

# Adam Smith and the Marquis de Condorcet. Did they really meet?

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the alleged direct acquaintanceship between Condorcet and Adam Smith. Mistaken information about this issue was repeated many times in the literature of the late 1800s and 1900s. It is presumed that they met in France, during Smith's journey there, chez Sophie de Grouchy. I will attempt to show that the meeting between the two authors was not in fact arranged by Sophie de Grouchy, Condorcet's wife, even though she was very interested in Smithian theories, especially about the category of "sympathy", as confirmed by her French translation of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. My purpose is to demonstrate that Madame de Condorcet did never meet Smith and, as a result, she could not have introduced Condorcet to Smith. A greater degree of probability can be attributed to the version that indicates Turgot as the intermediary between Condorcet and Smith. In my opinion, not even this hypothesis is totally convincing, because neither Smith nor Condorcet ever talk about their meeting. Moreover, there is no evidence of correspondence between them.

**Key-words:** Enlightenment, Adam Smith, Condorcet, Sophie de Grouchy, Turgot.

**JEL Classification:** B11, B12

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. Smith's journey and the success of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. 3. Sophie de Grouchy and Condorcet. 4. Smith, Turgot, Condorcet. 5. The circulation of *Wealth of Nations* in France before Smith's death. 6. Conclusions

## 1. Introduction

Recent works on the Enlightenment have shown renewed interest in a historical period characterized by a strong propensity for social change and political innovation, which had decisive effects on future developments, profoundly affecting «every aspect of modernity» (Israel 2011, p. 3). The Enlightenment is seen not only as the beginning of European modernity, but also as a lasting process that continues to raise many issues related to the challenges of contemporary society.

Around the 1970s, some scholars preferred a historical (and national) approach to the Enlightenment in order to investigate the features of this extraordinary phenomenon in the single European countries (Lenci 2007, p. 19). This approach was useful because it enabled a deeper analysis to be made of the Enlightenment in the individual countries, but I believe it is also necessary to get back to a wider view of the Enlightenment, reconstructing relationships between the thinkers who promoted it.

The focus of this paper is the alleged acquaintanceship between Smith and Marquis de Condorcet, especially in view of Smith's significant influence on many of Condorcet's economic essays.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, even today, many aspects of this relationship are still to be investigated.

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\* Given the usual disclaimer, I would like to thank the anonymous referees for their careful reading and constructive comments.

<sup>1</sup> As is well known, on Smith there is an endless bibliography, but Condorcet, too, has recently been drawing attention (cf. Pagden 2010, pp. 1-6).

The literature of the late 1800s and the 1900s insisted on the fact that the scientific intercourse between the two was partly the result of direct personal acquaintanceship, which developed in the period when Smith was living in France (1764-66).<sup>2</sup>

Recently, the renewed attention to the scientific link between Condorcet and Smith emphasized its effect on the spread of political economy. Emma Rothschild for instance carries on the past tradition, arguing that the scientific exchange between the two was based on direct personal relations:

Condorcet and Turgot were intimate friends, as were Smith and Hume; the relationships between Smith and Condorcet, or Smith and Turgot, were ones of correspondence, of reciprocal study, or distant regard. (Rothschild 2001, p. 19)

Amartya Sen is more cautious; while on the one hand he underlines the presence of Smith's ideas in Condorcet's writings and the importance of the latter's work in spreading classical political economy in France, on the other hand he makes no mention of any direct relations between them:

When Adam Smith died in Edinburgh in July 1790, the reputation of the Scottish philosopher and economist was more secure in France than it was in England. Smith's ideas were often invoked by revolutionary authors across the Channel (such as the Marquis de Condorcet), and there can be little doubt that he was a very established figure in French intellectual circles. (Sen 2011, p. 257)

What I wish to show in this article is that, while Condorcet's relationship with Smith is highly significant on the epistemological level and their common scientific purposes (human development and its relation with the increase in social wealth, the role of technical progress in the new production systems, etc.), the idea of a direct relationship between the two men remains unproven. This idea was based on a meeting that supposedly took place during Smith's stay in France, arranged by Sophie de Grouchy, Condorcet's wife.

In the light of more detailed research, this aspect – widely reported in the literature – cannot be confirmed. The following pages will try to demonstrate that Condorcet and Smith did not meet and nor did they correspond. This will be done through a reconstruction firstly of the events of Smith's journey to the continent and then of some of the events in the life of Sophie de Grouchy.

## **2. Smith's journey and the success of *Theory of Moral Sentiments***

The period Smith spent in France and Switzerland was a fundamental experience that strongly marked the personal and intellectual life of the Scottish economist and philosopher. For Smith, this journey represented the possibility of a fruitful confrontation with the Physiocrats.<sup>3</sup> After his meeting with the circle of *économistes*, «Smith had decided that it was time to pull together some of the thinking about jurisprudence, police and political economy he looked forward to discussing with François Quesnay» (Phillipson 2010, p. 188). Moreover, Smith took the opportunity of wide discussions with Turgot «on political and economic subjects», since at the moment both were «busy writing their most important works on those subjects», as testified by Morellet (Rae [1895] 2009, p. 182). Twenty years after his return from France, he remembered the names of the most famous figures in French society with whom he had spent time, discussing both their philosophy and economics.

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<sup>2</sup> On this, see Guillois (1897), Badinter-Badinter (1988), Boissel (1988), Dawson (1991); all the bibliographic references on this topic are to be found in Grouchy (2008).

<sup>3</sup> Obviously, the French economists found advantageous the confrontation with Adam Smith, too, because of their interest in the process of modernization of the English economy, especially in relation to the agricultural sector (Piettre 1966, p. 62), *free trade* (Quesnay 1908, p. 150; Turgot 1913, p. 602) and the rules for granting titles of nobility (Rich-Wilson 1978, p. 659).

