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Christine Théré, Loïc Charles, and Jean-Claude Perrot, Eds., *François Quesnay, Oeuvres économiques complètes et autres textes*, 2 volumes, (Paris, INED, 2005). 1618 pp. + notes. €68.00 (cl). ISBN 2-733-2103-19.

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Physiocracy was a short-lived eighteenth-century French economic doctrine that saw the land as the only source of true wealth since only Nature could multiply itself. Its adepts argued that agriculture had to be encouraged, that landowners must invest in farming improvements and advance capital to their farmers, and agricultural goods should circulate freely so that they could reach their proper markets. Agricultural profits would be returned to landowners who would pay all taxes so that the state and citizenry at large would benefit from agricultural prosperity. Industry and commerce merely transformed natural products and marketed them. They added no usable surplus value (the *net profit* produced by agriculture) and were therefore considered “sterile.” The inventor of Physiocracy, François Quesnay, Mme de Pompadour’s physician, expressed his ideas by means of a visual model, the *Tableau économique*, which depicted the distribution of advances by landowners, the series of reciprocal purchases by ‘farmers’ and ‘artisans’ that produced a monetary surplus for farmers. They returned this as rent to the landowners who had advanced them capital to begin with, thus ending a cycle that would begin anew. Physiocratic publications in the 1760s and 1770s described how this system worked and why it would be profitable.

Nearly half a century after publishing *François Quesnay et la physiocratie*, the Institut National d’Études Démographiques (INED) has brought out a new edition of François Quesnay’s writings.[1] This version is more than twice as long as its predecessor but unlike that earlier compendium—where one volume was devoted to critical assessments of Physiocracy—this edition does not include papers from the international conference held a decade ago at Versailles. What is more, Jacqueline Hecht’s biography of Quesnay, which first appeared in the volumes she co-edited in 1958, is reprinted in this new edition.

When Auguste Oncken published an edition of Quesnay’s works in 1888,[2] he had in mind the coming centennial of the French Revolution and Tocqueville’s assessment of the importance of Physiocrats (known in the eighteenth century as the *économistes*) in the transformation of the regime.[3] Physiocracy had been misrepresented, in Oncken’s opinion, especially in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, which was the lens through which people had come to know that doctrine. Oncken was not disputing that Physiocratic thought was problematic, but he wanted people to gain a more accurate idea of what they had actually said and engage with them directly rather than through intermediaries. In his view, Du Pont de Nemours and Eugène Daire’s selections did not fully render Quesnay’s centrality to the doctrine, drowning his contributions among those of his followers. What is more, they privileged those Quesnay writings they considered to be seminal.[4] As an historian of economic thought, Oncken believed that ideas developed over time, and that their development could best be gauged by reading both major and minor writings. By publishing *all* of Quesnay’s economic texts (and a selection of his other writings), Oncken hoped that readers would gain a far deeper understanding of Quesnay’s approach to economics and society. The volume included, therefore, segments on the nature of liberty and the soul from Volume III of the 1747 edition of Quesnay’s medical textbook, *Essai physique sur l’économie animale*, as well as Quesnay’s introduction to the first *Mémoires de l’Académie royale de chirurgie*—of which he was permanent secretary—published in 1743.[5] Oncken also set himself straightforward

editorial tasks: he meant, as he put it, to be both complete and exact which meant restoring original texts wherever possible.[6]

With much the same goals, The Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (INED) marked the bicentennial of the appearance of Quesnay's *Tableau économique* with a new edition of his works. INED's aim was to make widely available texts which were either out-of-print or difficult to find, and to disseminate long-lost versions of Quesnay's draft articles "Hommes" and "Impôts" intended for the *Encyclopédie*, and some of the *Philosophie rurale* he had penned directly, although it had traditionally been attributed to the marquis de Mirabeau. Quesnay's *Despotisme de la Chine*, on the other hand, was truncated. The 1958 INED version presents writings chronologically (they are divided into broad themes in Oncken). Jacqueline Hecht also provided a thoroughly researched eighty-page biography[7] and updated the bibliography of Quesnay's works and on Physiocracy as a whole.

