

# ADAM SMITH'S ROLE IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION\*

## I

'It is no more possible to write political economy without a detailed knowledge of Smith's book, than it is possible to write natural history while remaining a stranger to the works of Linnaeus'.<sup>1</sup> This verdict on Smith, by an anonymous reviewer in the journal *La Décade philosophique*, was becoming commonplace in France by 1804.<sup>2</sup> In the previous year Jean-Baptiste Say had declared in the first edition of his *Traité d'économie politique* that 'there was no political economy before Smith'.<sup>3</sup> Such evidence confirms that Smith's work was being read and appreciated on the eve of the establishment of the First Empire. For certain historians of economic analysis, Smith's establishment of a *science* of political economy was itself sufficient to convince French contemporaries that a new dawn of intellectual endeavour was upon them — the assumption being that if Smith's book was read his

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<sup>1</sup> Review of J.-C.-L. Simonde de Sismondi, *De la richesse commerciale, ou principes d'économie politique appliqués à la législation du commerce*, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1803), in P.-L. Ginguené et al. (eds.), *La Décade philosophique, politique et littéraire*, 42 vols. (Paris, 1794–1807), xxxvii, 16.

<sup>2</sup> See the references to Smith's political economy in Joseph Droz, *Des lois relatives aux progrès de l'industrie* (Paris, 1802); Nicolas Canard, *Principes de l'économie politique* (Paris, 1801); A. C. L. Destutt de Tracy, *Projet d'éléments d'idéologie à l'usage des écoles centrales* (Paris, 1801); Joseph Dutens, *Analyse raisonnée des principes fondamentaux de l'économie politique* (Paris, 1804); Vivent Magnien, *De l'influence que peuvent avoir les douanes sur la prospérité de la France* (Paris, 1801); Joseph Bosc d'Antic, *Essai sur les moyens d'améliorer l'agriculture, les arts et le commerce* (Paris, 1800); C. E. Micoud d'Humous, *Sur les finances, le commerce, la marine et les colonies* (Paris, 1802); J.-B. Brillat-Savarin, *Vues et projets d'économie politique* (Paris, 1803); Eugène de Vitrolles, *De l'économie politique réduite à un principe* (Paris, 1801); Charles Ganilh, *Essai politique sur le revenu public* (Paris, 1806); Charles Ganilh, *Des systèmes d'économie politique, de leurs inconvénients, de leurs avantages et de la doctrine la plus favorable aux progrès de la richesse des nations* (Paris, 1809).

<sup>3</sup> J.-B. Say, *Traité d'économie politique, ou simple exposition de la manière dont se forment, se distribuent et se consomment les richesses*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1803), i, pp. xx–xxi.

political economy would necessarily be imbibed.<sup>4</sup> Scholars less confident about the advance of rationalism in history have argued, by contrast, that Smith's liberalism was adopted in France only *after* the failure of the Revolution, when republican ideologies had exhausted themselves.<sup>5</sup>

The view that Smith's liberal economics was self-evident unites these interpretations; Smith could only be read as a defender of economic liberty and minimal government, because of the self-equilibrating effects of the 'hidden hand' of self-interest. The purpose of this essay is not to work out how far Say, Benjamin Constant, and J.-C.-L. Simonde de Sismondi were introducing a Scottish form of liberalism into France in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Rather, its objectives are twofold. First, it aims to show that Smith's ideas played a significant role much earlier, with important consequences for the movement of ideas from the commencement of the Revolution.<sup>6</sup> Although the evidence provided is selective rather than exhaustive, the argument is made that Smith's *Wealth of Nations* greatly influenced leading constitutional reformers in 1789. In the mid-1790s, his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* inspired a body of work intended to combat the terrorist tendency in French political culture. After 1799, the *Wealth of Nations* once again played a role in debates about the prospects for France, and especially the merits of Bonaparte's regime.

Secondly, it aims to reveal how partial the majority of responses to Smith's texts were. In part this was inevitable, given the complicated nature of Smith's writing. The first, anonymous, reviewer of the *Wealth of Nations* in 1777 made the point that, while Smith's 'superior genius and talent' had to be acknowledged, his was 'not a book that can be translated into our

<sup>4</sup> C. Gide and C. Rist, 'The Influence of Smith's Thought and its Diffusion: J. B. Say', in their *A History of Economic Doctrines*, trans. R. Richards, 2nd edn (London, 1948); H. W. S. Spiegel, *The Growth of Economic Thought* (Durham, NC, 1992), ch. 11.

<sup>5</sup> L. Salleron, *La Richesse des nations: analyse et critique* (Paris, 1973); G. Leduc, 'Adam Smith et la pensée française', *Revue d'économie politique*, lxxxvi (1976); K. Carpenter, 'Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations d'Adam Smith et politique culturelle en France', *Économies et sociétés*, xxiv (1995).

<sup>6</sup> See also T. Ando, 'The Introduction of Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy to French Thought' and D. Diatkine, 'A French Reading of the *Wealth of Nations* in 1790', in Hiroshi Mizuta and Chuhei Sugiyama (eds.), *Adam Smith: International Perspectives* (London, 1993); Philippe Steiner, *Sociologie de la connaissance économique: essai sur les rationalisations de la connaissance économique* (Paris, 1998); Gilbert Faccarello and Philippe Steiner (eds.), *La Pensée économique pendant la Révolution française* (Grenoble, 1995).

language'.<sup>7</sup> Equally, the Alsatian jurist Pierre-Louis Røederer, the most important interpreter of Smith in the 1790s, noted that by 1788 Smith had become an important source of ideas for political reformers, but added the more telling point that Smith's work was more referred to than read.<sup>8</sup> In 1803 Sismondi noted that Smith had in vain 'collected all the fundamental truths which ought to serve as rules to Legislators'. The *Wealth of Nations*, he said, 'lacks method, is hardly understood by anyone, is cited rather than understood, perhaps without being read'; the result was that 'the treasure of knowledge which it contains is lost to Governments'.<sup>9</sup> For Sismondi, Smith's meaning could only be determined by experts in an enterprise that included politics and history in addition to political economy. Even legislators, he argued, could not be expected to understand Smith's intentions without help from such men as himself. Such evidence shows the extent to which the orthodox view of Smith's reception understates the effects of Smith's opacity. The more substantive point follows, that, regardless of the clarity of Smith's core ideas, they could be combined with divergent moral and political philosophies which shaped their meaning for contemporaries. Economic liberalism did not entail a specific political ideology, nor even a consistent response to political problems. As in the case of Smith's British reception, a precise context needs to be established before we generalize about the consequences of his ideas.<sup>10</sup>

## II

The physiocrat and *philosophe* André Morellet was the first French translator of the *Wealth of Nations*, spending the autumn of 1776 at Brienne in Champagne working on the first volume of Smith's

<sup>7</sup> *Journal des savants*, Feb. 1777, 81–4.

<sup>8</sup> Review of *Ouvrages posthumes d'Adam Smith*, ed. P. Prévost, in *Œuvres de Røederer*, ed. A.-M. Røederer, 8 vols. (Paris, 1856–9), iv, 494–5, from *Journal de Paris*, 20 Thermidor an V.