1<sup>st</sup> May 1786 was the date on a letter sent from Edinburgh to the Abbé André Morellet, to present his friend, Sir John Bruce – professor of Logic – who was soon to arrive in Paris as tutor to a young gentleman, Mr. Dundas. Bruce was therefore preparing to play the same role that Smith had filled from 1764 to 1766, when he was accompanying the Duke of Buccleuch. On this occasion, Smith wrote to Morellet:

Give me leave to condole with you on the many heavy losses which the Society, in which I had so often so pleasure of seeing you about twenty years ago, have sustained by the death of so many of its greatest ornaments, of Helvetius, of Mr. Turgot, of Mademoiselle D’Espinasse, of Mr. D’Alembert, of Mr. Diderot. I have not heard of Baron d’Holbach these two or three years past. I hope he is happy and in good health. Be so good as to assure him of my most affectionate and respectful remembrance, and that I never shall forget the very great kindness he did me the honour to shew me during my residence at Paris.<sup>4</sup> (Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 259, p. 295)

Ian Simpson Ross, author of the precious biography entitled *The Life of Adam Smith*, believes Smith had more than one good reason to make his journey to the Continent. Undoubtedly the generous payment offered by Townshend must have played its part, but the fascination exerted by France was not indifferent, being the homeland of some of the men of letters most admired by Smith. Moreover, it is widely thought that Smith had already started to map out the research on the wealth of nations, so the opportunity to study a country «with a population three times that of Great Britain, a contrasting political system resting on the principles of absolutism, and a range of regional economies was a lure in itself to the social scientist» (Ross 2010, p. 212). Lastly, France was beginning to appreciate the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (henceforth, *TMS*). It should be pointed out, however, that the initial appreciation for *TMS* must necessarily have been confined to a small number of literati, that is, the French intellectuals able to read and understand English.

At the time of its first publication (1759), *TMS* was announced in France in the journal «Encyclopédique» in admiring tones for a book that presented a «moral system rooted in human nature» (Ross 2010, p. 212). A few years later, to be precise on 28 October 1763, Hume wrote to Smith from Fontainebleau to tell him that D’Holbach was supervising the translation of *TMS*.<sup>5</sup> The first French translation of *TMS* appeared in two volumes in 1764, translated by Eidous.<sup>6</sup> In any case, Smith was so deeply disappointed by this translation that several years later (1772), in a letter sent to Mme. de Boufflers from Edinburgh or Kirkcaldy (the place has not been clearly identified) he was still talking about it:

C’était une grande mortification pour moi de voir la manière dont mon livre (Théorie des Sentimens Moraux) avait été traduit dans la langue d’une nation où je n’ambitionne sûrement pas d’être estimé plus que je ne le mérite. (Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 130, p. 161)

He then goes on, with relief, to the news that another person is engaged in the translation of *TMS*, under the guidance of Mme. de Boufflers herself, who, according to a note in this letter, «compared it with the original from beginning to end»:

Votre bonté généreuse m’a délivré de cette peine, et m’a rendu le plus grand service qu’on puisse rendre à un homme de lettres. Je me promets un grand plaisir à lire une traduction

<sup>4</sup> Here Smith captured the phase of transition in France in the years between 1770-90, characterized by the death in rapid succession of the «grands meneurs du jeu philosophique» (Rivaud 1962, p. 48): «Helvétius died in 1771; Voltaire and Rousseau both passed away in ’78; they were followed by Condillac in ’80 and Turgot in ’81; two years later it was d’Alembert’s turn; in ’84 death also surprised Diderot; Buffon and d’Holbach, the two survivors, were to die shortly afterwards, the first in 1788, the other in ’89» (Moravia 1968, p. 14; my translation).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 77, pp. 96-98.

<sup>6</sup> This was the translation Hume was referring to. Cf. Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 77, p. 98.

faite, parce que vous l'avez désiré. Si ce n'est pas bien aise de savoir le nom de la personne qui m'a fait l'honneur de me traduire. (Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 130, p. 161)

The satisfactory translation by Blavet in two volumes, which Smith refers to in this letter, nips in the bud the never published translation by the Duke de La Rochefoucauld. News of this failure to publish was given to Smith by the Duke himself, who in a letter sent from Paris on 3 March 1778, wrote as follows:

[...] j'avois eu peut-être la témérité d'entreprendre une traduction de votre *Théorie*; mais comme je venois de terminer la première partie, j'ai vu paroître la traduction de M. l'Abbé Blavet, et j'ai été forcé de renoncer au plaisir que j'aurois eu de faire passer dans ma langue un des meilleurs ouvrages de la vôtre. (Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 194, p. 233)

The translation published by Blavet in 1774 therefore remains the most respected. After that one, republished in 1782, there would be a wait of twenty-three years before the appearance of the translation by Sophie de Grouchy, who had been left a widow by Condorcet four years earlier.

### 3. Sophie de Grouchy and Condorcet

Condorcet, plusieurs années avant son mariage, avait été conduit par Turgot, chez Mme. Helvétius, dans cette petite maison d'Auteuil "où l'on fêtait encore les saints de *L'Encyclopédie*". Dupaty, Roucher, Franklin s'y donnaient rendez-vous et, dans cette calme retraite, Condorcet avait goûté, avec les joies de l'amitié, la douceur des longues causeries dans un milieu sympathique où sa timidité n'avait rien à redouter. (Guillois 1897, p. 94)

The meeting between Condorcet and Sophie, who would soon become his wife, can be attributed – at least indirectly – to Roucher. As we have said, the latter frequented the de Grouchy household so assiduously that it could be said that « [il] était presque de la famille » (Guillois 1897, p. 25); he was especially close to Sophie's uncle, the magistrate Charles Dupaty «who continued Voltaire's battles, a defender of the rights of man, and to whom the translation of *Wealth of Nations* was dedicated» (Faccarello-Steiner 2002, p. 22).

