[Book Review]

**Ryuzo Kuroki and Yusuke Ando, eds.,
*The Foundations of Political Economy and Social Reform:
Economy and Society in Eighteenth Century France***

London and New York: Routledge, 2018, viii + 202 pp.

In this book, Ryuzo Kuroki and Yusuke Ando aim to re-examine the diversity of what they term the “political economy” of 18th century France, and its relation to social reform. With regard to diversity, they emphasise that the 18th century political economy can be viewed in a “holistic way” (1), as an “interdisciplinary” knowledge on production, distribution, and consumption of wealth, connected with moral philosophy, natural jurisprudence, political theory, and the history of societal progress.

This is a seminal approach; all the proposed contributions are interesting as they illustrate this period of Enlightenment when economic knowledge was not separate from the other sciences related to man and society, and when the authors were still hesitant what to name it. Certainly, not all the contributors establish a direct and immediate link between the theoretical corpus of the authors they study and its relationship with other sciences, or the programme of social reform that it envisages. Some papers are more analytical, while some are more contextualised. Nevertheless, the whole is very rich and reflects the development of this knowledge in gestation, in a balanced way. Some readers may point out the absence of some writers; however, the

overview appears comprehensive to us, representing the different ways of conceiving economic knowledge during the Enlightenment in 18th century France.

The papers are arranged chronologically. The first paper, written by Antoin Murphy, concerns Law and Cantillon, two similar yet distinct reflections on money, credit, and the banking system. According to both authors, the economy is based on the landlord's primacy. In Law's view, the economy arises from barter as the landlord introduces money to encourage employment and develop the manufacturing sector. Likewise, in Cantillon's view, everything begins with the landlord who leaves the “command economy” for the “market economy” (14); obviously, he retains his power through his expenditure decisions, while permitting entrepreneurs to act freely. Distinguishing the two authors, Law's optimism that money influences the economy, contrasts with Cantillon's pessimism and mistrust of adventurous financial innovations, potentially disconnecting the monetary economy from the real economy.

The following two papers pertain to the science of commerce. The first, written by Yoshie Kawade, concerns the *abbé* Le Blanc. Basically, Le Blanc questions whether France can become a trading

nation on a par with England. While the influence of Montesquieu and Hume is important in this context, Melon may be mentioned as well. Most importantly, Kawade states the following inflection in Le Blanc's thought, leading him from Montesquieu to Gournay: England is the model for France (as it has abandoned the temptation to constitute an empire on land), and an obstacle (as it has claimed to control world trade). Shohei Yoneda's paper deals with Forbonnais and his vision of an "industrious society," i.e. a society comprising individuals who pursue their happiness and consumer desires by producing and exchanging. Thus, once again everything is initiated by agriculture and the surplus generated by this activity, thereby boosting the spiral of production and the hierarchy of desires up to luxury. Yoneda terms this "productivism," i.e. the growth of the active population associated with the increase in the purchasing power of this population. Forbonnais' science of commerce advocates freedom inside and protection outside. In foreign trade, free competition is insufficient; protection is necessary because trade relations driven by jealousy and suspicion may not carry out the interdependence of participants or sectors and the reciprocity of desires.

The next three papers concern the *Economists*. In the first paper, Yusuke Ando discusses the *Economists'* attempt to move away from the view held by the science of commerce that war is a recurring stage in international relations, caused by the rivalry between nations. Initially defining war as a costly expense detri-

mental to enrichment, as it does not return to agriculture, Quesnay and his followers show a preference for maritime and defensive warfare that is easier to finance; in a second phase they reject the idea of war and demand more peaceful international relations based on a common European market to replace the old system of the balance of power. In his paper, Philippe Steiner presents "physiocracy" as an economic philosophy, i.e. a corpus that unifies a sensualist theory of knowledge, a theory of self-interested behaviour justifying profit and utilitarian action, and a theory of the legislator with the key concept of "economic government." Using this term, Quesnay places the economic question at the apex of government to avoid entrusting it to a subordinate administration, and fractional interests. Subsequently, he focusses it on the exclusive productivity of agriculture, on the liberalisation of trade, and on a tax system that does not harm the agricultural production. Finally, he entrusts its application to the proprietors of landed estate, through the provincial assemblies responsible for establishing a direct link between the sovereign and citizen-owners. Gianni Vaggi's paper presents Quesnay as one of the founders of the classical political economy whose ideas (on advances and net product) were occasionally established more clearly than those of Smith. Therefore, according to Vaggi, the decline of physiocracy may be linked to a deficiency in their political theory and their agrarian view of the market society rather than a deficiency in their economic analysis.

In his paper, Ryuzo Kuroki presents

Turgot as the link between Quesnay and Smith, with regard to the formation of the classical political economy. Turgot borrows the *bon prix*, the logic of the *Tableau economique*, and the freedom of trade concept from Quesnay. However, he rejects the sterility of industry and proposes a more homogeneous theory of profit that remunerates sectors uniformly, a theory of capital competition, a theory of market prices tending in the long run towards the fundamental price; this doctrinal set brings him closer to Smith.

Christophe Salvat questions whether Rousseau should be considered an economist. He includes Rousseau among the writers of essays on the political economy of 18th century France, even if he has not created a system of political economy, and dissociated economic issues from political ones. In some of his books, Rousseau is a “political economist” in the 18th century context. Viewing modern societies as corrupt, Rousseau believes that modern man cannot claim his citizenship (implying allegiance to the common good); he may claim only his personal happiness (which is an economic purpose).

In her paper, Sayaka Oki reveals two meanings of the term “economy” in this period: either the administration of a domain or a community of citizens, or the use of natural resources. The former meaning is related to law, moral philosophy, and politics. This is the meaning used by Rousseau. The latter meaning is related to the science of applying elements to nature for meeting human needs, the science of production, agronomy, and so on. This is the meaning indicated in

Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopedie*. The author expresses the reluctant acceptance of the term political economy. The Academy of Sciences has barely promoted it, favouring rustic economy or agronomy instead. Condorcet has merged it with political arithmetic to form a broader rubric of Moral and Political Sciences. Political economy, in its current sense, has gained a more official status only during the French Revolution. Thus, it has emerged as a new science, presumably, for a new society.

The last paper is peculiar as it concerns Pierre Prevost, an author more influenced by the British rather than French political economy, and whose economic writings extend well into the 19th century. Hiroshi Kitami describes him as a disseminator of ideas, widely recognised in several networks. He indicates the following three stages of Prevost’s training as an economist distinctly: 1. the definition of political economy that he took up with Rousseau in the 1780s, 2. the principles of wealth and economic freedom that he discovered with Smith and Stewart, and 3. the principle of population brought to light by Malthus.

It may be argued that this book does not address the relationship between political economy and social reform sufficiently, and the absence of some writers may be observed. Nevertheless, the overview of the economic thought of 18th century France presented in this book is rich, and equally diverse. The book is an excellent guide to explore this particular thought.

(Thierry Demals: University of Lille)