<sup>9</sup> Simonde de Sismondi, *De la richesse commerciale*, i, 12. See also H. O. Pappé, 'La Formation de la pensée socio-économique de Sismondi: Sismondi et Adam Smith', in Sven Stelling-Marchaud (ed.), *Sismondi européen* (Geneva, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Donald Winch, 'The Burke–Smith Problem and Late Eighteenth-Century Political and Economic Thought', *Hist. J.*, xxviii (1985); Donald Winch, 'Science and the Legislator: Adam Smith and After', *Econ. J.*, xciii (1983); R. F. Teichgraeber, '“Less Abused Than I Had Reason To Expect”: The Reception of *The Wealth of Nations* in Britain, 1776–90', *Hist. J.*, xxx (1987); Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), chs. 2, 7.

book. For reasons that remain somewhat vague, Morellet's translation was never published. We can at least be certain that his initial work was seized by local censors of the book trade.<sup>11</sup> The *Wealth of Nations* did appear in print, anonymously, in The Hague in 1778–9, as *Recherches sur la nature et causes de la richesse des nations*. The translation was later reissued in four volumes with the title *Recherches très-utiles sur les affaires présentes, et les causes de la richesse des nations* (Amsterdam, 1789). Sections from the *Wealth of Nations*, translated by Reverdil, were also published as *Fragment sur les colonies en général* (Lausanne and Basle, 1778) by the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel. The first major translation of the *Wealth of Nations*, however, was undertaken by the abbé Jean-Louis Blavet and published in three volumes in 1781 in Paris with the same title as that published in The Hague.<sup>12</sup> Extracts from this translation had earlier been popularized through the *Journal de l'agriculture, des arts et du commerce*, edited by d'Ameilhon, between January 1779 and December 1780. Another edition was produced at Yverdon in six volumes in 1781, a third in 'London and Paris' in two volumes in 1788, and a fourth in four volumes in Paris dated 'an IX' (1800–1). An infantry colonel from Bordeaux named Nort contacted Smith in 1782, offering to translate the *Wealth of Nations*. In a letter to Blavet dated 23 July 1782, Smith wrote that he had replied to Nort stating that the translation had been completed by Blavet, to his satisfaction.<sup>13</sup> Blavet's last edition was revised and corrected with the help of Guyot of Neuchâtel, who claimed to be a friend of Dugald Stewart. In a preface to this edition, Blavet stated that he had originally undertaken the translation for personal use and that it had only been published because his friend d'Ameilhon lacked material for his journal.<sup>14</sup> Little is known of Blavet, but his comment raises a question: why did the *Wealth of Nations* attract the attention of authors, editors, and booksellers between

<sup>11</sup> *Mémoires de l'abbé Morellet*, ed. P. E. Lémontey, 2 vols. (Paris, 1821), i, 235–8; letters to Turgot of 22 and 26 Feb. 1776, in *Lettres d'André Morellet*, ed. Dorothy Medlin, Jean-Claude David and Paul Leclerc, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1991–6), i, 310–12.

<sup>12</sup> See also David Murray, *French Translations of the Wealth of Nations* (Glasgow, 1905); *Enquête sur la nature et causes de la richesse des nations*, ed. and trans. Paulette Taieb, 2 vols. (Paris, 1995), i, pp. xxix–xxxiii.

<sup>13</sup> *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. E. C. Mossner and I. S. Ross (Oxford, 1977), 259–60.

<sup>14</sup> *Recherches* (Paris, 1800–1), preface. Blavet's translation appeared anonymously prior to the edition of 1800, but he announced his authorship publicly in a letter to the *Journal de Paris* (5 Dec. 1788) because of 'the popularity of the work'.

1778 and 1782? One clue lies in the fact that the *Journal de l'agriculture* was an arena for the gladiatorial combat then occurring between physiocracy and its enemies.

Physiocracy first came to prominence towards the end of the Seven Years War, when the French state was in crisis because of the combined effects of public indebtedness and military defeat.<sup>15</sup> The Royal Physician François Quesnay and his disciple Victor Riquetti, the comte de Mirabeau, were the doctrine's initial authors. Through their contacts with the court, the ministries, and the King's mistress Madame de Pompadour, they were able to bring attention to their ideas through the publication of the *Théorie de l'impôt* in 1760.<sup>16</sup> There were good reasons for official interest. In a climate of concern about the prospects for France, and anglophile demands that the French nobility follow the English and embrace commerce, physiocracy offered a measured plan for French regeneration. Without making France a mixed monarchy in the British sense, it proposed constitutional and legal change that would ensure the progress of commerce and civility while making them conform to a Christian standard of justice and virtue.<sup>17</sup> By curbing the passions, and enlightening self-interest, a natural morality would be reasserted, with political as well as moral implications. Most importantly for French politicians, the physiocrats promised a reformed monarchy that would be hegemonic in Europe because of its capacity to feed itself while generating revenues for self-defence greater than those of other states, including Britain.<sup>18</sup>

Leaving aside the moral and religious philosophy at the root of physiocracy, its key insight was the possible use of the surplus generated by agriculture (which they called the net-product) above the costs of production and the investment required for

<sup>15</sup> The best recent overviews are: Istvan Hont, 'The Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind: "Contemporary Crisis of the Nation State" in Historical Perspective', in John Dunn (ed.), *Contemporary Crisis of the Nation State?*, special issue, suppl. to *Polit. Studies*, xlii (1994); Michael Sonenscher, 'The Nation's Debt and the Birth of the Modern Republic: The French Fiscal Deficit and the Politics of the Revolution of 1789', *Hist. Polit. Thought*, xviii (1997); Philippe Steiner, *La 'Science nouvelle' de l'économie politique* (Paris, 1998), ch. 3.

<sup>16</sup> G. Weulersse, *Le Mouvement physiocratique en France* (Paris, 1910), 2 vols.

<sup>17</sup> [Comte de] Mirabeau and [François] Quesnay, *Traité de la monarchie (1757–59)*, ed. Gino Longhitano (Paris, 1999), ch. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Sonenscher, 'French Economists and Bernese Agrarians: The Marquis de Mirabeau and the Economic Society of Berne' (unpublished paper, given at the conference 'Republican Political Economy and Enlightenment: The Patriotic and Economic Societies of Berne in European Context', Lausanne, 2000).

the next harvest.<sup>19</sup> The physiocrats stated that this surplus ought to be taxed in order to establish public institutions responsible for justice: institutions that would combat the antagonism between classes that characterized the ‘unnatural and retrograde order’ of modern commercial societies.<sup>20</sup> Agricultural production would be stimulated, the physiocrats claimed, once it had been liberated from local and national restrictions on internal movement and international export. This was particularly the case with respect to trade in grain. Political control of the grain trade had been the norm in France for centuries.<sup>21</sup> This was unsurprising given the real possibility of famine, still remembered from the first decade of the century. But the physiocrats believed that increasing the price of subsistence goods, and coupling that with the greater productivity that accompanied free trade, would ultimately increase the real wage of the ordinary labourer. This would certainly be the case, it was argued, once indirect taxes had been replaced by the single tax on the agricultural surplus, which would be set at a level guaranteeing the expansion of trade while satisfying the government’s need for revenue. The political analogue to this economic doctrine was the division between the making of law and its execution. The wisest method of making law was by a hereditary king. The execution of law would be undertaken by the landed elite, brought together in provincial assemblies, which was responsible for overseeing the creation of wealth. A physiocratic king would rule as a ‘legal despot’, sovereign with respect to the making of law but always constrained by the natural order.<sup>22</sup> The physiocrats predicted that, while modern commercial states such as Holland and Britain would collapse through national bankruptcy, or civil war between merchants and landed nobles, a physiocratic France would counter economic

<sup>19</sup> ‘Maximes de gouvernement économique’, in *Physiocratie, ou constitution naturelle du gouvernement le plus avantageux au genre humain* (Paris, 1767).