At the beginning of summer in 1786, Condorcet spent «ses jours et ses nuits avec Dupaty à préparer la défense des trois roués»; in the same period, he first met Sophie, at the hotel in rue de Gaillon. Despite being no less than twenty-one years her elder, Condorcet immediately fell in love with this young woman who was not only beautiful but extraordinarily intelligent and perceptive. When she had been sent by her mother in 1784 to study in the ancient convent of Neuville-en-Bress, she still possessed «toutes les vertus d'une jeune fille naïve et croyante», and she had returned after two years more mature and thoroughly different:

philosophe et radicalement athée. Sa mère, effrayée d'une telle transformation, exigea qu'elle brûlât devant elle tous les livres de Rousseau et de Voltaire qu'elle avait rapportés. En vain. Sophie conserva ses idées subversives sous l'apparence de la plus grande douceur et de la meilleure éducation. Acquisée aux idées nouvelles et décidée à mettre son ardeur à leur service. (Badinter-Badinter 1988, p. 240)

A few months after their meeting, on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1786, Sophie de Grouchy was to become Mme. Condorcet and, until his death in 1794, she would share with her husband the same intellectual passion and public commitment. She was firmly opposed, and gave in very reluctantly, when Condorcet pushed her to ask for a divorce, it being the only way to preserve her and their young daughter from Robespierre's reign of terror.

As soon as they were married and settled in the Hôtel des Monnaies (Condorcet's residence since 1775 when Turgot had appointed him *Inspecteur des Monnaies*), Sophie decided to *tenir un salon* and, despite her young age, she managed to be very successful, just as Julie de Lespi-

nasse and Mme. de Staël (Necker's daughter, not exactly on good terms with Sophie) had done before her.<sup>7</sup>

Les soirées chez les Condorcet étaient sérieuses, et les discussions volontiers abstraites. [...] Mais tous ceux qui [...] fréquentaient [leur salon] avaient le sentiment exaltant de participer à un laboratoire d'idées où l'on préparait un monde nouveau. (Badinter-Badinter 1988, p. 250)

Mme. Condorcet's salon brought together a series of figures already well-known in revolutionary France and others who would become famous in the not too distant future. Intellectuals, literary figures, economists and politicians from abroad had pride of place.

At this point, we must reveal the error that has been perpetuated over the years, concerning the reconstruction of the relations between Smith and Condorcet. Various authors have considered *Mme. de Condorcet's salon* the privileged place of meeting and exchange between the two greatest intellectuals of the day:

The Marquis de Condorcet was one of the giants of the Enlightenment, and the pre-Revolutionary salon she [Sophie] maintained with him at the French Mint along the banks of the Seine welcomed some of Europe's leading thinkers and intellectuals, including Smith. (Brown-McClellan III in Grouchy 2008, pp. xiii-xiv)

Among the foreigners who visited the salon were Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and so it seems, Adam Smith. (Brown-McClellan III in Grouchy 2008, p. xxii). Brown and McClellan's "so it seems" suggests that they entertained some doubts on this point. However, they refer to three other sources that give the same information.

À peine installée quai Conti, Sophie donna vie au salon de l'Hôtel des Monnaies. Grâce à son charme et à son esprit, il devint le rendez-vous des philosophes et des savants de l'Europe éclairée. Adam Smith, qui avait rencontré Condorcet chez Turgot, vint peut-être saluer sa future traductrice. (Badinter-Badinter 1988, p. 248)

The fact that Sophie and Condorcet reserved a place of honour for foreigners is also reported by Boissel:

Leur salon devient le plus cosmopolite de la capitale. Au printemps, la rumeur se répand qu'on parle anglais à l'hôtel des Monnaies. C'est vrai. On est anglophile...et l'on parle anglais la moitié du temps, chez les Condorcet. Le salon s'érige en centre des libres penseurs, avec l'ambition avouée d'être le cœur de "l'Europe éclairée". Il y a là Thomas Jefferson, auteur de la Déclaration d'Indépendance, Adam Smith, le grand économiste écossais qui vient d'être nommé recteur de l'université de Glasgow, Bache-Franklin, petit-fils de l'homme d'État, lord Stormont, ambassadeur de Grand-Bretagne, Destutt de Tracy, jeune philosophe d'origine écossaise et... colonel au régiment Royal-Cavalerie, Beccaria, heureux de revoir son traducteur préféré (Dupaty), Anarcharsis Cloots. (Boissel 1988, p. 103)

Finally, in a recent biography of Adam Smith, we read that «before long he had become a habitué of the leading salons, including [that] of [...] Mme. de Grouchy» (Phillipson 2010, p. 192).

Sophie de Grouchy undoubtedly knew Adam Smith's works, being the translator of *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (including the appendix *Dissertation on the Origin of Languages*), as well as the author of the eight *Letters on Sympathy* in which she disputes with Smith, not fully sharing

<sup>7</sup> The literary salons were so important in the development of the French intellectual life (Pagden 2010, p. 223), that Diderot called them privileged places where it was possible to «find the true cosmopolitan» (Pagden 2010, p. 272).

the theorization of the concept of “sympathy”. She would probably have liked to know him personally, but her wish cannot have been fulfilled because Sophie’s birth dates to the years when Smith arrived in France.

