



Condorcet et Adam Smith. Réformes économiques et progrès social au siècle des Lumières, Simona Pisanelli

Riccardo Soliani



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jihi/400>

ISSN: 2280-8574

Publisher

GISI – UniTo

Electronic reference

Riccardo Soliani, « Condorcet et Adam Smith. Réformes économiques et progrès social au siècle des Lumières, Simona Pisanelli », *Journal of Interdisciplinary History of Ideas* [Online], 14 | 2018, Online since 31 December 2018, connection on 30 July 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jihi/400>

This text was automatically generated on 30 July 2020.

Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License

Condorcet et Adam Smith. Réformes économiques et progrès social au siècle des Lumières, Simona Pisanelli

Riccardo Soliani

REFERENCES

Simona Pisanelli, *Condorcet et Adam Smith. Réformes économiques et progrès social au siècle des Lumières*, Classiques Garnier, Bibliothèque de l'économiste 16, Paris, 2018, p. 214. ISBN: 9782406070504, € 29,00.

1 Historically, Condorcet's economic thought has drawn less attention than it deserved, as J.-C. Perrot remarked in 1992 (in his *Histoire intellectuelle de l'économie politique*, cited by Pisanelli at p. 14-15). Today, literature on him has considerably evolved, thanks to several authors like Rieucan and Menudo, and Pisanelli offers an interesting contribution to this fruitful thread. The book tackles a fascinating issue, that is, the relation between two main ideas of Condorcet's, compared with Smith's approach: *perfectionnement réel de l'homme* and economic growth, understood as the necessary precondition to it. Pisanelli mainly considers Condorcet's economic thought and finds in it a significant agreement with 20-years-older Smith, whom Condorcet esteemed very much, particularly for his opinions concerning free trade, taxation and colonialism.



- 2 Before the rational reconstruction, Pisanelli contextualizes Condorcet in the contemporary French debate, and scrutinizes his biography with accuracy, to assess the possibility of personal meeting between him and Smith—in the end, any encounter is excluded. But the intellectual links between them were very strong. Sophie de Grouchy, Condorcet's young wife, translated the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* into French. Condorcet himself was involved into the project of the French translation of the *Wealth of Nations*, even though he eventually did not participate, and wrote instead a synopsis in the journal *Bibliothèque de l'homme*. A paragraph on the consequences of Smith's journey to France and Switzerland concludes Pisanelli's erudite first chapter, which offers an original contribution on the circulation of ideas between Great Britain and France in the second half of the 18th century.
- 3 Pisanelli stresses that both Condorcet and Smith had the same aim, which was indeed common to most of authors in the age of Enlightenment: analyzing economy, in order to implement policies that would improve the social order in the widest sense. As mentioned above, the book discusses three topics of economic analysis. On free trade, Pisanelli evokes the lively debate in Great Britain and France, and provides textual evidence of Condorcet's favourable attitude. Condorcet was a friend of Turgot's and close to the Physiocrats, and shared their idea of a positive interaction between free trade, investment and productivity, supporting also high wages and education of labourers. Here, not only is Condorcet juxtaposed with Smith, but also with Necker.
- 4 Then Pisanelli carefully reconstructs the discussion on the *impôt unique* and on *luxe* that involved Turgot, Voltaire, Morellet, Le Mercier de la Rivière and many others. At the beginning Condorcet shares the Physiocratic argument, but later he appears nearer Smith. The root of the difference lies in the different position on the origin of surplus, where Smith was more advanced than Physiocrats.

- 5 Pisanelli devotes great attention to the debate on slavery, a topic which she has treated also in other papers. Here many different opinions are at play, depending upon the various social roles of the characters involved, as she demonstrates with reference to Le Mercier de la Rivère and Pierre Poivre. Two chapters are devoted to this issue, the second of which presents the position of Condorcet and Smith: both of them are against slavery, for ethical as well as economic reasons, since not only waged labour is more productive than slavery, but it is also part of the evolution of the “commercial society”.
- 6 Both the *intermède* paragraph on luxury and the two chapters on slavery are a plus of the book. Indeed the work has an interdisciplinary flavour. It is not narrowly limited to economic issues, but involves also topics related to social history and public ethics, thus helping the reader to grasp the real content of a key concept of Enlightenment: the *perfectionnement humain*. One could be slightly puzzled by the variety of topics dealt with in the book—free trade, equilibrium, taxation, luxury, slavery—even though each point is accurately developed and we can detect a sort of *fil rouge* linking them. The essay is far from being steeped in *esprit de système*; indeed, it offers a stimulating double portrait of two major characters of their century, depicted with *esprit de finesse*.