<sup>20</sup> I. Hont, ‘The Political Economy of the “Unnatural and Retrograde” Order: Adam Smith and Natural Liberty’, in M. Barzen (ed.), *Französische Revolution und politische Ökonomie* (Trier, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Steven L. Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1976), i, ch. 3.

<sup>22</sup> See Michael Sonenscher, ‘Property, Community, and Citizenship’, in M. Goldie and R. Wokler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (forthcoming); Michael Sonenscher, ‘Physiocracy as a Theodicy’, *Hist. Polit. Thought*, xxiii (2002).

inequality and become a force for peace in a moralized commercial world.<sup>23</sup>

The first legislative test of physiocracy began in the aftermath of the signing of the Treaty of Paris (10 February 1763), when, on 26 May, the free internal circulation of grain was declared legal by royal edict. In July of the same year it became possible, under certain conditions, to export grain freely. Fears about high prices led to the first *guerre des farines* in the middle of the decade. Attacks on physiocracy accompanied the experiment. Many of them accused the physiocrats of threatening the kingdom with famine. When the abbé Terray became *contrôleur-général* in 1769, hostility to physiocracy became ministerial policy and controls on the grain trade were restored. This lasted until the crowning of Louis XVI, in May 1774. Under the direction of the newly appointed minister Turgot, another attempt was made to introduce physiocratic reforms. Turgot freed internal trade in grain in September 1774, and followed this up with his Six Edicts of February 1776, which established full liberty of trade. Once again it proved unpopular, with the renewed *guerre des farines* of April 1775 a high point of opposition. Although Turgot fell victim to the intrigues of court factions in May 1776, the years up to his death in 1781 were dominated by the question of whether the laws he had put forward would have succeeded in restoring French glory, as he once promised the king, 'within ten years'.<sup>24</sup> It is likely that Blavet's translation was published as a text supportive of Turgot's reforms and reissued because of interest in the latter's ministry. Smith's book was an obvious pillar of support for the free-trade cause, containing as it did a sustained assault on grain-trade restrictions. It is equally probable that Morellet's failure to find a publisher for his translation was due to his physiocratic connections. The vicissitudes of the reputation of physiocracy at court, and in French literary circles more generally, is certainly the context which best explains initial responses to Smith.

This conclusion is somewhat surprising. Smith enjoyed excellent personal relations with the physiocrats during his stay in

<sup>23</sup> [Comte de] Mirabeau, *Philosophie rurale, ou économie générale et politique de l'agriculture, réduite à l'ordre immuable des lois physiques & morales qui assurent la prospérité des empires*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1764), iii, 304–25.

<sup>24</sup> *Mémoire au Roi, sur les municipalités, sur la hiérarchie qu'on pourroit établir entre elles, et sur les services que le gouvernement en pourroit tirer*, in *Œuvres de Turgot*, ed. P. S. Dupont de Nemours, 8 vols. (Paris, 1808–11), vii, 395–8.

France from January 1764 to October 1766, and maintained links with several of their number on his return to Scotland. Yet the substantive differences between his political economy and theirs would have been evident to the least diligent reader.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the *Wealth of Nations* Smith condemned the ‘speculators’ and ‘men of system’ exemplified by the excessively confident physiocratic administrators. The tone of Smith’s political economy, that is his approach to the subject in general, was opposed to Quesnay’s. Smith favoured the necessity of compromise in an imperfect world where second-best solutions alone were likely to be practicable. As he made clear in the third book of the *Wealth of Nations*, the natural progress of opulence had not only been impeded but had been reversed in certain parts of Europe, and it was utopian to believe that any legislator could restore ideal conditions by legislative fiat. He also believed it to be futile to impose reforms, however rational they might appear to be, when popular tradition was opposed to them. Prejudice and ignorance had to be accepted as key elements of the human condition: a notion intended to counter the grandiose schemes of hot-headed projectors. Nothing was less Smithian than Quesnay’s famous ‘Maximes générales pour le gouvernement d’une royaume agricole’: a summary of laws to be applied to states with the expectation of rapidly transforming economic conditions. For the physiocrats, whose education was steeped in Malebranche, the belief that reason was the slave of the passions was pure inanity. What is peculiar about Smith’s initial reception is that leading physiocrats did not appear to realize that an enemy was in their midst. The self-confidence of their approach to human sociability was marked, and it is possible that the subtleties of Smith’s arguments were unappreciated. Morellet recognized this in finding ‘some excellent things’ in addition to evidence of ‘the Scottish subtlety’.<sup>26</sup> The format of the book, as unlike the typical French treatise as it was possible to be, clearly played a major role. Smith consciously avoided systematic argument, and to French minds this spelled disorder. A clash of cultural values is evident in this instance, and a deep disagreement existed about

<sup>25</sup> On Smith’s French friends, see John Rae, *Life of Adam Smith*, ed. J. Viner (1895; New York, 1965), ch. 14; I. S. Ross, *The Life of Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1995), 364–80.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to Lord Shelburne, 12 Mar. 1776, in *Lettres de l’Abbé Morellet à Lord Shelburne*, ed. E. G. Fitzmaurice (Paris, 1898), 105.



the pursuit of human science in general — one that was noted by almost every French commentator. As Say later put it:

The work of Smith is nothing more than a confused assemblage of the soundest principles of Political Economy supported by illuminating examples, and of the most curious elements of Statistics combined with instructive reflections; but it is a complete treatise neither of the one nor of the other. His book is a vast chaos of just ideas, mixed haphazardly with positive ideas.<sup>27</sup>

Smith's attack on physiocracy as a flawed system, and his more specific refutation of the exclusive productivity of agriculture in the fourth book, were largely ignored. The more direct, rhetorically extreme, attacks upon physiocracy, by Galiani, Necker, Mably and Linguet among others, were seen as far greater impediments to the success of the doctrine at Versailles.