On the arrival in the world of the little de Grouchy, in the early years of her life nick-named “la jolie Grouchette”, there has been one slight doubt:

Le docteur Robinet, dans *Condorcet: sa vie, son oeuvre* dit que Sophie de Grouchy naquit “au mois de septembre 1766, et non pas en 1764”, comme dit Isambert. C’est là une erreur. D’abord, M. Isambert, ami très intime de la famille O’Connor ne pouvait pas se tromper sur un point aussi sérieux. De plus, le maréchal qui fut le second enfant du marquis de Grouchy, naquit le 23 octobre 1766, ce qui rend impossible la naissance de Sophie au mois de septembre de la même année. Enfin, Mme. de Grouchy, dans une lettre datée de 1775, dit qu’elle jouit de la présence de sa fille depuis dix ans; et Dupaty, en décembre 1777, disait que sa nièce avait près de quatorze ans. Le doute n’est donc pas possible. (Guillois 1897, p. 8)

Whichever of the two is the right version, considering that Smith was in France and Switzerland between 1764 and 1766, it is practically impossible that Condorcet’s wife could have received him among her guests in the *salon des Monnaies*.

To give the meeting between the two plausible, Guillois resorts to a contrivance which however is quite unconvincing:

Les étrangers de passage à Paris sollicitaient l’honneur d’être présentés à Condorcet et à la femme qui savait si bien faire les honneurs de sa maison. C’est ainsi que la marquise fut saluée, pendant ces années, par les souverains et les hommes d’État de toute l’Europe et de l’Amérique: [...] par Adam Smith, qui avait connu autrefois Condorcet chez Turgot et qui, à ce second voyage, venait admirer celle qui devait, après sa mort, traduire si éloquemment sa *Théorie des sentiments moraux*. (Guillois 1897, p. 76)

The explanation would make sense if, in reconstructing Smith’s biography, we didn’t already know that the only journey he made in his whole life – outside the United Kingdom – was the one with the duke of Buccleuch between 1764 and 1766. After his return, Smith established in Kirkcaldy for ten years, travelling occasionally to London and Edinburgh.

Therefore if there was direct acquaintance between Condorcet and Smith it was not due to Sophie de Grouchy’s acknowledged gifts as a hostess. Instead, a greater degree of probability can be attributed to the version that indicates, as the intermediary between Condorcet and Smith, the figure of Turgot, called – along with D’Alembert and Voltaire – one of his *trois pères* (Badinter-Badinter 1988, p. 53). We shall see, however, why not even this hypothesis is totally convincing.

#### **4. Smith, Turgot, Condorcet**

In 1764, at the time of Smith’s arrival in France, Turgot had been Land Agent of Limoges for a few years (since 1761) and would retain the post until 19 July 1774, the day he was appointed as Minister for the Navy. He served in this position for little more than a month, since in August that year he was appointed *contrôleur général* of finances. To his side – in the post of *inspecteur des monnaies* – he called one of his closest friends: Condorcet.

Unlike the encounter between Smith and Sophie de Grouchy, the meeting between Smith and Turgot seems to have actually taken place. We will try to reconstruct it below using several sources, starting with those that were contemporaries of the two economists and including the more recent ones. The first source to consider is certainly Morellet, to whom Smith wrote (the letter cited on pages 2-3 of this article). In his *Mémoires* (1821), Morellet tells us not only of his meeting with the Scottish economist, but also of Turgot’s presence during the enthusiastic conversations on a great range of topics:

J'avais connu Smith dans un voyage qu'il avait fait en France, vers 1762<sup>8</sup>; il parlait fort mal notre langue; mais sa *Théorie des sentiments moraux*, publiée en 1758<sup>9</sup>, m'avait donné une grande idée de sa sagacité et de sa profondeur. Et véritablement je le regarde encore aujourd'hui comme un des hommes qui a fait les observations et les analyses les plus complètes dans toutes les questions qu'il a traitées. M. Turgot, qui aimait ainsi que moi la métaphysique, estimait beaucoup son talent. Nous le vîmes plusieurs fois; il fut présenté chez Helvétius: nous parlâmes théorie commerciale, banque, crédit public, et de plusieurs points du grand ouvrage qu'il méditait. (Morellet 1821, p. 237)

The acquaintanceship between Smith and Turgot was also talked about in public speeches, as Neymarck reveals in *Turgot et ses doctrines*, quoting a passage from the speech delivered by Michel Chevalier, during his political economy course at the Collège de France, on 9 December 1873:

Quand bien même, dit-il, Smith n'aurait pas eu connaissance du travail de Quesnay (Tableau économique) à l'époque où il professait à Glasgow, il est évident qu'il en fit amplement le sujet de ses entretiens et de ses études, une fois établi à Paris en 1765-1766. Il fréquentait Quesnay; il voyait Turgot. (Neymarck 1885, p. 332, n. 1)

Jérôme Adolphe Blanqui, in his *Notice sur la vie et les travaux d'Adam Smith*, preface to Garnier's translation of the *Wealth of Nations* (henceforth, *WN*) of 1776, recounts the link between Smith and the physiocrats, among whom Turgot's name appears, although he cannot exactly be called such:

il fut en relations suivies avec les auteurs de l'*Encyclopédie* et avec les principaux chefs de l'école physiocrate. Adam Smith se fut bientôt lié avec eux, nommément avec Turgot et Quesnay, et leurs doctes entretiens ne tardèrent point à l'initier aux études qui faisaient l'objet de leurs méditations. Il est impossible de douter que ses rapports avec les encyclopédistes et les économistes français n'aient exercé une influence décisive sur son esprit. (Blanqui in Garnier 1843, p. xiii)

