

ECONOMICS TREATISES AND TEXTBOOKS IN ITALY
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF 18th- AND 19th-CENTURY POLITICAL ECONOMY

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The present economic crisis has stimulated the public opinion to raise questions about the reliability of market forces. A specific point made by the Harvard students who walked out of Gregory Mankiw's class of Economics 10 is that

[a] legitimate academic study of economics must include a critical discussion of both the benefits and flaws of different economic simplifying models [...]. There is no justification for presenting Adam Smith's economic theories as more fundamental or basic than, for example, Keynesian theory¹.

Harvard students' view of Smith as the precursor of mainstream economics is an oversimplification, although it is largely a consequence of the way in which his doctrines are presented in Mankiw's best-selling textbook². However, what these sympathisers of the Occupy Wall Street movement aimed to highlight is that problems like the financial crisis and economic inequality call into question the legitimacy of a paradigm that has dominated the last two centuries of politico-economic debate *and* of teaching. This paradigm can be summarised by the argument that market laws are more efficient than political authority as an instrument for governing society and for answering the demands that come from its members.

This paper draws from a larger research project on treatises and textbooks of political economy in 19th-century Italy³ to show how the teaching and dissemination of political economy was a key element in the social construction of a market-based political order, as it created a system of representations that was functional to this process. And the *locus* in which this system of representations operated was the public opinion. The originality of this paper *vis-à-vis* other contributions is that here we attempt a comparative analysis of the characteristics, context and functions of textbooks in the 19th and 18th centuries.

¹ «An Open Letter to Greg Mankiw».

² N. G. MANKIW and M. P. TAYLOR, *Economics*.

³ See M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds.), *L'economia divulgata*. See also ID., «Educating the Nation».

This comparison highlights different and contrasting views about the economic government of society that may help us to clarify—thanks to the historical perspective—our doubts about the ability of economics to offer convincing answers to current problems.

The research on textbooks we have promoted is one of the steps in a series of other inquiries conducted by a large group of scholars in the three past decades on the institutionalisation and spread of political economy in Italy and (in a comparative and trans-national approach) at the international level⁴.

The approach developed throughout these research projects, and adopted in the present paper, is now known as institutional history of economics. This methodology dates back to the pioneering work of Bob Coats on the (historical) sociology of economics⁵, and draws its main analytical tools from the crossroad between the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of science. Specifically, it is based on the assumption that economic knowledge develops itself through a process of social and institutional construction. First and foremost, this process has a fundamental institutional side, in that economics is introduced into educational curricula, academic activities, associational activities, and media and communication activities. The introduction of economics into the public debate is accompanied by regulations, very often controlled by the State and sponsored by various intermediate bodies of the civil society (academic boards, local authorities, economic societies, chambers of commerce, etc.). Secondly, because of this institutional framework, the construction of the economic discourse, and of its analytical and normative categories is itself a social process, which in turn contributes to the social construction of the economic reality it analyses and categorises. There is therefore an interaction between the social representations produced by economics, the economic skills and competencies it creates, and the social construction of the market order by economic agents and institutional subjects informed, mentally shaped and trained through the institutionalisation and dissemination of political economy and its ancillary sciences⁶.

A key role in this perspective is played by the Weberian notion of «rationalisation of knowledge»—in the present case, economic knowledge—and its related distinction between *formal rationalisation*, *material rationalisation* and *economic mentalities*. By «formal rationalisation» we mean—following Philippe Steiner⁷—the rise a systematic and self-consistent body of positive scientific knowledge, while by «material rationalisation» we mean the widespread production of notions that have a theoretical consistency although they are dominated by values and norms. The formalisation of knowledge is in this case only instrumental to the latter. Finally, the notion of «mentality» refers

⁴ To limit references to the main contributions in English, see ID., «The Emergence of Economic Periodical Literature»; ID. (eds.), *The Spread of Political Economy*; ID. (eds.), *Economists in Parliament*.

⁵ See the papers collected in A. W. B. COATS, *The Sociology and Professionalization of Economics*.

⁶ See P. BOURDIEU, *Homo academicus*; ID., *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*; F. LEBARON, «La formation des économistes».

⁷ See Ph. STEINER, *Sociologie de la connaissance économique*.

to the representations formed by economic agents, strictly related to the rules of behaviour they adopt in everyday life. Suggestions deriving from the actor-network theory⁸ improve our understanding of the role played in the social construction process not only by individuals and groups, but also by material devices (*dispositifs*) or socio-technical arrangements (*agencements*)⁹ such as (in our specific case) textbooks, book and journal series, encyclopedias, academic or club by-laws, academic and political career mechanisms, etc.

The present paper focuses on one of these devices, notably textbooks of political economy, by comparing those of the 19th century with those published in the 18th century. We aim to understand whether the main treatises of «civil» or «public» economy published in Italy in the Age of the Enlightenment already played the typical normative and pedagogical functions of 19th-century textbooks, contributing to the social construction of market society. A related question is whether these «devices» played a role in the formation of the public sphere, and which role they played.

As to the organisation of the paper, we use the results of our research on 19th-century economics textbooks as a sort of benchmark for a comparative analysis of the 18th century. Therefore, section 1 analyses the connection between textbooks, the institutionalisation and international circulation of political economy and the development of the public sphere in the 19th century, while section 2 provides some hints for the study of 18th century textbooks. Given our limited competence in the latter period, these suggestions are only tentative and will require further research.

I. — THE INSTITUTIONALISATION AND DISSEMINATION OF POLITICAL ECONOMY, TEXTBOOK PRODUCTION, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN THE 19th CENTURY

The recent research on 19th-century economics textbooks has revealed that the expansion of this literary genre started immediately after the Restoration of 1815, and by the end of the century it had turned into a mass phenomenon. Table 1 maps the different sub-genres that were connected **either to an educational function** or to an activity of popularisation: books that had the appearance of scientific treatises but were *de facto* recommended or used as textbooks; essays that focused only on the definition of political economy, highlighting its aims and scope and its connections with other moral sciences; textbooks *stricto sensu*; lecture notes collected by students and young assistants and often revised by professors; and finally short manuals devoted to the popularisation of political economy amongst the middle and working classes.