Given these priorities it is unsurprising that initially Smith was infrequently cited. It is highly significant that Condorcet's *Vie de Turgot* of 1786 states that the book was 'too little known in Europe'.<sup>28</sup> When Smith was mentioned, or more frequently plagiarized without reference, it was in response to particular needs in the midst of specific intellectual controversies. In 1784, for example, passages were used as the basis for Guillaume Grivel's articles on debt and credit in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* volumes on *Économie politique*.<sup>29</sup> Smith's ideas about public finance quickly became points of reference for writers involved in the debates which stemmed from Calonne's tampering with the value of gold in 1785, and the Anglo-French commercial treaty of the same year. Dupont was directly involved in these negotiations, and attempts to portray Smith as a physiocrat probably date from this time.<sup>30</sup> In a letter to Smith of June 1788, accompanying his pamphlet written in support of the commercial treaty, Dupont treated Smith as a fellow defender of free trade and opponent of mercantile war. He did not mention any division of opinion with regard to political economy, and coupled Smith and the physiocrats together in the 'march towards a fine constitution' which he believed was the shared destiny of France, Britain and North

<sup>27</sup> Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, i, p. xii.

<sup>28</sup> *Œuvres de Condorcet*, ed. A. Condorcet O'Connor, 12 vols. (Paris, 1847–9), v, 45.

<sup>29</sup> *Encyclopédie méthodique: économie politique et diplomatique*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1784), ii, 147–55. I owe this information to Mike Sonenscher of King's College, Cambridge.

<sup>30</sup> *Mémoires sur la vie et les ouvrages de M. Turgot*, ed. Pierre-Samuel Dupont de Nemours (Philadelphia, 1782), 110.

America.<sup>31</sup> It is clear that Dupont regarded Smith's attacks on physiocracy as illogical and held to the patriotic opinion that those of Smith's ideas that were true, such as the interpretation of the division of labour, could in fact be traced to Turgot. Whether Turgot had had a direct influence over Smith remained unanswered, but from the mid-1780s onwards Dupont began to defend the view that Smith had been writing in the physiocratic tradition of economic argument.<sup>32</sup> As late as 1814 he wrote a letter to Jean-Baptiste Say stating that the criticism of physiocracy in the *Traité d'économie politique* made no sense, while adding: 'The fancy you have of disowning us, which, my dear Say, you cannot quite conceal, does not prevent you from being, by Smith's line, a grandson of Quesnay and a nephew of the great Turgot'.<sup>33</sup>

Röederer was convinced that debates in the Assembly of Notables over taxation first brought the *Wealth of Nations* to wider public attention, and it is clear that the reissue of Blavet's translation in 1788 aided this process. Interest in Smith was sufficiently great to inspire a new translation. Jean-Antoine Roucher, a minor poet, published his translation in four volumes in Paris under the auspices of the Buisson press in 1790–1. The abbé Blavet said it was plagiarized from his own work because Roucher could not understand English. Despite this, Roucher's translation was the basis of the extracts from the *Wealth of Nations* published in Condorcet's *Bibliothèque de l'homme public* in 1790. The translation was reissued as a book numerous times: in Avignon in 1791, in Neuchâtel in 1792, and in Paris in 1794, where it was slightly revised, and in Paris again in 1806. The revisions of Roucher's translation in 1794, which must have been completed before he fell victim to the Terror, might appear to be significant. They give the impression that the *Wealth of Nations* was again becoming important on the eve of Robespierre's fall.

<sup>31</sup> 'You have done much to speed this useful Revolution, the French *Économistes* will not have harmed it': *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. Mossner and Ross, 311–13.

<sup>32</sup> 'Observations sur les points dans lesquels Adam Smith est d'accord avec la théorie de M. Turgot, et sur ceux dans lesquels il s'en est écarté' (1809), in *Œuvres de Turgot*, ed. Dupont de Nemours, i, 67–71. For a review of the controversy, see P. D. Groenewegen, 'Turgot and Adam Smith', *Scot. J. Polit. Econ.*, xvi (1969); Donald Winch, 'Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Early Histories of Political Economy', in M. Albertone and A. Masoero (eds.), *Political Economy and National Realities* (Turin, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> *Œuvres diverses de J.-B. Say*, ed. L. F. E. Daire, C. Comte and H. Say (Paris, 1848), 366.

In fact, it is difficult to find a *philosophe* whose writings were not published in 1794–5; the revolutionaries' faith in rational education, together with concern over the possibility of creating a republic in a large state, led to an unparalleled issuing of works ancient and modern. The attempt to create a 'Thermidorean enlightenment' has been little noted by historians, but Smith's books were undoubtedly intended to be part of it.<sup>34</sup> Yet, in the case of the *Wealth of Nations*, it remains difficult to understand why the French were interested in the book at this time. Smith's work was nowhere portrayed as a systematic exposition of a new science called political economy. Rather, he was described either as a physiocrat or a source of good ideas with disparate applications: a student, as one reviewer put it, of 'the system of social economy', embracing every aspect of the 'government of large empires'.<sup>35</sup> While we lack information regarding ordinary readers' responses to Smith, and while the majority of citations were superficial, Sismondi's verdict in *De la richesse commerciale* was not altogether correct. Patterns of interpretation began to emerge with the publication of anti-physiocratic perspectives on the reform of France at the end of the 1780s: these were distinctive because they opposed royal sovereignty, the example of Britain's constitution, and the versions of mixed government associated with the *parlements*.

### III

French interpretations of Smith as an opponent of physiocracy begin with the writings of Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès. In 1775 his 'Lettres aux économistes sur leur système de politique et de morale' was approved by the censor; but it was never published, probably because of Turgot's fall from power. It became the basis for a longer study of the problems of the French monarchy and their possible solution, and it is in the notes that were added to the original work that Smith plays a prominent role.<sup>36</sup> This

<sup>34</sup> On the 'Thermidorean enlightenment', see Martin S. Staum, *Minerva's Message: Stabilizing the French Revolution* (Montreal and Kingston, 1996); James Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001).

<sup>35</sup> J. Le Breton, review of Roucher's translation, in Ginguéné *et al.* (eds.), *La Décade philosophique, politique et littéraire*, v, 401–9. See also Ginguéné's review of Blavet's translation, *ibid.*, xxviii, 8–11.

<sup>36</sup> These, and other important notes from Sieyès's papers in the Archives nationales de France (284AP 1–19), have been published in *Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès: écrits*

(cont. on p. 76)

role became public when Sieyès revealed what he variously entitled the ‘social art’, ‘science of politics’, ‘social science’ or ‘science of the social order’, in the *Vues sur les moyens d’exécution*, *Essai sur les privilèges*, and *Qu’est-ce que le Tiers État?*, which proved so influential in 1789.<sup>37</sup> From the perspective of Smith’s French reception, Sieyès is important because he distinguished between Smith and all of the physiocrats, including Turgot. He was also among the first writers to employ Smith’s ideas in justifying radical constitutional change.