Blanqui also adds that «quelques-uns de ses biographes ont assuré qu'il avait entretenu avec Turgot une correspondance dont il n'est resté aucune trace» (Blanqui in Garnier 1843, p. xxii). It is highly likely that he is referring to Condorcet's well-known *Vie de M. Turgot*, considered one of the main economics works by the Marquis, rather than a real biography of his friend. On the presumed exchange of letters between Smith and Turgot, in fact, Condorcet says:

C'étoit par ces occupations que M. Turgot remplissoit sa vie. Un Commerce de Lettres avec M. Smith sur les questions les plus importantes pour l'humanité [...] lui offroit encore une occupation attachante et douce. (Condorcet 1804, p. 201)

Smith's first official biographer, Dugald Stewart, also refers to the episode reported by «one of Turgot's biographers» which portrays the latter exchanging letters with Smith. Stewart is not at all convinced of the existence of this correspondence, since no such letters have been found: «it is scarcely to be supposed, that Mr. Smith would destroy the letters of such a correspondent as Turgot» (Stewart 1829, v. vii, p. 43).<sup>10</sup> And indeed, confirmation that this did not happen, and that there had been no exchange of letters between the two after Smith's return to Scotland, is found in a letter signed by Smith himself, sent to the Duke de La Rochefoucauld on 1 Novem-

<sup>8</sup> It was 1764, as we have said several times.

<sup>9</sup> The correct year of publication of *TMS* was 1759 and not 1758 as erroneously stated by Morellet.

<sup>10</sup> On this point, in actual fact, Stewart contradicted himself. Only a few lines later in fact he recalled Smith's urgent desire «to destroy all the papers in his possession» (Stewart 1829, v. vii, p. 43).

ber 1785 from Edinburgh.<sup>11</sup> The beginning of the letter that there had been a previous request by the Duke to have access to the correspondence between Smith and Turgot (a request of which there is no trace):

My Lord Duke, I should certainly have been very happy to have communicated to your Grace any letters which the ever-to-be-regretted Mr. Turgot had done me the honour to write to me; and by that means, to have the distinguished honour of being recorded as one of his correspondents. But tho' I had the happiness of his acquaintance, and, I flattered myself, even of his friendship and esteem, I never had that of his correspondence. He was so good as to send me a copy of the *Process Verbal*<sup>12</sup> of what passed at the bed of justice upon the registration of his six edicts which did so much honour to their Author, and, had they been executed without alteration, would have proved so beneficial to his country. But the Present (which I preserve as I most valuable monument of a person who I remember with so much veneration) was not accompanied with any Letter. (Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 248, p. 286)

The valued acquaintanceship with Turgot at the time of Smith's journey to Paris is also confirmed by a letter from Turgot to Hume in which he writes: «Je sors de chez le Baron d'Holbach où était votre ami M<sup>r</sup> Smith» (Hume 1932, p. 424).

However, it is certain that the contact between the two did not continue in writing in the years following 1766 (the year his tour of the continent ended), as erroneously stated by Condorcet in *Vie de M. Turgot*.<sup>13</sup>

What interests us here, however, is the role of intermediary that Turgot may have played between Condorcet, his valued assistant, and Smith. The meeting between these last two is reported as a fact by Franck Alengry. Condorcet is described as an untiring worker and assiduous reader of all the major economics books published in the period between 1767 and 1779 (from 1775 on, he devoted himself to writing his first works on economics).

Il a même vu Hume à son voyage à Paris en 1763. Il a connu Adam Smith qui a vécu près d'un an dans cette ville (oct. 1765-oct. 1766), après un long séjour de 18 mois à Toulouse. Au dire de Dupont de Nemours, Smith fréquentait assidûment chez Gournay où il se lia avec Turgot. [...] Condorcet était alors âgé de 23 ans; il était lié avec d'Alembert depuis la soutenance de sa thèse d'analyse (1759); il fréquentait le même monde que lui, le monde des Encyclopédistes, des géomètres et des philosophes; et c'est là qu'il connut Turgot, Smith et les autres Économistes. Condorcet étudia de très près le fameux ouvrage de Smith: *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations* (1776). (Alengry 1904, pp. 692-3)

Such a statement increases the uncertainty concerning the relationship between Turgot and Condorcet. On this aspect, Ross – Adam Smith's biographer – leading us back to the previous acquaintanceship between them, points out that «Condorcet was a protégé and friend of Turgot, and like him frequented the salon of Julie de Lespinasse when Smith attended it in 1766» (Ross 2010, p. 387).

Yet again, while we can accept Condorcet's profound knowledge of Smith's works, it is difficult to agree with such certainty on their personal relations, which are a completely different matter.

As far as we know, Smith never referred to meeting this young mathematician, even though he was an integral and well-respected part of the intellectual circuit Smith frequented during his

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<sup>11</sup> The Duke de La Rochefoucauld's grandfather, famous for writing the *Maximes*, had been criticised (and likened to Mandeville) by Smith in the first version of *TMS*. In spite of this, the grandson believed *TMS* was such an excellent work that he wanted to undertake its translation, (see Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 194, p. 233).

<sup>12</sup> This was *Procès verbal de ce qui s'est passé au Lit de Justice tenu par le Roi à Versailles, le mardi douze mars 1776*.

<sup>13</sup> This information is confirmed by G. Schelle who states that «les papiers de Turgot ne renferment non plus aucune trace de la correspondance qu'il a échangée, dit-on, avec Adam Smith» (Schelle 1913, t. I, p. 5).



stay in France and Switzerland. But at the time Condorcet was young (only 23 years of age) and despite his surprising maturity in the scientific field, he may not have attracted Smith's attention or he may not have had long enough conversations with Smith to make the great Scottish thinker remember him. On the other hand, if this had happened, it is extremely surprising that no mention was made of such an important event even in Condorcet's official biography, written by Arago under the supervision of O'Connor, Condorcet's son-in-law.