⁸ See B. LATOUR, *Science in Action*; ID., *Pandora's Hope*; M. CALLON (ed.), *La science et ses réseaux*.

⁹ See F. MUNIESA, Y. MILLO and M. CALLON, «An Introduction to Market Devices».

TABLE 1. — Literary Genres in Italian books on political economy (1815-1922)

LITERARY GENRES	TOTAL AMOUNT		FIRST EDITIONS	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Treatises	79	14.21	49	11.81
Meta-economic essays	36	6.47	29	6.99
Textbooks	252	45.32	153	36.87
Lecture notes	138	24.82	138	33.25
Popular manuals	51	9.17	46	11.08
TOTAL	556	100	415	100

SOURCE

M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds.), *The Economic Reader*, p. 125.

Overall, more than 400 original «educational» works of economics were produced in the period between 1815-1922, not counting translations of textbooks from other languages¹⁰. And the figure rises to more than 550 if we take into account the further editions of a large number of these works. Some of them became true best-sellers and even long-sellers.

TABLE 2. — Types of textbooks of political economy published in Italy (1815-1922)

TYPES OF TEXTBOOKS	TOTAL NUMBER	FIRST EDITIONS
University	90	39
High school	150	104
Elementary school	2	2
Comparative exams	10	8
TOTAL	252	153

SOURCE

M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds.), *The Economic Reader*, p. 133.

¹⁰ See A. MAGLIULO, «La sistemazione dell'economia politica».

Table 2 details the types of textbooks that were published in the same period. The number of textbooks addressed to a public of university students is a consequence of the process of institutionalisation of political economy in Italian universities that took occasionally place since the Restoration but was propelled by the unification of Italy in 1861. Chairs of political economy were progressively created in all law faculties, and the new university regulations of 1876 added the teaching of statistics, while public finance was established as compulsory course in the academic year 1885-1886, following a period in which it had already existed as an optional course. Likewise in the eighties, two Higher Schools of Commerce were created in Genoa and Bari, similar to the first institution of this kind which had been founded in Venice in 1868.

As table 2 reveals, a large number of textbooks published in Italy was actually targeted at secondary school students. Most of them were adapted to the educational programmes of technical institutes, the «practical» branch of secondary education that was instituted in 1859 by the Kingdom of Sardinia (the dominion of the Savoy dynasty including Piedmont, Liguria and Sardinia), and was extended to the whole country after 1861. These institutes included a commercial branch in which political economy was regularly taught. Starting from the late 1880s, the revision of syllabuses entrusted to the positivist intellectual Aristide Gabelli introduced the teaching of political economy, in conjunction with ethics and law, into the «schools of education» (*scuole normali*), the secondary institutes for the training of primary school teachers. Finally, a small number of textbooks of political economy for lyceums were issued in the first decade of the twentieth century. Classical lyceums were the «noble» branch of secondary education, the only one that provided access to university studies. However, the teaching of political economy—combined with law—in lyceums did not survive the reform of 1923 entrusted by the fascist government to the philosopher Giovanni Gentile.

Preliminarily to examining the functions of political economy textbooks and their relationship with the rise of public opinion, we need to clarify the notion of «textbook» here employed. A textbook of political economy is a book aiming at educating certain groups of novice readers by enlightening them on the contents of the economic science and on the typical policy prescriptions that were made to derive from it. Such a pedagogical aim did not necessarily require a formal system of education, as demonstrated in the early nineteenth century by the spread of a literature for the economic self-education of women and young people¹¹. But the history of the nineteenth century also shows that with the progress in the institutionalisation of political economy in universities, secondary schools, and popular education, the number of textbooks significantly increased.

Who were the readers of economics textbooks? The institutional setting in which they were employed suggests that the audience was typically composed by students or middle-class and working-class adult people, and side by

¹¹ See K. TRIBE, «Economic Manuals and Textbooks».

side with them by teachers, parsons, members of religious orders, philanthropists and other educators. But one misses the real nature of early textbooks of political economy if one does not consider that many of them were aimed—as mentioned in their titles—at «whoever is interested in the laws of political economy». These were professionals (such as lawyers), farmers, landlords, entrepreneurs, civil servants, politicians, journalists, etc., i.e. the social basis of what Jürgen Habermas has called the «public sphere»¹². Economics textbooks were instrumental in forming and sustaining the public opinion and nourishing the public discourse.

In order to explain this role we must turn to the content of textbooks and to the way in which they represented the science of political economy and its policy prescriptions. The most relevant fact about nineteenth-century textbooks, at least until the 1870s, is not that they contained an exposition of the principles of the Smithian science of political economy, and therefore they illustrated the natural functioning of market laws and the self-determining, automatic social mechanisms that promised to generate well-being. What counted more was that textbooks combined a formally rational exposition of the scientific laws governing society with the prescriptions that were said to derive from them. Their main focus was normative rather than positive, more oriented to behaviour and government activity than to theoretical issues. The point was that the new science of political economy was seen to contain a clear political message, as the knowledge of the laws of this science opened the way to a new type of «governmentality»—in Foucault's¹³ terminology—in which the aim of promoting the public good was no longer attributed to the paternal care of the sovereign. The natural economic and demographic laws, if left free from interference, performed this political aim much more efficiently than governments. These laws at the same time put constraints on what was politically feasible and created the conditions for a growth of welfare that benefited all the classes of society. What is more, economic textbooks combined this «macro-economic» argument about governmentality with another very original «micro-economic» set of arguments about private behaviour. The latter consisted of those norms of individual behaviour that were considered consistent with the smooth functioning of market laws.