Sieyès’s most famous act was to persuade the members of the third estate in the Estates General of 1789, and members elected from the other two orders who would join them, to declare themselves representatives of the sovereign nation. National sovereignty became the watchword of the new order thereafter established. In the recent past this term had been used to justify possible divisions of political authority between kings and *parlements*, kings and estates, and between the king and the people. Sieyès’s achievement was to sever the link with these corporatist perspectives on the body politic. National sovereignty now signified a unified but abstract being — the nation — as represented by a political body, the members of the self-proclaimed ‘national assembly’. The first aspect of national sovereignty highlighted by Sieyès was the representative system it entailed. The second was civil equality, because the nation could never maintain itself in the midst of privileged classes or castes. It became essential to reorganize France into equal administrative units under a central government and legislature. The nation thus became a homogeneous political entity standing above other political actors. Following Hobbes, Sieyès argued that a free and stable society could only be established if the sovereign reigned over all of the component parts of the political realm. Neither the people acting as a body, nor the landed proprietors, the monarch, merchants, or capitalists, could be entrusted with ultimate political authority. National sovereignty did not, evidently, mean popular sover-

(n. 36 cont.)

*politiques*, ed. Roberto Zapperi (Paris, 1985) and *Des manuscrits de Sieyès, 1773–1799*, ed. Christine Fauré, Jacques Gilhaumou and Jacques Valier (Paris, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> On Sieyès, see Pasquale Pasquino, *Sieyès et l’invention de la constitution en France* (Paris, 1998); Murray Forsyth, *Reason and Revolution: The Political Thought of the Abbé Sieyès* (Leicester, 1987); Keith-Michael Baker, ‘Sieyès’, in François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1988); William H. Sewell, *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: The Abbé Sieyès and ‘What is the Third Estate?’* (Durham, NC, 1994).

eignty. Sieyès was as implacably opposed to democracy as he was to the sovereignty of a hereditary monarch. He continued to try to establish what he called a 'republican monarchy' or 'monarchical republic', despite his belief that the National Assembly had betrayed him, in the autumn of 1789, by nationalizing the property of the Church, and by giving the king a suspensive veto over acts of law. It was ever more apparent as the decade progressed that there was a large gap between what Sieyès intended for France and the more popular philosophy imputed to him by many leading revolutionaries. Uncertainty about his actual beliefs came to a head after his involvement with Bonaparte in the creation of the Consulate in 1799. Sieyès's complicated political metaphysics will not be examined in any detail here;<sup>38</sup> discussion will be limited to showing how Sieyès employed Smith's work in the formulation of the idea of the sovereignty of the nation in 1789.

Sieyès followed both Smith and the physiocrats in recognizing the need to combat the tendency of modern commercial societies to become amoral arenas dominated by merchants, aristocrats, or despots. Like them, he had little faith in remedies associated with the restoration of classical republicanism, Christian charity, or the community of goods. What impressed Sieyès most about Smith's work was the evaluation of different forms of government by reference to the protection of private property and extent of individual liberty. In Sieyès's eyes, Smith had usefully moved beyond the debate about the respective merits of republics or monarchies. Sieyès attacked physiocracy in the first place for similar reasons to those of Smith. Indeed, he claimed priority, noting that his criticism had been formed in 1770.<sup>39</sup> The physiocrats supported the social structure that most suited an agricultural kingdom and believed this to be the best for France. They were mistaken, he argued, because of the necessity of establishing a commercial society founded on the productive power of labour if modern states were to maintain order and defend themselves. The physiocratic division of society into productive agricultural and sterile commercial and manufacturing classes was condemned as a vestige of feudalism:

<sup>38</sup> The best recent studies are Sonenscher, 'Nation's Debt and the Birth of the Modern Republic'; Hont, 'Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind'.

<sup>39</sup> *Sieyès: écrits politiques*, ed. Zapperi, 81.

The arts and commerce have caused us to progress towards independence, they have liberated men from feudal servitude, and multiplied the classes which the aristocracy wants to reduce to three alone. Pastoral nations have only two [classes]: proprietors and their servants; feudal society has three, including a class of domestic servants because the proprietors are idle. Commerce establishes ten, twenty, or more.<sup>40</sup>

Sieyès claimed that the most important movement in modern history was 'the conversion of the largest part of the toiling class, who were forced to provide personal services, into free artisans who produce tangible wealth'. This had been responsible for 'the prosperity of modern nations' and was in opposition to 'all the different kinds of idleness' epitomized by the landed aristocracy venerated by the physiocrats. Sieyès outlined a conjectural history describing how a multitude became a democratically governed society before the progress of commerce and the increasing size of the state made it necessary to establish a modern nation: a single body with a will, governed by 'indirect democracy' or the system of representation. Smith's description of the natural progress of opulence, in the third and fourth books of the *Wealth of Nations*, clearly played a large role in Sieyès's work.

Not for the last time among French interpreters, however, Sieyès refused to count himself Smith's disciple. This was because of the second part of his attack on physiocracy. In associating the rational exercise of authority with the landed class, the physiocrats were establishing what Sieyès called a 'ré-privée' rather than a legitimate society, which he called a 'ré-publique'. They were creating an aristocracy from a contingent group in society, which had no natural right to exercise sovereignty. At the same time he rejected Smith's cautious approach to politics founded on the claim that the British constitution was on the whole suited to commerce. Sieyès held this to be insufficient. Political procedures and constitutional mechanisms could be found that would genuinely increase the liberty and happiness experienced in society. Sieyès's imaginative conclusion was that Smithian politics and physiocratic projects amounted to defences of the political supremacy of the landed elite. Despite themselves, they were anglophiles. An alternative solution had to be found that would combat 'the unfortunate descent into commercial greed'.

Sieyès claimed that he had 'gone beyond Smith' in 'recognizing the distribution of large professions or trades as the true principle

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

of the progress of the social state'. What Sieyès meant by this was that the division of labour had altered the social structure of modern society and made imperative political change in accordance with this movement. Smith, because of his British prejudices, had failed to acknowledge that modern constitutions had to ensure 'the representation of labour'.<sup>41</sup> Sieyès explained that the division of labour *was* a representative system. Those who served the individual by producing goods were akin to those who made political decisions. Applying the division of labour to political life required the separation of powers, and an absolute distinction between the making of law and its execution. Law was to be made by legislators indirectly elected from the body of the people. The execution of law was to be overseen by a single representative, the Bourbon king. All those involved in politics, as representatives, could lose their positions if the national will asserted itself and judged them to be failing in carrying out their duties. Such a view of politics had two important consequences. The first was that the popular element of the constitution had to be limited to association with the abstract body or nation. Democracy was a flawed system of government because it was backward-looking, and incompatible with the division of labour as it had developed in all walks of life. The second was that political stability was fostered by Sieyès's representative system because of the division of labour. Commercial ties between individuals created groups with interests who were able to express those interests through the representative system. In this way what Montesquieu had called 'intermediary powers' were established between the government and the people; they were conducive to a culture of peace and moderation. In an argument reminiscent of Madison's tenth *Federalist*, Sieyès argued that his republic was most suited to large states in which expansive commerce would be coupled with greater means of self-defence.