According to one of the biographies of Smith, Condorcet – lifelong secretary of the *Académie royale des sciences* in Paris – supposedly sent a copy of his *Essai sur l'application de l'analyse à la probabilité des décisions rendues à la pluralité des voix*, with the dedication: «pour monsieur Adam Smith de la société royale de la part de l'auteur» (Ross 2010, p. 388).<sup>14</sup> But even this is not necessarily indicative of previous contact between the two. On the other hand, Smith himself tells us – as mentioned above – that he received a gift from Turgot without any accompanying letter:

it was “by the particular favour of M. Turgot” that he received the copy of the *Memoires concernant les Impositions*, which he quotes so often in the *Wealth of Nations*. This book was not printed when he was in France, and as it needed much influence to get a copy of it, his was most probably got after Turgot became Controller-General of the Finances in 1774. But in any case it would involve the exchange of letters. (Rae 2009 [1895], p. 184)

Condorcet may have done the same with his *Essai*, in order to get his intellectual work known by the person he called the author of a «ouvrage malheureusement encore trop peu connu en Europe pour le bonheur des peuples» (Condorcet 1804, p. 54).

In short, there is no evidence, either in Smith's correspondence or in Turgot's, about a role of the latter concerning the promotion of a meeting between Condorcet and Smith. Besides, the other authors – close to Condorcet and Turgot – give no hint of the idea of a direct relationship between the Scottish economist and the French philosopher.

### 5. The circulation of *Wealth of Nations* in France before Smith's death

The puzzling aspects concern not only the direct relationship between Smith and Condorcet, but also the question of the circulation of the WN in France. As is well known, the “notes” to the French edition of the WN by Condorcet, many times announced, never appeared.

*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* saw the light, in its complete form, in 1776. However, there are good reasons to believe that Smith – before his arrival in France – had already written what was to become known under the title of *Early Draft of Wealth of Nations*. The meeting and discussion with a circle of French scholars supposedly gave him a series of ideas and information to enrich and deepen the analysis begun in the rough draft, until it was transformed into work that we know today.

It seems that in the first few months on the continent, Smith and his charge had no contact with the Parisians because they were unable to express themselves in any language apart from their own.<sup>15</sup> So at first they only frequented Hume, an old friend of Smith's who had been living in France since 1763 as the secretary to the Earl of Hertford, English ambassador in Paris (a post he retained until 1766) and therefore well integrated in French intellectual circles.<sup>16</sup> It was to Hume that Smith would write his letter from Toulouse on 5 July 1764, containing – in all likelihood – his first reference to WN:<sup>17</sup>

The Life which I led at Glasgow was a pleasurable, dissipated life in comparison of that which I lead here at Present. I have begun to write a book in order to pass away the time. You may believe I have very little to do. (Mossner-Ross 1977, p. 102)

<sup>14</sup> On this, see also Mizuta (2002).

<sup>15</sup> Ross 2010, p. 210.

<sup>16</sup> Hume had already been in France for study purposes between 1734 and 1737.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 82, p. 101.

The events related to the French translation of the *Wealth of Nations* are in some respects similar to those reconstructed for the *TMS*. As soon as Smith heard that there was a French version of the work that was to consecrate him as the founder of political economy, he wrote to his publisher, Thomas Cadell, asking him to procure him a copy immediately. Smith believed that the translation was the work of the Abbé Morellet. He had been told so and he was convinced by the note accompanying the title: “traduit de l’Anglois de M. Adam Smith, par M\*\*\*”. He wrote:

I understand that the Abbé Morellet has translated my Book into French and published it in Holland in four or six octavo Volumes with large notes. I should be much obliged to you if you could procure me a copy of his translation and send it to me by the first convenient opportunity» (Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 239, p. 276).

He would ask about it again in two more letters to Cadell, in August<sup>18</sup> and November 1784<sup>19</sup> and it was only on 21 April 1785 that he would discover that he had been «misinformed with regard to the Abbé Morellet having translated my book» (Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 281, p. 244). According to his *Mémoires*<sup>20</sup>, Morellet had received a copy from Smith, through Lord Shelburn<sup>21</sup> and had spent the whole autumn of 1776 studying *WN* and translating it. This translation however was to remain in manuscript form since – to his great disappointment – Morellet was beaten at the post by Blavet:

un ex-bénédictin, appelé l’abbé Blavet, mauvais traducteur de la *théorie des sentimens moraux*, s’était emparé du nouveau traité de Smith, et envoyait toutes les semaines, au journal du Commerce, ce qu’il en avait broché; tout était bon pour le journal qui remplissait son volume, et le pauvre Smith était trahi plutôt que traduit, suivant le proverbe italien, *traduttore traditore*. (Morellet 1821, p. 237)

The journal Morellet refers to was the «Journal de l’Agriculture, du Commerce, des Arts et des Finances», which printed – from January 1779 to December 1780 – Blavet’s translation of *WN* “in instalments”. In 1781, the translation was put together and printed in two versions of six and three volumes, at Yverdon and Paris respectively.<sup>22</sup> Blavet said that he translated Smith’s work only for personal use, so – when his friend Ameilhon (editor of the «Journal») suggested weekly publication – Blavet chose to remain anonymous. It was only later, in view of its success with the public, that he decided to reveal his name and claim the translation (Murray 2000, p. 72). The translation can’t have been as bad as was feared by its author and indicated by Morellet – who would associate it with the later translation by Roucher, saying that «l’un et l’autre ignor[e]nt la matière» (Morellet 1821, p. 238) – if Smith in person wrote to Blavet to compliment him on the «excellent traduction»:

Je suis charmé de cette traduction et vous m’avez rendu le plus grande service qu’on puisse rendre à un auteur, en faisant connaître mon livre à la nation de l’Europe dont je considère le plus le gout et le jugement. J’étais fort content de votre traduction de mon premier ouvrage; mais je le suis encore plus de la manière dont vous avez rendu ce dernier. Je puis vous dire, sans flatterie, que partout où j’ai jeté les yeux dessus, (car comme il n’y a que peu de jours que je suis parti de Londres, je n’ai pas encore eu le temps de la lire en entier) je l’ai trouvée, à tous égards, parfaitement égale à l’original. (Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 218, pp. 259-60)

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 240, p. 278.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 242, pp. 279-80.