These aims were mirrored by the typical structure of nineteenth-century textbooks, modelled, with some variations, on Say's *Traité* and *Cours*. After an introductory part containing an extensive discussion of the scientific nature of political economy, of its methodology and of its connections with other moral or social sciences, textbooks were divided into four parts, respectively devoted to the analysis of production, circulation, distribution, and consumption. The theory of production and circulation contained the more objective, theoretical and formalised aspects of the science, like the definitions of wealth, value, prices,

¹² J. HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

¹³ M. FOUCAULT, *Sécurité, territoire, population*; ID., *Naissance de la biopolitique*.

trade, money, capital, and the analysis of the role of capital, labour and land in the production, reproduction and growth of wealth. Their aim was to show that there were natural laws underlying the production and circulation of wealth and that freedom of enterprise and of exchange encouraged competition and maximised well-being. Normative discussions in these parts related to the role of government in regulating trade, money and credit. Needless to say, *laissez-faire* arguments largely predominated at least until the last decades of the century. The theory of distribution contained both an objective theoretical analysis of the natural laws that regulated wages, profits and rents, and vehement normative digressions illustrating the benefits (and limits) of private property or the rules of individual and collective behaviour that the various social classes should adopt to be consistent with economic laws: privileges, artificial monopolies, the right of succession, trade-unions, strikes, associations, cooperatives, socialism were some typical targets of these discussions. Paradoxically but not surprisingly, the more elementary and synthetic the textbook was, the more this normative side was predominant. But the most striking part of textbooks was that on consumption. This part was composed by a sub-part on public consumption, which contained the theory of taxation and public expenditure, and by another very significant sub-part on private consumption, which offered a series of indications on the need to be industrious and on the virtues of moderation, saving, providence, marriage, family cohesion, responsible parenthood *et similia*. Here a «microphysics of power», to use Foucault's definition, was deployed in order to construct the morals of the market.

Therefore the aim of textbooks was the education of market actors through the creation of representations that showed the correct functioning of market laws. This aim implicitly assumed that the market could be beneficial to society only if public and private actors simultaneously acknowledged its governmentality and adopted behaviours that were consistent with it. Those involved in government and administration should know the laws of political economy to avoid *hybris* in their supposed efforts to improve the welfare of society. Individual economic agents—opportunistly supported and instructed by «deontologists»¹⁴—should know the laws of political economy in order to make choices based on their «true» enlightened interest, as intimated by Jean-Baptiste Say in such works as the *Cathéchisme d'économie politique*, the *Petit volume*¹⁵, and above all the *Essai sur le principe d'utilité* published as an appendix to the *Cours d'économie politique pratique*¹⁶. There was a sort of mirror effect, because everybody should take cognizance of the new modes of self-organisation of society: private actors should internalise the rules of behaviour that favoured them, while the government had to decide consistently with them. But there was a sort of «third party» in this scene, acting in the role of Smithian «impartial spectator», or in that

¹⁴ See J. BENTHAM, *Deontology*.

¹⁵ See J.-B. SAY, *Œuvres diverses de J.-B. Say*.

¹⁶ See, ID., *Leçons d'économie politique*, pp. 130-154.

of a «tribunal», as Jeremy Bentham¹⁷ and Gaetano Filangieri¹⁸ argued almost at the same time: enlightenment about the laws of political economy enabled everybody to verify if individual behaviour on the one hand and political and collective action on the other cooperated to securing and improving welfare and civilisation. The public discourse about the virtues of government and those of private citizens could now rely on the *knowledge* of the laws that generated the new mechanisms of social regulation. Open discussion became therefore a sort of macroscopic «naturalistic fallacy»: private morality and policy prescriptions should be grounded on, and «verified» by their consistency with, the truths manifested by the science of political economy.

As a matter of fact, nineteenth-century textbooks presented these systematic connections between economic laws to a supposedly ignorant public that was to learn them as a system. They instilled such a consciousness into relatively untrained minds that could be moulded at will, as a *tabula rasa*. They created a self-governing, self-referential civil society, by educating individuals, spreading the morals of the market, and shaping the horizon of expectations of market participants. And by cognitively constructing civil society through political economy, textbooks contributed to creating the public sphere, because they posited the conditions through which the inner normativity of the market was turned into a truth that could be studied scientifically and assessed on the basis of scientific reasoning, scientific analysis, empirical testing, etc. Market laws became a parameter, a benchmark to assess this new form of governmentality. «After the textbook», a public sphere could exist as mirror game between the governors and the governed, between the State and civil society. The public sphere could exist as a public discourse on the political virtues of the market because the morals of the market had been socially constructed also thanks to textbooks.

If this was the specific role of textbooks, the social construction of market society and the public discourse on its natural laws also depended on other devices and arrangements. Some of them were more focused on systematic analysis, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and series of books specialised in political economy, while others were intended as arenas for open debate, such as clubs of political economy and economic associations, journals of political economy, newspapers, public lectures, and, as soon as liberal revolutions made room for them, parliaments. What strikes in this context is the systematic and institutional connection between these instruments of dissemination and discussion. Taken together, they formed a network of human and non-human actors in which every element was directly connected to every other by a variety of links. And a further characteristic of these networks was their trans-national serialisation: similar sets of institutions appeared sequentially in various European countries. This means that such an institutionalisation of political economy was a phenomenon of a larger circulation of economic ideas throughout Europe

¹⁷ J. BENTHAM, *Constitutional Code*, p. 36.

¹⁸ G. FILANGIERI, *La Scienza della Legislazione*, bk. 4, ch. 53, «Della libertà di stampa».

that started in the 18th century¹⁹, and was supported by the circulation of individuals who travelled from a capital to another to attend courses of political economy, gatherings in *salons* and academies, or to meet the masters of the new science. However, our institutional focus allows us to observe that there was a third type of circulation, which reveals to what extent the social construction of market society through the dissemination of political economy was at the same time an institutional construction of knowledge and the creation of the conditions of possibility for the public sphere: this was the circulation of certain socio-technical arrangements that were adapted to different situations to perform a similar role.