Sieyès was confident that by such means a 'moral civilization' would emerge, composed of 'honest people'. Citizens would be independent, but at the same time they would be able to recognize their need for social ties and the duties that accompanied them. One of the first roles he identified for national legislators was 'to enlighten men about their happiness'. This entailed fixing the meaning of the term 'industry' to make apparent the difference

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

between productive industry and 'false riches, those of secondary importance, and especially wasteful, destructive, or ruinous wealth'.<sup>42</sup> Once these had been outlawed, it would be possible to create a more egalitarian society because commerce would tend towards greater material equality. With the progress of commerce and the division of labour, goods would become cheap enough to increase the real wages of the labouring classes.<sup>43</sup> It is likely that Smith would have classed such a development of his ideas as another example of a utopian system, with Sieyès being castigated as a French Richard Price. The difference was that national sovereignty became a political reality in 1789.

At the same time as Sieyès was propagating his unorthodox modern republicanism, equally radical constitutional innovators were using Smith's ideas to ensure that physiocracy did not win the day in the Estates General. From the mid-1780s a group of writers in Paris, gathered around the Genevan banker Étienne Clavière, began to develop distinctive solutions to the twin problems of national decline and financial crisis. Clavière had been exiled from his homeland after involvement in the failed revolution of 1782, which had been put down by French troops. After becoming a British subject (when the short-lived possibility arose of creating a 'new Geneva' in Ireland), Clavière finally settled in Paris. He did this for two reasons: first, to extend his personal fortune by speculation on the Paris Bourse; and secondly, to promote his imaginative projects for the reform of modern states, large and small.<sup>44</sup> While his eye remained on Geneva, which he wanted to make more democratic, he realized that revolution in a small state was contingent upon its acceptance by larger monarchical neighbours. His personal wealth allowed him to employ distinguished polemicists to address such problems. Jacques-Pierre Brissot was one of the leading figures who followed Clavière's lead. Another, always less pliant, was Gabriel-Honoré Riquetti de Mirabeau, the son of the great physiocrat. The

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> On Clavière, see Richard Whatmore, 'Commerce, Constitutions, and the Manners of a Nation: Étienne Clavière's Revolutionary Political Economy, 1788–93', *Hist. European Ideas*, xxii (1996); Richard Whatmore and James Livesey, 'Étienne Clavière, Jacques-Pierre Brissot et les fondations intellectuelles de la politique des Girondins', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, cxxi (2000).



resulting writings sought a new constitution for France. In these writings Smith loomed large.

The Clavière circle agreed with Sieyès that France had to continue to embrace commerce in order to generate public revenues and ultimately gain political stability. They also accepted that the physiocratic diagnosis of the ills of the state represented a step away from civilization. With Sieyès, they blamed the French nobility in particular for the French malaise.<sup>45</sup> The political economy of the Clavière circle was, however, more orthodox with respect to their republicanism. Unlike Sieyès, they believed that it was possible to create a state founded on popular sovereignty, in which the people could be trusted to make the law and defend their liberties. This view derived from a distinction between two types of commercial state. The first was dominated by monarch and nobility, and described France in the late 1780s. Its commerce was accordingly founded on trade in luxury goods. The second was the popular state, the democratic or aristocratic republic, in which a more egalitarian social system had been established. Civil equality was here sustained by forms of trade catering for the needs of the masses rather than the elite; such forms were also compatible with austere republican morals. The distinction between *commerce d'économie* and *commerce de luxe* had been made in the twenty-first book of Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois*. Clavière interpreted Montesquieu as a writer who had explored the possibility of creating a commercial republic in a large state. Although he had ultimately rejected the notion, Montesquieu had rightly identified the key as the transformation of the culture of a state into one which embraced republican commercial values. Clavière believed this question had also been addressed in writings by the Baron d'Holbach in the 1760s, such as *Le Système social*, and also in the various editions of Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes* in the 1770s.<sup>46</sup> The point that these authors refused to make was that France had the potential to become a popular state whose commerce was characterized by morality and

<sup>45</sup> Comte de Mirabeau [and Étienne Clavière], *De la caisse d'escompte* (Paris, 1785), i–v; Étienne Clavière and Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *De la France et des États-Unis, ou de l'importance de la révolution de l'Amérique pour le bonheur de la France* (1788; Paris, 1791), 2, 45, 106, 116; [Jacques-Pierre Brissot], *Point de banqueroute, ou lettre à un créancier de l'état, sur l'impossibilité de la banqueroute nationale, & sur les moyens de ramener le crédit & la paix* (London and Paris, 1787), 20, 36.

<sup>46</sup> Letter to Jean-André Deluc, 16 June 1774, Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Genève, J.-A. Deluc papers, MS fr. 2463, fos. 105–8.

moderation. Clavière, in publications written with Brissot in particular, began to argue that France had to move in this direction if she was to remain a leading power in Europe.<sup>47</sup> What is interesting about this claim is that Smith was marshalled in support of it. Clavière and Brissot held that Smith's attack on the mercantile system in the fourth book of the *Wealth of Nations* reflected their distinction. They perceived Smith to have been arguing that moral and moderate commerce was being destroyed in Britain, and that the country was being weakened both politically and economically as a consequence.

Clavière and Brissot used the *Wealth of Nations* against *De l'esprit des lois*. They argued that Montesquieu had been mistaken in his view that commerce based on *luxe* could never become characterized by *économie*. The abolition of aristocracy in France was the central means of accomplishing this goal. Such social engineering was intended to be gradual. Like Smith, they accepted that the imperfect world of human motivation meant that speedy legislative change would be both futile and dangerous. This was one of the reasons why they opposed Sieyès.<sup>48</sup> Social and political change had to be eased by a prior transformation of culture, particularly popular culture. Smith was time and again cited as a closet republican, a fellow enemy of Britain's commercial civilization and an advocate of moderate commerce.<sup>49</sup> There were striking links between this view of Smith and that of Thomas Paine.<sup>50</sup> Paine, as is well known, became close to Brissot in the early 1790s.

In 1789, Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was interpreted as supportive of constitutional innovation. He was embraced by the victor in the Estates General, Sieyès, those supportive of popular sovereignty, and the physiocrats themselves. In short, all sides of patriotic opposition to the ministries and the crown claimed Smith as one of their own. What is most surprising is his role in plans to transform France, and other large monarchies, into republics. The early years of the Revolution did not alter these perceptions.

<sup>47</sup> Clavière and Brissot, *De la France et des États-Unis*, 130–3.

<sup>48</sup> J.-P. Brissot de Warville, *Plan de conduite pour les députés du peuple aux États-Généraux de 1789* (Paris, 1789), 37–40.

<sup>49</sup> [Étienne] Clavière, *Opinions d'un créancier de l'État sur quelques matières de finance importantes dans le moment actuel* (Paris and London, 1789), epigraph, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Whatmore, "A Gigantic Manliness": Paine's Republicanism in the 1790s', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (eds.), *Economy, Polity and Society: British Intellectual History, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000).