Oncken had not provided any critical assessment of the doctrine but only notes to assist the reader. One of the volumes of the 1958 INED set, on the other hand, offered scholarly assessments of Quesnay's doctrine, including the relevance of his medical corpus. Luigi Einaudi and Alfred Sauvy (the editor of the volumes) framed the project in separate introductions. Einaudi stressed the innovative aspects of Physiocratic thought—especially the *Tableau*—whose mysteries were a warning against any facile conclusions about economic processes, and whose circulation so well embodied the importance of continuous exchanges for economic growth. If the Physiocrats' concept of a *net product* was reductive, it was no more so than Ricardo's notion of *rent* or Marx's of *surplus value*. Physiocrats had come up with a totally new interpretation of economic processes in their day. What is more, despite a common misconception, they did not believe in an unchanging natural order, but rather in an *enduring* order, based on material realities. Alfred Sauvy was less sanguine about the eternal verities peddled by the Physiocrats, emphasizing instead their historical significance. Whether their ideas were "true" or not was beside the point, for they had reflected seriously about the problems of their own era. What is more, both Marx and Leontief had been stimulated by their writings, so displaying the "variety and wealth of the subjects upon which Quesnay reflected" would attest to the richness of his thought.[8]

The 2005 edition is far more encompassing and would have been even longer (including some hitherto unknown documents, such as the inventory of Quesnay's library) had the enterprise not become too costly. Longer extracts from Quesnay's medical writings were therefore sacrificed, although an important fifty-page segment from the 1747 *Essai physique sur l'oeconomie animale* opens the first volume. As in Auguste Oncken's edition, Quesnay's writings are divided thematically. Commentary is provided both in notes and in introductions to each "dossier." These volumes are certainly handsome and decidedly erudite. Anyone interested in French economic history will be delighted with the care that the principal editors, Christine Théré and Loïc Charles, have taken in tracing provenance, in rendering manuscripts accurately, and contextualizing each work. One of the great contributions of this edition is its thorough inventory of the Mirabeau and Quesnay papers located at the Archives nationales. George Weulersse had catalogued them in 1910 and published some selections, but given pell-mell additions and reshufflings, the work is now outdated, and was imprecise to begin with.[9] The new presentation is meticulous, displaying both editors' familiarity with Quesnay's and Mirabeau's writings and their penmanship. Doubtful earlier ascriptions are dismissed, erring perhaps too much on the conservative side. Having perused these documents myself in search of Mirabeau *arcana*, I am less convinced than Christine Théré that some of the literary pieces are not from his hand or not revised by him.

The careful examination of these manuscripts reflects another aspect of recent Quesnay scholarship. The Quesnay corpus has been gradually extended, with the growing realization of the degree to which Quesnay oversaw Physiocratic texts. Loïc Charles weighs the evidence for and against Quesnay's authorship of the *Essai sur l'administration des terres* (1759) only to reject it. Other false attributions are

restored to their probable authors, Louis-Paul Abeille and the still mysterious Mr “X.” The *parti-pris* of this edition, however, is to render unto Quesnay what the editors Christine Théré and Loïc Charles (and Jean-Claude Perrot as series editor) believe he read, annotated, and sanctioned: Patullo’s *Essai sur l’amélioration des terres* (1758)[10], and, as they say, grant him the paternity of all of Mirabeau’s works published during Quesnay’s lifetime from their meeting in July 1757 to his death in December 1774.[11] Mirabeau is in fact the big loser in this collective attribution, for not only does Quesnay now share in the writing of his works, so do the mathematician Butré and Baron Marivetz (the former calculating French economic performance for analyses of the *Tableau* and the latter assisting in the composition of the *Questions intéressantes sur la population, l’agriculture et le commerce* (1758).[12] The overall contention is that Quesnay, as “party chief” retained uncontested control over Physiocracy both intellectually and practically.[13]

One-quarter of Volume I (238 pages) is devoted to the different versions of the *Tableau économique* and the simpler *Formule économique* that followed it (along with explanations and commentaries that accompanied them). For Quesnay scholars this will be a special boon, for although several versions are available on-line or have been published elsewhere, this allows for more formal comparisons and displays the centrality of the model to the doctrine.

The real novelty, as mentioned above, is the inclusion of documents from the Quesnay/ Mirabeau manuscripts (the bulky bundles of M 784) at the Archives nationales. Although Weulersse had published some of these materials in 1910, they had never been examined quite so carefully or systematically. The selections (rescued from the fragmentary and disjointed originals, as anyone who has looked at these documents will attest), are presented in five separate dossiers (*Philosophie rurale*, “dépenses, “luxe”, “fragments sur les sciences” and “commerce”).

This is where the editors can best demonstrate Quesnay’s continued engagement with the Physiocratic enterprise. Whether he can be construed as a principal (as opposed to an occasional) contributor, however, varies from work to work (in my humble estimation)—evidence of his writing entire chapters of the *Philosophie rurale* being more convincing than his oversight of Mirabeau’s *Leçons économiques* of 1770, addressed to “young readers.”[14] Mirabeau, for one, told the Margrave of Baden that this work “has cost him more than all his other writings.”[15] There is no reason to question his credibility given the credence accorded to Grimm or the notoriously unreliable Du Pont. We might ask what “textual” purity meant in a century when borrowings were common and manuscripts were passed around for comment. For the editors, this seems to suggest, if not quite the “death of the author”, the death of all but Quesnay as “author.” This seems too bold an assertion to me (for one might then be entitled to ask whether a particularly overbearing dissertation supervisor can be considered the actual author of the work) but these pages will allow students of economic thought the opportunity to ponder this question— which previous editions did not raise.