We call these «serialised» sets of arrangements «institutional packages». An institutional package is a system of institutional and discursive devices that proves successful in one environment in promoting and establishing a particular form of governmentality and is imported in other areas by being adapted and «translated» by key actors, within key networks, in order to replicate a similar form of governmentality. Sometimes existing institutions are modified (and this is a particular form of translation) from within in order to adapt them to the new package. But the point is that it is impossible to think of the spread of economic ideas and of their success as arguments in public discussions without considering the effort that was made to institutionalise these sets of institutions in different geographical contexts.

Let us consider the institutional package that was associated with the success of classical political economy and *laissez-fairism* in the first half of the nineteenth century. Some of its elements were originally British, like the model of the Political Economy Club, but its canonical form was established in France and then circulated across European borders, from Spain and Portugal to Italy, Greece and other countries. As highlighted by the most recent studies on these phenomena²⁰, the lectures given by Jean-Baptiste Say at the *Athénée Royal*, at the *Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers* and at the *Collège de France* by the end of the 1820s remained quite isolated episodes, and political economy was institutionalised in universities only towards the end of the nineteenth century. Therefore the initiatives of French liberals focused on the economic enlightenment of the middle class in the public sphere. The establishment by Pellegrino Rossi, Charles Dunoyer, Joseph Garnier, Adolphe Blaise, Eugène Daire, Gilbert-Urbain Guillaumin and others of a *Société d'économie politique* in 1842 was the first step in this strategy²¹. The same group of intellectuals had created in 1841 the *Journal des économistes*. Six members of the Society were elected to parliament in the Second Republic²², while Frédéric Bastiat and Gustave de Molinari were

¹⁹ See V. LLOMBART, «Realidad nacional y circulación internacional»; E. LLUCH and J. L. CARDOSO, «Las teorías económicas».

²⁰ See L. LE VAN-LEMESLE (ed.), *Les problèmes de l'institutionnalisation*; ID., *Le Juste ou le Riche*; Ph. STEINER, «Cours, Leçons, Manuels».

²¹ Y. BRETON, «The Société d'économie politique of Paris».

²² See ID., «French Economists in Parliament».

instrumental in founding the *Association pour la liberté des échanges* in 1846, a propaganda society which was modelled on Richard Cobden's and John Bright's Anti-Corn Law League²³. This was also the golden age of the «public lectures» given by Adolphe Blanqui at the *Conservatoire des arts et métiers*, by Pellegrino Rossi and Michel Chevalier at the *Collège de France*, and by Joseph Garnier at the *École supérieure de commerce*²⁴. Finally, Guillaumin played the role of «official» publisher of the School, by promoting the series entitled *Collection des principaux économistes* (15 vols.) between 1840-1848, the *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique* (1852-1853) edited by Charles Coquelin and other *laissez-faire* economists²⁵, and other encyclopedias and series.

The fact that all these elements were «strictly complementary» is testified by their imitation in other countries. This happened in Belgium, where an *Association Belge pour la Liberté Commerciale* was established in 1846, accompanied by efforts to create societies, journals, and courses of political economy, to send economists to parliament and to publish textbooks and series of political economy²⁶. A similar adaptation of the package was attempted in Spain by the so-called *Escuela economista*, whose promoters founded journals like *El Economista* (1856-1857), *La Tribuna del Economista* (1857-1858) and the *Gaceta Economista* (1861-1863)²⁷, a *Sociedad Libre de Economía Política* (1856-1868) and an *Asociación para la Reforma de Aranceles de Aduanas* (1859-1868)²⁸. Like their French source of inspiration, Spanish liberals sent a patrol of economist to parliament after the democratic revolution of 1868²⁹. Finally the efforts to produce a textbook and a dictionary were originally combined in the *Curso de economía política* (1855-1856) by Benigno Carballo, which was a miscellany of translations from articles of Coquelin and Guillaumin's *Dictionnaire* and of excerpts from the *Cours d'économie politique* by Jean-Gustave Courcelle-Seneuil³⁰.

In Italy, the importation of the French liberal «institutional package» was the joint work of a group of economists composed among others by Antonio Scialoja, author of the *Principj della economia sociale*³¹, Gerolamo Boccardo—editor of various series and encyclopedias and author of a *Trattato*

²³ See G. de MOLINARI, «Frédéric Bastiat».

²⁴ All these economists published their lectures in the form of a textbook. See A. BLANQUI, *Cours d'économie industrielle*; P. ROSSI, *Cours d'économie politique*; M. CHEVALIER, *Cours d'économie politique*; J. GARNIER, *Abrégé des éléments de l'économie politique*; ID., *Traité d'économie politique*.

²⁵ Ch. COQUELIN and G.-U. GUILLAUMIN (eds.), *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*.

²⁶ See G. ERREYERS, «Economic Associations in Belgium»; G. ERREYERS and M. van DIJCK, «A Powerful Instrument of Progress».

²⁷ See S. ALMENAR, «Economic Thought in Spanish Periodical Publications».

²⁸ See S. ALMENAR and V. LLOMBART, «Spanish Societies, Academies and Economic Debating Societies».

²⁹ See S. ALMENAR, «Chair, Tribune and Seat».

³⁰ See ID., «Teaching, Spreading and Preaching».

³¹ A. SCIALOJA, *I principj della economia sociale*.

