudrillart's 1860 preface to *Théorie des sentiments moraux*, predating Buckle's elaboration of the contrast in 1861, and of course well before German debate got going.

<sup>201</sup> See for example his *Études sur les réformateurs ou socialistes modernes* (1840), 7<sup>th</sup> ed., Guillaumin, Paris 1864.

<sup>202</sup> *Philosophie de l'économie*, p. 17.

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...it is the philosopher of sympathy, the exclusive defender of sentiments of benevolence and commiseration, that the opponents of political economy have accused of selfishness and an implacable hardness with respect to the suffering of his fellow men ... at least they might have taken account of the fact that their attacks were directed to the philosopher who had made sympathy the unique motivation of our actions and the dictate of our obligation.<sup>203</sup>

Taking account of the considerable menace that socialism represented in the eyes of economic liberals, Smith's work needed to be revised on those points that appeared to provide support to socialist arguments – the sections on distribution were important among these. Courcelle-Seneuil's introduction to his abbreviated 1888 edition of *Wealth of Nations* (reprinted in the *Dictionnaire d'Économie politique* in 1891) is a clear example of this.

Like numerous other commentators on Smith, Courcelle-Seneuil outlined everything that he found unsatisfactory in *Wealth of Nations*. He takes especial exception to the determination of value by labour, since it simply gives ammunition to socialists in their opposition to political economy:

Having said that everything exchanged among men is made up of labour, without also having said that not all work is muscular work, is it not true that to then say that the portion of the worker in the price of products diminishes with the progress of industry amounts to fleecing the workers? One knows the number of times, and in what violent terms, that socialists, sustained by the account given by the author of the *Recherches*, have for sixty years insisted that the worker had been stripped of that which belonged to him.<sup>204</sup>

In closing this section on the second phase of the reception, it should be noted that during this entire period it was Garnier's translation of *Wealth of Nations* which was the basis for all editions, revised by Eugène Buret and Blanqui in 1843, abbreviated by Courcelle-Seneuil in 1881, all published by Guillaumin, the publisher of the French economic lobby. *Moral Sentiments* emerged from initial obscurity at the beginning of the century, and the republication of Sophie de Grouchy's translation in 1830, and then again in 1860, made it accessible to readers who were able to refer to it if they wished to see for themselves how Smith developed a moral theory, and not simply take Cousin, Jouffroy and Baudrillard at their word. All this would change in the following period.

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<sup>203</sup> M. Monjean, "SMITH (Adam)", in Coquelin and Guillaumin, *Dictionnaire* Vol. 2, p. 624.

<sup>204</sup> J.-G. Courcelle-Seneuil, "SMITH (Adam)", in L. Say and J. Chailley (eds) *Nouveau dictionnaire de l'économie politique*, Guillaumin., Paris 1892 Vol. 2, p. 813. See also "Notice sur la vie et l'œuvre d'Adam Smith", in A. Smith *Richesse des nations*, Paris: Guillaumin, Paris 1891 pp. xxi-xxiii.

## 6. From Theory to History, 1888-2002

The third period of the Smith reception in France is characterised by the fact that, besides republication in Guillaumin's 1966 collection of their principal economists, more than a century separates the last complete translations of *Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations* and their reappearance in 1983 and 1991, followed by new translations in 1999 and 1995 respectively. We can take up the story with the 1876 centenary of the publication of *Wealth of Nations*.

The *Journal des économistes*, house journal of French economic liberals, had never published very much on Smith and his writing. This changed in 1876, and the shift was signalled by Maurice Block, during a meeting of the Société d'économie politique on 6 March 1876:

Arising from studies upon which I have been engaged for some time, I noticed that the celebrated work of Adam Smith (*Wealth of Nations*) appeared in March 1776. I wish to call that date to mind in this meeting and add a proposal.<sup>205</sup>