Quesnay’s articles in the *Ephémérides* and *Journal d’Agriculture, du commerce et des finances* are gathered under the rubric of “Polemical Writings” that makes up much of volume II and Quesnay scholars will again appreciate the decision to print “original” versions (which Oncken had not found), such as that of the *Despotisme de la Chine*. Du Pont de Nemours had made the editorial decision to switch the first and last chapters when he published the work in the *Ephémérides* to make it appear more “inductive” than the “deductive” piece Quesnay had actually written. Whether it was worthwhile to include articles that are available in other collections, especially now that many can be accessed on Gallica, is more problematic. Théré and Charles went to great lengths to track down original manuscripts and correspondence—for example several letters from Quesnay to Tronchin[16]—but the choice to duplicate as well as update older editions seems a waste of precious space. It might have been better to direct the reader to available resources and to include more path-breaking materials.

Of course, this is undeniably a magnificent achievement. Users can rest assured that they are reading the most reliable versions they are ever likely to find of Quesnay's writings, and those not familiar with his oeuvre will encounter a far greater variety than was hitherto possible. It is unfortunate that such elegant editions are so costly. It would be nice to imagine every eighteenth-century French historian owning a set, rather than the privileged few.

NOTES

[1] *François Quesnay et la physiocratie*, 2 vols (Paris, 1958)

[2] Auguste Oncken, *Oeuvres économiques et philosophiques de F. Quesnay, fondateur du système physiocratique accompagnées des éloges et d'autres travaux biographiques sur Quesnay* (Frankfort and Paris, 1888). (available on Gallica)

[3] Quoting from the *Old Regime and French Revolution* (1856): "De tous les gens de ce temps-là les économistes sont ceux qui paraîtraient le moins dépayés dans le nôtre. Si je lis les discours et les écrits des hommes qui ont fait la Révolution, je me sens tout à coup transporté dans un lieu et au milieu d'une société que je ne connais pas. Mais quand je parcours les livres des économistes, il me semble que j'ai vécu avec ces gens et que je viens de discourir avec eux." Oncken, pp. ix-x.

[4] Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, *Physiocratie ou Constitution naturelle du gouvernement le plus avantageux au genre humain* ("Leyden", 1768) and Eugène Daire ed., *Collection des principaux économistes*, volume 2, *Physiocrates* (Paris, 1846). (Both works are available on Gallica)

[5] *Mémoires de l'Académie royale de chirurgie* (Paris, 1743), volume I. (available on Gallica)

[6] Oncken, pages xxiii-xxiv.

[7] Oncken had chosen to present Quesnay through the *éloges* that followed his death in December 1774, and Mme du Hausset and Marmontel's recollections.

[8] Alfred Sauvy, "Présentation", p. xix, in *François Quesnay et la Physiocratie*, volume I.

[9] George Weulersse, *Manuscrits économiques de François Quesnay et du marquis de Mirabeau aux Archives nationales (M 778 à M 785)* (Paris, 1910).

[10] Which is listed under Quesnay's name on Gallica.

[11] "Introduction des éditeurs", volume I, pp. xix and xxii.

[12] "Présentation" of the section "Questions intéressantes sur la population, l'agriculture, et le commerce", volume I, pp. 331-33, and "Présentation" to the section on the "Tableau économique", pages 391-96.

[13] See the "Présentation" of the section "Philosophie rurale" Volume I, pp. 639-642.

[14] Another sample of Quesnay's comments and revisions of Mirabeau's drafts is provided by Gino Longhitano's recent edition of the hitherto unpublished *Traité de la monarchie*, (Paris, 1999) based on manuscripts in M 784.

[15] Letter of 12 May 1770, in Carl Knies, ed., *Carles Friedrichs von Baden Breiflicher Verkher mit Mirabeau und Du Pont* (Heidelberg, 1892), Volume II, p. 39.

[16] I must say that help received from others is not fully acknowledged. Thus footnote 49, p. xxvi, mentions the existence of Quesnay annotations of books he owned, such as the *Lettre à Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Lyon dans laquelle on traite du prêt à l'intérêt*, at the Hagley Museum and Archives. It is I who alerted the editors to its existence and provided them with xerox copies of the relevant pages.

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