*teorico-pratico di economia politica*³² and of a *Dizionario della economia politica e del commercio così teorico come pratico*³³—and Francesco Ferrara, founder and editor of various journals, founder with Camillo Benso di Cavour of the *Società di Economia Politica* (1852), and of a second *Società di Economia Politica* in 1868 (whose president was appointed Giovanni Arrivabene, a former member of the Belgian liberal group)³⁴, and finally editor of two series entitled *Biblioteca dell'economista* (1850-1868), including 26 volumes that contained the translation of textbooks, treatises, journal articles and entries of Guillin and Coquelin's *Dictionnaire*³⁵. Giuseppe Pomba was the enlightened entrepreneur who promoted this and other publishing ventures of the liberal group³⁶. Following the pathway of their French colleagues, Scialoja, Ferrara, Boccardo and other economists taught political economy in various Italian universities, to an audience that was only partially composed by students. These and other economists became members of parliament³⁷. The sponsorship of the Count of Cavour, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia in the decade preceding the unification of Italy (1852-1861) and absolute protagonist of the events that led to this result³⁸, was instrumental in supporting this network of liberal economists³⁹.

Concluding this analysis of the networks that supported the circulation of economic ideas in early nineteenth-century Europe, we can see that there was a connection between the imitations of the French-liberal institutional package, the production of treatises and textbooks of political economy and the development of the public sphere. The networks of institutions thus created represented the social basis of the public sphere, while textbooks provided theoretical foundations to the economic language that was spoken within it. Applying Giandomenico Romagnosi's distinction between «native» and «dative» elements in the history of civilisation⁴⁰, it is interesting to remark that there was a strong dative side in the spread of the new discourse on political economy and in the creation of the public sphere.

³² G. BOCCARDO, *Trattato teorico-pratico di economia politica*. See G. BIANCHI and R. FAUCCI, «Il Trattato di Gerolamo Boccardo».

³³ G. BOCCARDO, *Dizionario della economia politica*.

³⁴ See M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI, «The Associations of Economists».

³⁵ See P. ROGGI, «Francesco Ferrara»; G. GIOLI, «Lo studio delle "scienze economiche"».

³⁶ See G. MICHELAGNOLI, «Francesco Ferrara».

³⁷ See M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI, «Economists and Political Economy in Parliament».

³⁸ See R. ROMEO, *Cavour e il suo tempo*.

³⁹ There were other successful «institutional packages» in the nineteenth-century history of economics. Consider, for example, the international success of the Socialism of the Chair in the 1870s and 80s, with its typical associations, journals and publishing ventures, or the more limited attempts to imitate the Marshallian organisation of economic studies at the University of Cambridge at the turn of the nineteenth century. The international spread of Marxism, Socialist planning and corporativism (at least in clusters of countries characterised by similar political regimes) are other examples of the same phenomenon at a later date.

⁴⁰ G. D. ROMAGNOSI, *Dell'indole e dei fattori dell'incivilimento*, pp. 25, 59-60.

II. — THE 18th-CENTURY TEXTBOOKS OF «CIVIL» OR «PUBLIC» ECONOMY AND THE CREATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

As known, the process of academic institutionalisation of political economy already started in the 18th century, in Italy as elsewhere. However, compared to the 19th century, the introduction of political economy into university curricula was only episodic in Old Regime Italian states. On 5th November 1754, Antonio Genovesi opened his course of «Commerce and Mechanics» at the University of Naples, which he repeated until his death in 1769. A new course was entrusted to Troiano Odazi in 1782, followed some years later by Domenico Genovese⁴¹. As far as Northern Italy is concerned, it was only on 9th January 1769 that Cesare Beccaria started teaching «public economy» at the *Scuole Palatine* in Milan. He lectured until 1771, when he was followed by Alfonso Longo who taught the same subject until 1782. The only other episode of institutionalisation in the 18th century refers to the University of Modena, where Agostino Paradisi was professor of «civil economy» from 1772 to 1780⁴².

These episodes of institutionalisation of political economy stimulated the production of some works whose title revealed their nature of textbook. Genovesi published his *Delle lezioni di commercio o sia di economia civile* in 1765-1767⁴³. Beccaria did not publish a systematic textbook, although some lecture notes of his courses circulated in Milan. One of them was bought and published by Baron Pietro Custodi as *Elementi di economia pubblica* in 1804 as part of the 50-volume series *Scrittori Classici Italiani di Economia Politica*⁴⁴. Longo adopted Pietro Verri's *Meditazioni sull'economia politica*⁴⁵ as a reading recommended to students, while Paradisi's lectures were only accompanied by the circulation of lecture notes. Interestingly, in 1886-1887 Paradisi planned to translate and adopt Condillac's *Le commerce et le gouvernement considérés relativement l'un à l'autre* (1776)⁴⁶: a project that was not accomplished and which, incidentally, would have given to this work a larger circulation than it actually had.

We must now turn to the institutional context of these episodes in order to see if there were similarities between them and the more systematic phenomena of institutionalisation that took place in the 19th century, and if these similarities may justify the argument that the normative and pedagogical process associated with the teaching of political economy and the circulation of textbooks in the 19th century had its origins in the Age of the Enlightenment.

To be sure, there was an equally strong and visible institutional package behind the institutionalisation of political economy in the 18th century. Political economy was part and parcel of the enlightened reform strategy promoted by

⁴¹ See F. DI BATTISTA, «Per la storia della prima cattedra universitaria d'economia», pp. 40-42.

⁴² See M. BIANCHINI, «Una difficile gestazione».

⁴³ A. GENOVESI, *Delle lezioni di commercio*.

⁴⁴ C. BECCARIA, *Elementi di economia pubblica*.

⁴⁵ P. VERRI, *Meditazioni sulla economia politica*.