Block had already spoken for most of the meeting, so he limited himself to reporting details concerning a pilgrimage made by a young economist, Arthur von Studnitz, to Kirkcaldy; first published in German, the article appeared in French translation in the May issue of the *Journal*.<sup>206</sup> On 5 April 1876 Joseph Garnier, presiding over the following meeting of the Society, read out a letter from the Belgian political economy society proposing that a meeting be convened in September to celebrate the centenary,

to take account of the extent of the peaceful conquest effected through the influence of Adam Smith's doctrines, and at the same time to examine whether it were true, as some ... claimed, that these celebrated doctrines needed to be revised or rejected on certain points.<sup>207</sup>

On 2 June the same year the London Political Economy Club held a centenary dinner to celebrate the appearance of *Wealth of Nations*. Reporting on the event Léon Say, Minister of Finance and grandson of Jean-Baptiste, replied to the criticism Robert Lowe had made of commercial treaties as a means of furthering free trade.<sup>208</sup> A month later the *Journal* published extended extracts from the London meeting, notably the one

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<sup>205</sup> *Journal des économistes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, Vol. 41, (March 1876), p. 459.

<sup>206</sup> A. von Studnitz, "Pèlerinage sur la tombe de Adam Smith", *Journal des économistes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 42 (May 1876) pp. 258-264

<sup>207</sup> *Journal des économistes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, Vol. 42, (April 1876), p. 133

<sup>208</sup> *Journal des économistes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, Vol. 42, (June 1876), pp. 463-4.

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that Say had made himself.<sup>209</sup> General approval was expressed at the tenor of the contributions, save that made by Émile de Laveleye who seemed to have offended the editors with his treatment of the division between the Historical School and orthodoxy. Finally, the celebration was raised again at a meeting of the Society on 5 December, in which Joseph Garnier suggested that a medal be struck commemorating the centenary of the *Wealth of Nations*, which could also mark the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Society itself.<sup>210</sup>

In both France and in England the commemoration marked a shift that displaced Smith's work from the domain of economic theory to that of the history of theory. This finds expression on Block's own work, as well as the various abbreviated editions of *Wealth of Nations* published from 1888 to 1973.

In 1888 J.-G. Courcelle-Seneuil was the first to present an abbreviated edition of *Wealth of Nation*. Books IV and V were left out entirely, on the grounds that the ideas they contained had been widely accepted. In Books I to III digressions were eliminated, as well as the notes introduced by Blanqui in the 1843 and Garnier in the 1859 editions. Beyond this, Courcelle-Seneuil noted the change in the way *Wealth of Nations* was treated. He considered that economists had directed too much attention to this work:

The *Wealth of Nations* had been the object of this superstition [that Smith was the father of political economy, as if there had been nothing beforehand] for at least three quarters of a century, and had certainly been harmful to the science. As commentators compounded their reservations, restrictions, rectifications and observations of all kinds the work became less clear; it was like a Koran, drowned out by the commentary, a work of very unequally educated minds. Hence a work of the highest value had obstructed for a long period the very science to whose progress it had contributed.<sup>211</sup>

This argument was also advanced by Block at the beginning of his own book.<sup>212</sup> Courcelle-Seneuil's continued this historical contextualisation by arguing that scientific interest in *Wealth of Nations* was no longer a major issue, while the pedagogical interest of the work had always been problematic:

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<sup>209</sup> *Journal des économistes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, Vol. 43 (July 1876) pp. 110-12.

<sup>210</sup> *Journal des économistes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, Vol. 44 (December 1876) p. 459.

<sup>211</sup> Jean-Gustave Courcelle-Seneuil, "Notice sur la vie et l'œuvre d'Adam Smith", in A. Smith *Richesse des nations*, Guillaumin, Paris 1881 pp. vi-vii.

<sup>212</sup> Maurice Block, *Les progrès de l'économie politique depuis Adam Smith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Guillaumin, Paris 1897.

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Science of whatever kind is impersonal, and it is neither sacrilege nor injustice to criticise and correct as needed the formulae of its illustrious servants, nor establish in formal terms the errors that they may have committed. But as corrections pile up it becomes necessary to substitute a new terminology for the older, and this is lengthy work, meticulous, thankless, nearly always subject to challenge or to neglect, or poorly understood – but useful and likely to favour the advance of social science.<sup>213</sup>

Courcelle-Seneuil's edition was published again in 1908, one year before the appearance of the classic French work of the history of economic thought: Charles Gide and Charles Rist's *Histoire des doctrines économiques des Physiocrates à nos jours*. The treatment that *Wealth of Nations* received in this work further accentuated this historical shift in appraisal of Smith.