<sup>20</sup> Morellet 1821, pp. 236-8.

<sup>21</sup> A letter from Smith to the publisher Cadell confirms that Shelburn had a copy of *WN*, sent to him by the author himself. Cf. Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 242, p. 279.

<sup>22</sup> In 1788, in London and also in Paris it would be republished in two volumes. The last edition, in 4 volumes, appeared between 1800 and 1801. Cf. D. Murray 2000, pp. 71-6: 72.

In the same letter, Smith informs Blavet of the infantry colonel Count Nort's intention to show the author his translation of *WN*, but does not express a warm reaction:

Je lui écrirai par le prochain courrier que je suis si satisfait de la vôtre, et que je vous ai personnellement tant d'obligation, que je ne puis encourager ni en favoriser aucune autre. (Mossner-Ross 1977, letter n. 218, p. 260)

There is no mention in Smith's letters (at least in those found) of the translation made by the French poet Roucher<sup>23</sup>, a friend of the de Grouchy family.<sup>24</sup> Young Sophie, who had known him since she was eight, received English lessons from him. His knowledge of this language seems to have been the only quality to justify Roucher undertaking the translation of *WN*.

the poet Antoine Roucher [...] had no special qualifications for dealing with Smith's book other than knowing English. (Ross 2010, p. 386).

In the hot summer of 1784, Roucher announced to Sophie de Grouchy that he was planning to stay with Mme. Helvétius in autumn, where – in full tranquility – he would be able to devote himself to the work of the Scottish economist Smith (Boissel 1988, p. 68). On this point, Ross – citing Carpenter (1995) – says that Roucher started his translation in 1790, based on the fourth edition of *WN*, dated 1786 (Ross 2010, p. 386). Presumably, compared to his intentions, Roucher delayed the beginning of the work to which he had said he wanted to devote himself (providing his intentions were dated correctly by Boissel), seeing that over five years passed between 1784 and 1790. And on the title page printed by Buisson, the publisher of the first edition of Roucher's translation, it clearly states that the original text was the fourth edition published only in 1786 (Lecaldano 2009, p. 65).

The first three volumes were ready for publication in 1790, the fourth and last was published in 1791. Smith's personal library contained volumes I and III of the edition by the French poet (Mizuta 2002) and for us are of special interest since they promised readers a further volume, the fifth, which in actual fact never appeared:

Et suivies d'un volume de Notes, par M. le Marquis de Condorcet, de l'Académie Française, et Secrétaire perpétuel de l'Académie des Sciences.

Condorcet's commentary was certainly anxiously awaited, to judge by the number of times it was announced in the press. When Roucher's first volume came out (August 1790) and then his third (October 1790), *Le Moniteur* (certainly a widely read paper at the time), announced the launch in an enthusiastic tone. Lastly, on 26 May 1791, for the imminent release of the fourth volume, the paper wrote that «on ne peut qu'attendre avec impatience le cinquième volume, où l'on annonce des notes d'un écrivain homme d'Etat, digne commentateur d'un texte qu'il aurait pu composer lui-même» (*Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, 1847, vol. 8, p. 490). In the second edition (1791-92), «revue et considérablement corrigée»,<sup>25</sup> the reference to Condorcet's commentary had disappeared and, obviously, it does not appear in the two following editions either, of 1792 and 1794.

Based on the collection of bibliographic sources consulted so far, it is not known whether these notes were written and then lost, or whether Condorcet ever actually started to write them. What is certain is that they did not appear in his collected works edited by O'Connor and Arago, and nor was any mention made of them in his official biography, written by the latter.

<sup>23</sup> Famous for the poem in twelve cantos entitled *Les mois*.

<sup>24</sup> In the summer of 1772, «Roucher, le poète, et Grouchy, le militaire, jouent aux échecs dans le petit salon» (Boissel 1988, p. 25).

<sup>25</sup> As shown on the title-page of the second edition, again published by Buisson.

Undoubtedly, it cannot be said that Condorcet was unaware of the translation of *WN* done by Roucher, with whom, what's more, he was in friendly relations. A synthesis of it, or – as Diatkine (1993) calls it – a “patchwork” of some of its parts, appears in the third and fourth volumes for the year 1790 of the *Bibliothèque de l'homme ou Analyse raisonnée des principaux ouvrages français et étrangers*. It is also interesting to notice the publication's long subtitle, to see more clearly that this periodical dealt with a rather broad range of topics, namely *Sur la Politique en général, la Législation, les Finances, la Police, l'Agriculture et le Commerce en particulier, et sur le Droit naturel et public*. The title page shows the editors as *M. Condorcet, Secrétaire perpétuel de l'Académie des Sciences, l'un des Quarante de l'Académie Française, et autres Gens de Lettre*. De Peyssonel and Le Chapelier can be numbered among the latter, but the group of literary figures involved was certainly much larger. The intentions underlying the operation carried out by the editors of the *Bibliothèque de l'homme* were certainly admirable, aimed at educating and raising awareness in the citizens of a totally new, enlightened France. These goals are well described by Faccarello and Steiner:

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 analysis of well-known works, both ancient and modern. (Faccarello-Steiner 2002, p. 82)

In the literature various hypotheses have been put forward to explain why Condorcet's volume of commentary did not appear. In quite a recent article, Ruth Scurr finds it highly likely that Condorcet was too busy and preoccupied in playing a fundamental role in French revolutionary politics to think of even starting work on a volume of notes on *WN*. While this idea is acceptable, Scurr's very next supposition is not:

Alternatively, Whatmore has suggested that Condorcet may have abandoned his commentary on the *Wealth of Nations* after 1790 because he realised that the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was more pertinent to the process of social renewal that was fast becoming central to the Revolution. (Scurr 2009, p. 444)

Following Whatmore's lead, Scurr seems to consider Smith's two main works separately, something which has long characterised the debate on the supposed incompatibility of Smith's philosophical work with his economic work, resulting in what is known as *Das Adam Smith Problem*. This debate has been fed by the view of the conflicting relation between the motives of self-interest (*WN*) and sympathy (*TMS*). But, if we return to the overall vision which characterizes the Enlightenment theoreticians, emphasizing their conception of man and society, the problem of the nineteenth-century interpretations disappears. The *Adam Smith problem* is only a «pseudo-problem» (Raphael-Macfie 1976, p. 20) and «there is no longer room for the schizophrenic Smith» (Vaggi 1996, p. 107).<sup>26</sup> So, Scurr's interpretation can certainly not be accepted, if only because Smith constantly revised *TMS* until his death in 1790, well beyond the publication in 1776 of *WN*, which consecrated him as the founder of political economy.

Another supposition is that the name of Condorcet as the author of the volume of notes to follow Roucher's translation was merely used for publicity purposes to ensure the publication greater success. On this point, in view of what Lalande reports, «On pensa que son nom pouvait donner plus de crédit à l'entreprise» (Lalande 1796, p. 155), Faccarello points out that «non seulement Condorcet “s'occupa peu” de ces notes sur Smith, mais il autorisa, en quelque sorte, que l'on utilise son nom à des fins publicitaires» (Faccarello 1989, p. 125).

In this sense, it is difficult to say whether Condorcet, beyond his great interest in Smith's work and his admiration for the Scottish economist, ever really intended to write an extended commentary of the *WN*.

## 6. Conclusions

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<sup>26</sup> Interesting considerations on this aspect can be found in Wakatabe 2015, p. 5.

In short, we can say it is certain that Adam Smith's stay in France was fruitful for several reasons, but it is also certain that the meeting between Smith and Condorcet never occurred.

As far as the first aspect is concerned, in France Smith strengthened his view on the method and tasks of political economy through his discussions with the economists (Quesnay, Turgot and other Physiocrats) and philosophers he often met. Moreover, he took the opportunity during his journey to comparatively investigate different models of economic, social and political relations, consolidating his reformist attitude: «in no other society would Smith be likely to hear more of the oppressed condition of the peasantry, and the necessity for thoroughgoing reforms» (Rae [1895] 2009, p. 168).

As far as the second aspect is concerned, I have examined the two main reasons used to confirm the idea of a direct acquaintanceship between the two men. The first reason is linked to the role of Condorcet's wife, Sophie de Grouchy; the second one is linked to a possible mediation by Turgot, who met Smith many times. I have demonstrated that the reference to Sophie de Grouchy as hostess of the literary salons is unfounded, because during Smith's stay in France, she had only just been born. J. Rae was wrong when he stated that «so much has been written about the literary salons of Paris in last century that it is unnecessary to do more here than describe Smith's connection with them» (Rae 2009 [1895], p. 179), since it is now clear that some reconstructions of this aspect of his stay in France remain unproven.

Of course, the reference to Turgot is more realistic and plausible. However, in Turgot's correspondence and in Smith's there is no confirmation of the hypothetical meeting between Smith and Condorcet, promoted by Turgot. So, in the current state of the research, this hypothesis can be excluded, too.

Finally, I looked for evidence to support the hypothesis of a meeting between the two, in the works and the correspondence of the philosophers and economists close to Condorcet and, more generally, in the literature of that time. But, I found no confirmation.

Obviously, beyond the direct acquaintanceship, Condorcet had a deep knowledge of Smith's work, above all the WN, as explicit references in *Vie de M. Turgot* (1786) emphasize. On the other hand, Smith's influence on Condorcet is evident in many of his economic writings, although it is difficult to find precise bibliographical references. As is well known, at that time it was not unusual for the most influential scholars to use references to the works of other authors without correct acknowledgement.<sup>27</sup>

In my opinion, the task remaining to be done is a wider, more systematic analysis on the similarities and differences between Condorcet and Smith on the purely economic plane<sup>28</sup>, starting from the issue of Roucher's translation and from the question of Condorcet's missing commentary on the WN. Such a task, however, is outside the scope of this article, the main aim of which is simply to focus on some evident contradictions in the previously accepted reconstruction of the personal relations between the two thinkers.

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<sup>27</sup> As Enrique Fuentes Quintana writes: «the year of publication, the work and the author have become, since then, essential points of reference: in order to indicate the birth of a science, Political Economy, in order to point out the most successful work ever published up to today and in order to signal the most famous economist of all time» (Fuentes Quintana 1976; my translation).

<sup>28</sup> On this see at least Alengry (1904) and Caillaud (1908) and more recently, Gioia and Bevilacqua (2013, pp. 134-6).

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