⁴⁶ See É. B. de CONDILLAC, *Le commerce et le gouvernement*.

some intellectual circles in close connection with local monarchs and political authorities. The group gathering around Bartolomeo Intieri and Celestino Galiani in Massa Equana, of which Genovesi was a member, or the *Accademia dei Pugni* created and led by Pietro Verri and Cesare Beccaria in Milan are remarkable examples of this institutional background⁴⁷. Scholars like Verri and Genovesi participated in public non-elected bodies, in which their expertise in political economy was highly recognised. The enlightened sovereigns of various Italian states promoted the reform of universities and higher education establishments, and made room for subjects like agriculture and political economy in their syllabuses. The teaching of these subjects at the *Scuole Palatine* in Milan was a clear demonstration of the public function that was attributed to them. The «Plan of direction, discipline and economy» of the University and Palatine Schools issued by the Austrian government of Lombardy in 1771 placed education under the jurisdiction of the State and transformed it into a public service⁴⁸. The *Scuole Palatine* offered lectures on technical and legal subjects concentrated in one academic year. These courses, combined with four years of attendance at the University of Pavia, granted a graduation in law. Lectures were public and open to everybody without distinction of rank. However they were mainly attended by those who intended to apply for public offices. Its diplomas were considered preferential qualifications for obtaining such offices. Cameral sciences and political economy were taught at an elementary level, so that everybody could understand their content⁴⁹. The cases of Naples and Modena, where political economy was taught at the Faculty of Philosophy as a general introductory course, were not dissimilar. There too the introduction of political economy was connected to the education of those who had—or were supposed to obtain—responsibilities in government.

Other elements of this institutional setting were the academies of sciences, letters and arts and the more focused academies of agriculture and economy like the *Accademia dei Georgofili*, created in Florence by Ubaldo Montelatici in 1753, and soon transformed into a public body⁵⁰. Most of these institutions—animated by aristocrats, members of the clergy and rampant men of letter—were actually public bodies whose by-laws were approved by the sovereign and whose discussions were strictly controlled from above. They were intended as places in which useful knowledge was to be developed in order to support the government in its reforming action. The place that political economy found in their activities has been documented, and is revealed by various periodical publications and transactions issuing from these institutions⁵¹. On a partially different

⁴⁷ F. VENTURI, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 1, ch. 8; C. CAPRA, *I progressi della ragione*, pp. 177-231.

⁴⁸ See M. BIANCHINI, «Una difficile gestazione», p. 49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

⁵⁰ See R. PASTA, «L'Accademia dei Georgofili»; V. BECAGLI, «L'Accademia economico-agraria dei Georgofili».

⁵¹ See the various contributions to M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds.), *Associazionismo economico*, vol. I.

side, the case of the short-lived journal entitled *Il Caffè* (1764-1766), connected to the informal academy gathered by Verri and Beccaria, is a vivid example of the way in which the study of political economy was connected to new forms of aristocratic sociability aimed at the modernisation of society and at the creation of a reforming governing class.

Therefore, also in the 18th century the spread and circulation of political economy, and its institutionalisation as a science with a clear political content, were connected to the creation of a network of individuals and institutions in which economic knowledge and expertise played a key role. Furthermore, it is clear that most of the institutions listed above had as a source of inspiration the French model, with its academies, *salons* and informal intellectual circles, and with its journals and other publishing ventures (like the *Encyclopédie*). The circulation of Italian intellectuals between Naples, Milan, Venice and Paris is a proof that such a model existed and was recognised by contemporaries, as the biographies of Ferdinando Galiani, Pietro Verri and Cesare Beccaria well exemplify. However, the academic institutionalisation of political economy owed more to the German and Austrian model of state and cameral sciences than to the French example, although Naples can boast of a priority in Europe in this field. There are however two features of this «Enlightenment and Reform» institutional package that emerge in comparison with the 19th-century French-liberal equivalent. Firstly, it was less directly focused on the promotion and dissemination of political economy. A principal aim of journals, academies, aristocratic circles and debating societies was the critique of tradition, prejudice, obscurantism in their multiple shapes. Scientific, literary, philosophical subjects were as much important, if not more important, than political and economic subjects. Even the political debate was less dominated by politico-economic issues than in the early 19th century. And secondly, in the institutionalisation of economic knowledge and in the demand for economic expertise political economy was rivalled by the less political and more technical subject of agriculture.

Were these differences of focus related to the nature of the economic discourse and to the type of economic knowledge that was expected to be taught, and that was actually taught, in universities and «palatine» schools? It is certain that the political economy that university regulations and the will of sovereigns and other political bodies delineated was strongly different from the neo-Smithian⁵² political economy that prevailed in the early 19th century. This political economy was inspired by enlightened principles of economic and social reform aiming at developing the agriculture, manufactures and trade in order to increase the welfare of the nation, suppressing feudal privileges, reforming the law of property, limiting poverty, placing the finances of the State on a more solid basis, ensuring the defence of the country, and promoting the arts and civilisation. However, the emphasis was on *agenda* rather than *non-agenda*, i.e. on the policy techniques

⁵² See Ph. STEINER (ed.), *L'économie politique néo-smithienne*.

through which the sovereign could achieve these goals of government. Political economy should recommend the best combination of regulations, rewards and punishments that could make the choices of individuals compatible with these goals. The detailed description of the content of courses that is contained in the by-laws of the Universities of Modena and Reggio or the *Scuole Palatine* in Milan trace a theoretical framework which is on the one hand descriptive and taxonomical, and on the other hand prominently normative. Detailed description and taxonomy are a necessity, because the different activities of the various classes composing the nation must be known one by one, with their peculiarities, their habits, their conventions, and their institutional regulations, if the sovereign aims to introduce reforms and to increase well-being⁵³. On the other hand, the approach is prominently normative, because it is grounded in the idea that well-being and national power are the artificial product of the paternal, enlightened and continuous care of the sovereign. In the case of Naples, there was an inner tension between Bartolomeo Intieri's more technical and scientific aims, and Genovesi's «Scienza del commercio». The latter was offered to the reforming State as «the school of economic reason» and as a scientific and educational tool for the government of the economy⁵⁴. The history of the chair of political economy after Genovesi's death reveals the attempts of the government to transform the teaching of political economy into a more administrative subject. This does not mean that there was no demand for a more scientific and systematic analysis of economic laws and general principles. But the inner structure of the political economy that emerges from the analysis of the official documents of Italian Old regime states is strikingly dissimilar from the naturalistic and systematic theory of the self-functioning of market mechanisms that became successful after the Napoleonic era. The political framework that enshrines the older political economy is the active, minute and paternal care of the sovereign, not the governmentality of economic laws.