First of all it can be noted that Gide and Rist cite Smith from the 1904 Cannan edition; they also regarded Cannan's edition of Smith's *Lectures* to be important in clarifying what Smith might have taken from the Physiocrats, a typical issue in the history of economics. They also attributed to Smith's work an essentially cultural virtue, which enjoined the economist to maintain a wide scientific perspective.

Today, in spite of the changes that have occurred in the fundamental principles of the science, no economist can afford to neglect this old Scottish writers without severely constricting his scientific perspective.<sup>214</sup>

This historicisation of Smith had implications for the manner in which Gide and Rist viewed Smith liberalism. They isolated three major ideas:

1. economic activity creates a natural community generated by the division of labour;
2. economic institutions emerged in a spontaneous manner;
3. these institutions are beneficial.

They accepted the first and the second of these, but not the third, which they conceived as properly belonging to the naïve confidence of the eighteenth century in natural providence. There is no doubt that Gide's support for social economy is the source of this judgement on *Wealth of Nations*.

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<sup>213</sup> Courcelle-Seneuil, "Notice", p. vii.

<sup>214</sup> Gide and Rist, *Histoire des doctrines économiques depuis les Physiocrates jusqu'à nos jours*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., Sirey, Paris 1944 p. 58.

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After the new 1908 edition of Courcelle-Seneuil's condensed edition, there were no more French editions of the work until after World War II. The first of these, the Costes edition, was a projected French version of Cannan's 1904 edition, employing Garnier's translation for the text and adding to it Cannan's notes. But this got no further than the first volume, and publication was broken off. A new condensed edition was proposed the same year, as part of Louis Baudin's collection of economic writers – the series presented abbreviated versions of the classics of political economy, broadly conceived, including authors like Jean-Baptiste Say, Joseph Schumpeter, but also Frédéric Le Play. Unlike Courcelle-Seneuil, Bousquet did not exclude Books IV and V, even though he did think that the essential contribution of Smith was to be found in Books I and II.<sup>215</sup> This was in turn a judgement taken that followed on from that of his master Schumpeter, which viewed Smith as lacking in originality. How then could one explain his success and why also republish him? Bousquet's response is interesting, since it recapitulates a dimension already touched on with Gide and Rist – the doctrinal dimension enveloping Smith's economic writings. Just as Gide and Rist disputed the views of those who saw these writings as a defence of liberalism, Bousquet argued that reading Smith could once more be of interest,

As far as the science of economics goes, Smith is not a modern writer; and this despite the fact that he argues in favour of free external trade, liberal policies in general, and the spontaneous organisation of the modern world as the outcome of personal interest. Certainly, his arguments are of his time and they might be in certain respects superseded, but they contain a store of lasting truth and a disturbingly contemporary echo. Today there are those who carry this struggle forward, among others I can mention Hayek, Robbins and Machlup and, in France, Jacques Rueff and in part Maurice Allais, and one can only wish them the success that their master, Adam Smith, had formerly.<sup>216</sup>

Within the context of French political economy, reference to economists like Rueff and Allais, Hayek and Robbins shows that Baudin and Bousquet sought counter the emergence of a new, more institutionalist or sociological, political economy – associated especially with the brothers André and Jean Marchal.<sup>217</sup> They sought to uphold the colours of economic liberalism at a time they were having a bad press, the behaviour of industrialists during the German occupation having left a very negative impression on the higher economic administration directing post-war reconstruction,

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<sup>215</sup> Georges-Henri Bousquet, "Avertissement et Introduction", in G. H. Bousquet, *Adam Smith. Textes choisis*, Dalloz, Paris 1950 p. 18.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.

<sup>217</sup> See Philippe Steiner, "La *Revue économique* (1850-1980): la marche vers l'orthodoxie académique?", *Revue économique*, Vol. 51 (2000), pp. 1009-1058.