With the collapse of the constitution of 1791 the members of Clavière's circle were in a strong position to criticize the constitution-builders of October 1789 for creating an impolitic mixture of monarchy and democracy. They took advantage of the King's flight from Paris in April 1791 and played a major role in the establishment of the First Republic in September 1792. Smith was again cited as a republican *avant la lettre*. Dupont de Nemours, and his fellow physiocrat Germain Garnier, continued to use Smith's ideas to support physiocratic administrative reforms. They argued that Smith would have advocated the sovereignty of the landed classes in 1789, believing as they did that this mirrored Smith's conception of a reformed British constitution.<sup>51</sup>

#### IV

Alternatives to these interpretations began to develop with the growth of pessimism about the success of constitutional change. Certain critics of the initial stages of the Revolution had long argued that changing the form of government of the state would fail if measures were not concurrently taken to enlighten popular and elite culture. One of the leading exponents of this line of argument, the Marquis de Condorcet, demanded from 1790 onwards that if the Revolution did not create an educational system capable of fostering reason and virtue in the general populace then France would not long avoid civil war. To prevent this outcome he organized the publication of a series of extracts from the works of eminent philosophers, including Smith, that were deemed sufficient to convince recalcitrant subjects to embrace virtue and become citizens. The *Bibliothèque de l'homme public*, as the series was termed, also promised a critique of some of the extracts published, and the first volume declared that Condorcet himself would soon be publishing an assessment of the 'system of social science' contained in the *Wealth of Nations*.<sup>52</sup>

Historians have long been perplexed by Condorcet's failure to deliver his account of Smith, particularly as nothing in

<sup>51</sup> P. S. Dupont de Nemours, *Examen du gouvernement d'Angleterre, comparé aux constitutions des États-Unis* (London, 1789), 137; Germain Garnier, *De la propriété dans ses rapports avec le droit politique* (Paris, 1792), 80.

<sup>52</sup> *Bibliothèque de l'homme public, ou analyse raisonnée des principaux ouvrages français et étrangers, sur la politique en général, la législation, les finances, la police, l'agriculture et le commerce en particulier*, 28 vols. (Paris, 1790–2), i, 1; iii, 108–216; iv, 3–115.

Condorcet's private papers has suggested that he ever commenced an analysis of the *Wealth of Nations*. It has generally been assumed that the events of the Revolution, developing as they did into civil and international war, caused Condorcet to move on to other issues. This is not the case, however, since he maintained his faith in the necessity of educational transformation. It was the central demand of all his works from 1792 to his death in 1794, including the posthumously published *Esquisse d'un tableau historique de l'esprit humain* (1795). An alternative explanation is possible. Perhaps Condorcet abandoned the study of the *Wealth of Nations* because he had begun to focus on the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as a more pertinent text for the examination of political culture and the means of moralizing it. The book had been praised by the *Journal encyclopédique* in October 1760 for 'respecting religion and . . . radiating virtue'. A translation was published in 1764 by Marc-Antoine Eidous. A revised edition appeared in 1770 with the title *Métaphysique de l'âme*, but the translation was poor and that of Blavet in 1774–5, from the second English edition, little better. The book appears to have attracted more attention in English: Sieyès owned a copy by 1790, and reportedly declared 'it is an astonishingly good book'.<sup>53</sup> Rœderer borrowed this in the first year of the Revolution and, by the time France became a republic, was arguing that the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was of far greater import for France than the *Wealth of Nations*. He described it as being 'the most excellent collection of observations through which the science of morals has ever been enriched'.<sup>54</sup> As the transformation of popular culture came to the centre of revolutionary debate, interest in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* blossomed. Significantly, it was also at this time that Condorcet's wife, Sophie Grouchy, began her translation of Smith's book, which finally appeared with her six letters on sympathy in 1798. What was of particular interest to the French was the English edition of 1790, and especially the new sections 'on the corruption of our moral sentiments, which is occasioned by our disposition to admire the rich and the great, and to despise or neglect persons of poor or mean condition'.

<sup>53</sup> Notes on *Théorie des sentiments moraux*, in *Œuvres de Rœderer*, iv, 495–7.

<sup>54</sup> Pierre-Louis Rœderer, *Cours de l'organisation sociale*, repr. *ibid.*, viii, 188–200; review of Sophie Grouchy-Condorcet, *Lettres sur la sympathie*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1798), *ibid.*, iv, 499, from *Journal de Paris*, 26 Messidor an VI.

Smith became important because he explored the possibility of making individuals who had been brought up in corrupt political cultures virtuous and fraternal. He was held to be innovative because he had derived a theory of moral action from sources other than Hobbes or Helvétius. This was made clear in Røederer's *Cours d'organisation sociale*, presented as a series of public lectures at the Lycée in the spring of 1793.<sup>55</sup> Røederer confessed that his work was written 'from the tomb' as it had the aim of confronting 'the doctrine of demagogy' of the dominant Jacobins.<sup>56</sup> The lectures thus formulated an extensive critique of republicanism derived from ancient sources, called by Røederer 'l'antiqu'archie', which he believed to be intellectually responsible for the policy of Robespierre's 'modern levellers'.<sup>57</sup> Røederer was impressed by Condorcet's emphasis on teaching individuals, and especially children, to reason independently, and by the demand that the moral and political sciences be modelled on the natural sciences. He more strongly agreed with Sieyès that the force of habit was greater than that of reason, and consequently that institutions to instil the republican virtues by repetition and commemoration were at least as important as *écoles primaires*. What distinguished Røederer's view was the argument that manners could be precisely defined for successful living and that the republican legislator, through exact physiological knowledge of the workings of human nature, could develop strategies to ensure the propagation and stability of such manners. As a result he believed he was 'doing something new' by 'observing for the first time the things which exist before the eyes of the world', and in the process developing a new form of republicanism for moderns.<sup>58</sup>

The revolutionaries had been creating new laws without the prior establishment of cultural foundations. Røederer wanted to place manners 'next to enlightenment and public opinion, as means of reviving or replacing laws which are ancient or exhausted', developing institutions founded on 'the moral and physiological nature of man'.<sup>59</sup> His new moral science was, he

<sup>55</sup> On Røederer, see R. Scurr, 'Social Equality in Pierre-Louis Røederer's Interpretation of the Modern Republic', *Hist. European Ideas*, xxvi (2000); R. Scurr, 'The Social Foundations of the Modern Republic: P.-L. Røederer's *Cours d'organisation sociale*' (Univ. of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> 'Notice sur ma vie pour mes enfants', in *Œuvres de Røederer*, iii, 287.

<sup>57</sup> *Cours d'organisation sociale*, repr. *ibid.*, viii, 134, 179.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 149–52.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 131, 182.

claimed, indebted to ‘the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the first book to reconstruct the true foundations of morals, by analysing the phenomena of the heart in its entirety in order to discover the principles that direct it’.<sup>60</sup> This said, Røederer’s analysis of the springs of social organization — the moral and physical faculties — was closer to Helvétius’s *De l’homme*. Røederer was certain that the passions could be directed, making them virtues or vices when assessed by reference to public interest, because of ‘the spirit which enlightens us’, the rational or calculating faculty which sought the safety and interest of the self. This could be reinforced or overruled by a still more powerful force, the ‘moral habits or manners learned in infancy’. Røederer acknowledged that this force was of little importance in contemporary France, but wanted to show that ‘social institutions can act upon men, and make them fulfil their common duties . . . the legislator can ensure that the only actions open to the will are useful and virtuous’.<sup>61</sup> The practices associated with the impassioned pursuit of wealth, glory, love, or power, could be directed towards virtuous or vicious deeds.