Let us take as an example Genovesi's *Lezioni di economia civile*. The «Promemio» offers a definition of «civil economy» which is firmly rooted in the framework of the Aristotelian practical philosophy. «Economy» is one of the «moral sciences». It is the art of the *pater familias* aiming at providing the family with «virtue, wealth, and glory»⁵⁵. The definition of the *despòtes* as «the Head, and Prince of his family»⁵⁶ introduces to the analogy between the family and

⁵³ Agostino Paradisi's course in Modena (1773-1774 and 1774-1775), as revealed by his lecture notes, is exactly in this style, covering in the first year an outline of the economic system, the moral system, property, fidecommissums, mortmains, agriculture, forests, hunting, fisheries and mines. In the second year it deals with commerce in three parts: commerce in general (territory, workers [not labour!], proprietors [not property or capital] as the leading class of society, population, labour, metals); the elements of commerce (exchange, the circulation of money, the amount of specie, interest); and foreign trade (change, money, and the balance of trade). See M. BIANCHINI, «Una difficile gestazione», p. 65.

⁵⁴ See F. DI BATTISTA, «Per la storia della prima cattedra universitaria d'economia», pp. 36-37.

⁵⁵ A. GENOVESI, *Delle lezioni di commercio*, p. 262.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

the State, and between the father and the Sovereign. Civil economy is one of the parts of the art of politics, which considers the prince

as the great Father, or Sovereign of the nation, and instructs him to govern with science, prudence, and humanity. And *Civil Economy* is the part of politics embracing the rules that may render the subject nation populous, rich, powerful, wise and polite. On the other hand, *Political Tactics* properly is the part containing the art of legislating and preserving the State and the Empire⁵⁷.

Genovesi expects that the audience of his lectures will be composed by landlords, judges and lawyers, theologians, financiers, governors of provinces and State ministers⁵⁸. The general thrust of Genovesi's economic discourse is moral and normative. He speaks of the duties of the landlord and of the duties of the prince, and among them he lists the knowledge of the civil and natural history of their country⁵⁹. Knowledge of political economy is necessary to judges and lawyers on account of the the large number of regulations that govern economic activities⁶⁰. The same knowledge is required from those who take government responsibilities, as they must aim to promote increasing prosperity whenever it is possible, or to preserve it in hard times⁶¹.

On the other hand, the expert in civil economy who instructs this audience is the «political philosopher enchanted by the true causes of public opulence and prosperity, i.e. virtues and arts»⁶². The latter must have a complete knowledge of the political economy of nations, because «without a system of these notions, adapted not only to the nature and needs of man, but to the conditions, qualities and interests of each nation, one operates blindly, and risks to be ruined»⁶³.

The action of the sovereign in promoting the ends of political economy is based by Genovesi on the study of human nature, in which the hedonistic assumptions that he derived from the sensationalist tradition are at work⁶⁴. This constitution of the human frame is essential because it indicates the ways in which the sovereign can obtain his goals: not by managing or directing every economic activity but by indirectly stimulating what he considers to be favourable to welfare and power, or to populousness and civilisation, and on the contrary by discouraging what is unfavourable to these goals. By providing artificial pains through prohibition and punishment, and artificial pleasures through reward and prizes, the sovereign will direct the energies of his subjects where he wishes:

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 264-265.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 266-267.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-277.

These forces [of the mind and of the body], when they are well managed and properly combined, and directed to an end, will make Sovereigns almost omnipotent, as Mr. Fontenelle says with much grace. It is not easy to understand what can be done with them, when they are well and attractively employed and stimulated, and mainly through prize and honour, which are two very powerful springs of the human mind⁶⁵.

Similarly, Pietro Verri in *Meditazioni* explains that the government must not minutely regulate every aspect of economic life. On the contrary, it can more effectively intervene «obliquely», leveraging on the one hand the knowledge of economic processes, and on the other hand the natural principles that regulate the human mind: the avoidance of pain and the search for pleasure⁶⁶.

However, the main actor in all these processes is the sovereign. There is more proximity in the overall approach to political economy between Nicolas Delamare or Jacob Friedrich von Bielfeld (or before them, Jean Bodin)⁶⁷ and Genovesi (or Verri), than between the latter and Jean-Baptiste Say. This does not mean that there is no critical renewal of the old police and cameralistic traditions. But the «modernity» of the Italian economic authors of the Enlightenment period lies more in the analysis of the energy and plasticity of the human mind—with its typical passions and interests⁶⁸—than in the consciousness of self-ordering economic processes. The «natural laws» to which they constantly refer are the hedonistic attributes and motives of individuals, rather than the laws that spontaneously regulate exchanges and population mechanisms and promote economic development.

Perhaps an indicator of the difference between eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century political economy is offered by the relative fragility of the teaching of political economy. In Naples, after Genovesi's death, Galiani refuses to replace him at the chair of political economy and is sceptical about its survival⁶⁹. The crisis of the chair is evident as two competitions in 1769 and 1777 fail to find Genovesi's successor. The chair is not suppressed but it undergoes a period of decline because of the government's attempt to transform it into a merely administrative discipline. In Milan in 1771 Beccaria quits the Scuole Palatine to become a member of the Supreme Council of the Economy and later of the Cameral Magistracy. It seems that among the reasons of this decision there was the fact that those offices were better remunerated⁷⁰. Then Kaunitz suppresses the chair in 1782. Similarly in Modena, Paradisi renounces to the chair in 1780 to become overseer of public education⁷¹.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 277-278.

⁶⁶ P. VERRI, *Meditazioni sulla economia politica*, p. 511.

⁶⁷ J. BODIN, *Les Six Livres de la République*; N. DELAMARE, *Traité de la Police*; J. F. VON BIELFELD, *Institutions politiques*.

⁶⁸ See A. O. HIRSCHMAN, *The Passions and the Interests*.