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and liberal doctrine being squeezed at a time when planning was in the ascendant as the pathway to economic reconstruction.

This political dimension was no longer of such great relevance when Gérard Mairet issued a condensed edition in 1976, nor when Daniel Diatkine published a complete edition in 1991. Instead, the history of ideas had become the critical motivation for the republication of *Wealth of Nations*. Mairet situated the work in relation to Hegel and Marx, arguing that Smith organised his thinking in the form of descriptive national “tableaux”; the first giving a description in economic categories, and the second in historical terms.<sup>218</sup> Diatkine was a specialist in the history of economic thought, and he placed Smith in the context of eighteenth century thought and the evolution of Smith’s thinking from the *Lectures*. His concluding argument placed emphasis upon the importance of Smith for modern economic theory, although this line of argument is scarcely credible.

Finally we come to the new translations which draw upon the logic and argument of historians. No longer aimed at legislators, no longer part of the arena of ideological conflict, no longer read by economic theorists, Smith’s work now addresses an academic world interested in the history of ideas. These new translations are certainly worthwhile in respect of the rigour with which they restore Smithian concepts; but at the same time, an eighteenth century author is read and translated out of the early twenty-first century,<sup>219</sup> especially in the manner in which his language is appraised and the text located historically.<sup>220</sup> But one cannot overlook the fact that these translations, faithful by modern editorial standards, no longer have a public readership.

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Kenneth Carpenter’s strict focus upon book and publishing history has revealed a *Wealth of Nations* which passes from a marginal text – first published abroad as a book, but then quite quickly only in Paris and in editions of increasing solidity – to a canonical text. The present essay on the translations and the reception of Smith in the French language has lent support to this approach from the viewpoint of intellectual history and allows us to emphasise certain points.

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<sup>218</sup> G. Mairet, “Préface”, in A. Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations. Les grands thèmes*, Gallimard, Paris 1976 pp. 12-13.

<sup>219</sup> Jean-Michel Servet, “Introduction”, in A. Smith, *Recherches sur la Nature et les Causes de la Richesse des Nations*, Économica, Paris 2000 Vol. 1, pp. v-xix.

<sup>220</sup> Paulette Taieb, “Préface”, in A. Smith, *Enquête sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1995 Vol. 1, pp. i-xxxiv.

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In the first place, the most well-known work of Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, first appeared to the general public as a quite marginal text, but not for the more limited world of authors publishing in political economy, or among those who thought deeply about this area: for very different reasons they recognised the quality and importance of the work, even if Smith's originality was disputed or relativised. Translations were not always of good quality – those of Malthus and Ricardo, made in the early nineteenth century, fared no better – but without being well-translated, it can be said that Smith's reputation constantly rose through the latter half of the eighteenth century. France was a country in which political economy was not unfamiliar: *Wealth of Nations* was therefore read and commented upon. The French revolution did not slow this process; on the contrary, it was furthered by it.

Secondly, parallel to the passage towards editorial canonicity, there is in reality a complex process of work within which Smith's name becomes synonymous with the science that *Wealth of Nations* did so much to create; but in the course of this the 1776 text ceased to be that which one read in order to grasp this science. Work on Smith's work assumed a particular tonality. French economists have never liked the organisation of the work. They used it, modifying it where it appeared inadequate, and, following Say, they thought that the systematic treatise a more appropriate form in which a science aimed at the reconstruction of the modern world should be diffused. This being so, *Wealth of Nations* became increasingly distanced from more advanced research, and the work was as much marginalised as canonised.

As regards *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, we should emphasise that its reading was at first guided by seventeenth and eighteenth century French rationalist philosophy – through Sophie de Grouchy, Jouffroy and on to Cabanis and Victor Cabanis. The text then went through a reconsideration at the hands of Baudrillart, who sought to respond to socialist critics, recalling that Smith, apart from being the author of *Wealth of Nations*, was also a philosopher of moral sentiments.

Finally, it also needs to be emphasised that Smith's works endured a long eclipse – from the early 1840s to the 1940s. Their reputation revived with the publication of new complete editions – but these were solely for the benefit of historians of ideas.