At the root of Røederer’s analysis was a belief that virtuous actions and egalitarian social structures would best secure the ‘safety’ which all humans sought by protecting property and giving the greatest scope to liberty. He believed that humans were motivated by self-interest towards this end in all their actions. This was where he parted company with Smith. He acknowledged that he was writing in the contrary tradition of ‘Pufendorf, Hobbes, Mandeville, La Rochefoucauld, and Helvétius’. The existence of a spontaneous moral sense or ‘universal benevolence’, which he imputed to Smith, was absolutely denied.<sup>62</sup> The faculty of sympathizing or identifying with the pain of others became one more example of ‘rational benevolence’ or ‘the enlightened and perfected reason which determines the happiness of men’.<sup>63</sup> The danger of the idea of sympathy in Smith was its use in an attack upon the possibility of social equality. Smith had argued that the poor accepted their position in society

<sup>60</sup> Review of *Ouvrages posthumes d’Adam Smith*, ed. Prévost, *ibid.*, iv, 494–5, from *Journal de Paris*, 20 Thermidor an V.

<sup>61</sup> *Cours d’organisation sociale*, in *Œuvres de Røederer*, viii, 185.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 187–91. Spontaneous moral sense and universal benevolence were of course more characteristic of Hutcheson and Reid, and at odds with what Smith and Hume contended.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

because of their sympathy with the successes of the ambitious, the powerful and the wealthy. Roederer claimed that this amounted to a justification of the social hierarchies of the *Ancien Régime*, and was both dangerous and based on a misunderstanding of the love of acquisitiveness. He explained that deference was a product of the corrupted manners of an inegalitarian society rather than a universal social fact; given the prevalence of virtuous manners, acquisitiveness could be positive in its effects. Smith's view was a vain illusion; the artisans would never be satisfied with low wages because of sympathy with their masters.<sup>64</sup>

Sophie Grouchy-Condorcet confessed to an equal fascination with Smith, and also identified him as the most useful *philosophe* for the French revolutionaries. She too, however, found Smith wanting. Her translation was accompanied by letters on sympathy intended to clarify Smith's ideas and to relate them to the problems faced by the revolutionaries. She sought to explain why crowds gathered at the guillotine, and to examine the moral consequences of regicide. This commentary revealed that Grouchy's aim was in fact to justify her dead husband's project of formulating a rational system of education capable of creating 'an almost irresistible tendency for all men to embrace virtue'. As a consequence, she adhered to a rigid conception of the virtues themselves, the nature of happiness and what she called the 'moral constitution' as a whole.<sup>65</sup> The notion of a common idea of justice, or a rational faculty able to determine the moral content of sensations, was of course anathema to Smith, and Grouchy unsurprisingly held that Smith's idea of sympathy and the role of convention made little sense. Smith became interesting to the French when sympathy was translated as conscience, and his detailed examination of the conditions in which this characteristic could be exercised was of particular importance because it allowed the French to fit Smith into arguments about 'the warping of the moral sentiments by social institutions'.<sup>66</sup> Once again, Smith's rejection of 'natural equality' was described as mistaken. The potential existence of a transformed republican individual living a happy and moral life was recognized to be a notion Smith would have considered beyond the pale. A world without social unequal-

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 200. See also the review of Madame de Staël, *De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur et les nations*, repr. *ibid.*, iv, 473–94.

<sup>65</sup> Grouchy-Condorcet, *Lettres sur la sympathie*, ii, 433, 463–5.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 459, 467.

ities and deference would certainly have struck him as irregular and fantastic.

## V

In the early years of the nineteenth century a further shift of interest occurred. The *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was once more held to be less significant than the *Wealth of Nations*. This was shown by the republication of Blavet's translation of the latter book, and the appearance of Garnier's, surpassing all prior versions.<sup>67</sup> The change paralleled the movement of revolutionary debate away from national manners. Napoleon's re-establishment of a regime based on social hierarchy, clerical control over popular mores, and nugatory political liberty, was crucial for perceptions of Smith. Republican constitutionalism having failed, the *Wealth of Nations* became one of the key texts which revealed to legislators the means to make good citizens, not by forcing them to be virtuous but by creating conditions in which citizens would enjoy a moderate income and thereby become independent. In many respects the Smith that emerged was the one we would recognize today. He was described, for the first time consistently, as the founder of a new science. As Garnier acknowledged with chagrin, Smith had become *the* opponent of physiocracy. Furthermore, the *Wealth of Nations* was seen to be his definitive work. But it was not the case, as Pierre-Louis Ginguené wrote, and so many historians have assumed, that Smith was in any simple way victorious.<sup>68</sup> The central claim of this essay can be reaffirmed, because Smith's political economy continued to be used to justify starkly contrasting perspectives on morals and politics.

Rœderer, now a loyal lieutenant of the Empire, used Smith to defend a narrow franchise based on mobile property. Smith thereby became a supporter of Bonaparte.<sup>69</sup> Say and Sismondi were more critical of the new regime, and their references to the

<sup>67</sup> *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations d'Adam Smith, traduction nouvelle avec les notes et les observations*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1802). Garnier's translation was reprinted in 1810 (although this continued to be dated 1802), 1822 and 1843.

<sup>68</sup> Review of Smith, *Essais philosophiques*, ed. P. Prévost, in Ginguené *et al.* (eds.), *La Décade philosophique, politique et littéraire*, xv, 336–43.

<sup>69</sup> Rœderer, 'Mémoires sur quelques points d'économie publique, lus au Lycée, en 1800 et 1801', in *Œuvres de Rœderer*, viii, 41–97.



*Wealth of Nations* implicitly attacked the mercantile empire of the burgeoning Continental System. Smith was once more described as a supporter of a moralized commercial society, created by legislative endeavour.<sup>70</sup> The hidden hand was conspicuous by its absence in these accounts of Smith's political economy. Within a decade Smith was being used by Benjamin Constant, in his *Principes de politique* (1815), to recommend to France the British model of politics and political economy, a view abhorred by Say in *De l'Angleterre et des Anglais* (1816). Constant was well aware that using Smith to defend commercial society as the counterpart of a representative system in politics was to make Smith a Scottish Sieyès.<sup>71</sup> At the same time Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon was arguing that Smith had been the first to recognize the need for a new political system conducive to *industrie*.<sup>72</sup> It is likely that in his formulation of what became known as socialism, Saint-Simon was also following the logic of Sieyès rather than Smith. It was yet another French perception of which Smith would surely have disapproved.

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution: An Intellectual History of Jean-Baptiste Say's Political Economy* (Oxford, 2000), ch. 8.

<sup>71</sup> Biancamaria Fontana, *Benjamin Constant and the Post-Revolutionary Mind* (New Haven, 1991), ch. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Henri Saint-Simon, 'Moyen constitutionnel d'augmenter les richesses de la France', *L'Industrie ou discussions politiques, morales et philosophiques*, ii, ch. 7, in *Œuvres de Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1869), iii, 152–8.