⁶⁹ F. DI BATTISTA, «Per la storia della prima cattedra universitaria d'economia», p. 37.

⁷⁰ M. BIANCHINI, «Una difficile gestazione», p. 57.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

How can this fragility be interpreted? As revealed by the description of the institutional package attempted at the beginning of this section, political economy was considered a central art of government, and its critical analyses served as a blueprint for social and political reform. However, in a way practising this art seemed to be more important than teaching or spreading it. And expertise appeared to many more important than education and open discussion. The descriptive, artificialist and normative structure of eighteenth-century political economy excludes that such a theory could be foundational for a self-referential economic sphere regulated by natural laws, in which individuals participate as elements of a social mechanism to which they must be educated and about which they must be enlightened. More precisely, individuals must be educated and enlightened, and academies, economic societies and journals demonstrate the efforts made to create at least the core of a modern public sphere. But first of all they have to be governed: and political economy is the art and science of the statesman and legislator and is taught to the statesman and legislator.

Nevertheless, the typical nineteenth-century approach to political economy cannot come from nowhere and it would be ungenerous to say that it had no native element in the Italian Enlightenment tradition of economic thought. The most telling example is perhaps that of Cesare Beccaria. One of his early works in economics is «Tentativo analitico su' i contrabbandi» (1765), a short paper published in *Il Caffè* in which a formal mathematical apparatus is applied to the understanding of a complex economic phenomenon. On the other hand Beccaria's lecture notes collected in *Elementi* reveal traces of an old-style approach to political economy, based on the role of government in encouraging agriculture and other economic activities. One of his models seems to be Joseph von Sonnenfels' «Grundsätze der Polizei, Handlung und Finanzwissenschaft»⁷², a work that reveals a narrowly defined and quite old-fashioned role of police regulations⁷³. However among Beccaria's sources there are also Cantillon, Hume, and a dash of Physiocracy. Furthermore, the text reveals a methodology that is closer to that adopted in «Tentativo» and based on a «Galilean» scientific approach to the analysis of economic phenomena. Policy recommendations are selected consistently with the results of economic analysis. The laws that regulate the growth of wealth—which can be discovered through «political arithmetic» and probability calculus—are natural and providential. The existence of such laws only makes the economic science applicable and useful.

On his side, Verri concludes his *Meditazioni* by arguing that the end of the «Minister of the Economy» is

... never to despair about the good, and to speed up its advent by spreading into the Nation the seeds of the most useful truths [...]. All the rest should be abandoned to the immediate principle that moves the universe and acts with unchangeable laws. This principle unites and divides every

⁷² J. VON SONNENFELS, *Grundsätze der Polizei*.

⁷³ M. BIANCHINI, «Una difficile gestazione», p. 53; K. TRIBE, *Governing Economy*, pp. 86-87.

being; but it never plunders and it leaves nothing idle in the physical as well as in the political domain. This principle, of which we see the effects, know the existence and admire the laws, is called by us—with a vague and always indefinite vocable—nature⁷⁴.

We find therefore in Beccaria and Verri some important attempts to provide a formal rationalisation of economic knowledge, and these attempts prepare the ground for the new science of political economy of the Physiocrats and Adam Smith. Verri offers a clear example of an intention to promote the advent of a «natural» regulation of economic phenomena through the enlightenment of the public opinion.

A first result of the comparative analysis attempted in this paper through the case study of Italy between the 18th and the 19th century, is that the context for the development of political economy as a set of representations and norms appears to be institutionally dense and to be organised around institutional packages that circulate through transnational networks of people and arrangements, and are adapted to different circumstances: the «Enlightenment and Reform» package in the 18th century, and the «(Anglo-)French liberal» package in the 19th century.

A second conclusion is that the relative fragility of the institutionalisation of political economy in the 18th century as compared with 19th century can be interpreted as a symptom of a different role attributed to political economy in these respective contexts. On the one hand this branch of knowledge was seen as the art and science of government that should guide the action of reform of enlightened sovereigns thanks to an analysis of the human nature that revealed the natural «forces» or «springs of action» that the government could wisely manipulate to obtain the ends of prosperity, power, populousness, and politeness. On the other hand, political economy became since the early 19th century the science of the natural laws of production, distribution, exchange and consumption, and its main role consisted both in revealing their inner political normativity, and in creating a system of representations and norms that were consistent with, and supportive to, the smooth functioning of market and population laws.

This conclusion is confirmed by the texts that were more closely connected to the institutionalisation of political economy. Not only the limited number of original treatises or textbooks published in the 18th century in Italy sharply contrasts with the mass phenomenon of publication and circulation of these instruments in the following century. The brief descriptions and quotations we have provided also offer some confirmations of the different nature and aims of political economy in either case. Maybe the absence of popular manuals and

⁷⁴ P. VERRI, *Meditazioni sulla economia politica*, pp. 559-560.

of guides for the education of the youth in the Age of Enlightenment is a further sign that such a difference was also strictly related to the role of the public sphere: there can be a fully developed public opinion and an open public discussion on the consistency of policy and private choices only when political economy is attributed the function of indicating the forces that replace and put serious limits to the visible hand of government. Nowadays that public discussion suggests to revise uncritical confidence in market forces, we are still talking of putting *limits* to the latter, rather than replacing them with active, albeit democratic, manipulation from above.

Nevertheless the natural character of economic processes begins to appear in 18th-century economic writings, on the background of the Galilean tradition that was typical of early Italian economic science⁷⁵, but also under the influence of Hume and the Physiocrats. This approach is obviously transitional to an alternative way of conceiving the systematic exposition of principles that textbooks of political economy offered, and to new functions of these instruments in the creation of a new system of social and political relationships, in which the public sphere is a third party between private agents and government.

⁷⁵ See M. BIANCHINI, *Alle origini della scienza economica*; ID., «Some Fundamental Aspects»; ID., «The Galilean Tradition».