

## REFERENCES

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Sophus Reinert, *Translating Empire: Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 438, \$61. ISBN 978-0-674-06151-4.

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In the opening pages of *Translating Empire*, Sophus Reinert details the argument of his book. First, "it seeks to reveal the conflicted roots of political economy in the long eighteenth century and the seminal roles played in its institutionalization by the translations of texts and practices by the pressures of international competition; and by what contemporaries knew as 'emulation'" (p. 2). Second, "it draws inspiration from recent calls to unite the traditions of 'entangled' and 'comparative' historiography, aiming to analyze Enlightenment political economy in comparative terms while simultaneously telling a coherent story" (p. 3). And, finally, it uses John Cary's *Essay on the State of England Trade*, first published in 1695, "to explicate how European political communities competed between the 'Glorious Revolution' and the French Revolution, how some grew wealthy, while others became poor, and how they struggled to be free in a world where industry to an ever greater extent secured liberty and greatness through violent economic rivalries" (p. 4).

Reinert goes on to back up these claims in five thick chapters. The opening chapter, "Emulation and Translation," is the most important since it draws together intellectual history, cultural history, and economic history in a single methodological framework in order to argue for a reconsideration of the role political and economic emulations played in the comparative fate of competitive states and nations of early modern Europe. Building on the argument of his late mentor, Istvan Hont, that Jealousy of Trade represents one of the main tenets of early modern political thought, Reinert shows that much of the literature of eighteenth-century political economy revolved around the success of English economic policies and ideas. In the context of the progressive erosion of Latin as the common language of European scholars since the Renaissance, translation became a major medium for facilitating such emulation. Indeed, Reinert registers an unprecedented surge of translations of economic works in Europe in the middle of the eighteenth century. Looking deeper into this phenomenon, he shows that it is precisely at this moment that England began to be a net exporter of knowledge, in the form of economic works translated into foreign languages, as well as the leader in terms of economic development in Europe. From this perspective, Reinert questions the "precursorism" of much of the literature on early modern political economy that emphasizes texts, such as those of the physiocrats and Adam Smith that adopted the "doux commerce" *cum* laissez-faire model of development and, by the same token, belittle the contributions of mercantilists such as John Cary.

The second chapter offers an overview of John Cary's life and career, first as a merchant from Bristol, then as a statesman in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The main part of the chapter is dedicated to a detailed discussion of Cary's economic and political ideas as they are developed in the *Essay on the State of England Trade* in its multiple editions. During the twenty-five years that separated the *Essay*, Cary's first published writing, and his death in 1720, Cary developed a consistent set of arguments that called for a positive balance of trade and the development of England's power through commerce and manufactures. A representative of the Bristol merchant community, he favored an aggressive policy toward imperial competitors such as France and a tighter control over Ireland's economic destiny. At the end of his life, Cary played with the idea that trade was governed by principles that can be proven and assembled into a coherent "science."

The third chapter presents the French translation of Cary's *Essay*, published in 1755, and develops the political, cultural, and economic context in which it was made and released. The translator of Cary was Georges-Marie Butel du Mont, a young protégé of the famous intendant of trade, Vincent de Gournay. The author of several works on English trade and secretary of the commission charged with settling border disputes between France and England in their colonies, Butel du Mont was perfectly equipped to deal with Cary's text and to present it to a French audience. In the process, Cary's slim volume of less than 200 pages ballooned to two volumes of more than 1,000 pages.

Moreover, Butel du Mont's translation was one of the books from Gournay's circle that was translated into Italian. Antonio Genovesi, translator of Cary by way of Butel du Mont in 1758, would also translate in 1765 Claude Herbert's very successful *Essai sur la police générale des grains*. Through the process of yet another cultural reconditioning, Cary's *Essay* grew to an impressive 1,500 pages. Although Genovesi claimed to have a "laconic style of writing" and to have added only "very few annotations," he, like the French translator from whom he took over the *Essay*, transformed the text to a large extent, adding a new introduction of 130 pages and many annotations, but also "an exceedingly liberal translation of Thomas Mun's *England's Treasure by Forraign Trade*." While Du Mont's principal concern was to relieve Cary's book of its initial anti-Catholicism and francophobia, Genovesi's translation inscribed the work in a narrative of greatness and decline that informed, following the teaching of Giambattista Vico, much of the Neapolitan contribution to European enlightenment (pp. 200–203).

The last chapter describes the peregrinations of Cary's *Essay* throughout German-speaking states where the polymath, polyglot, and occasional political economist Christian August Wichmann produced what Reinert called quite appropriately a *pot-pourri* German version of Cary's *Essay*. Aware of the existence of the earlier lives of the *Essay* in England and France, Wichmann set himself to the task of producing a German translation of Genovesi's version of Cary. This translation would encapsulate the work of all three previous authors/translators, consigning his painstaking, bibliographical work to erudite annotations in his own version of the *Essay*. This quest to provide his readers the perfect map of the Cary–Butel du Mont–Genovesi political economy ends abruptly, though, since only the first one of the projected three or four volumes—depending on whether one takes Wichmann seriously when he announced

in his general introduction that he would provide a final volume that would advertise his own thoughts on political economy—was ever published. It seems as though the German translation went largely unnoticed.

This is a brilliant book. Reinert knows perfectly how to transform a good story into good history. The evidence he marshals to argue for the central role played by translation in the development of early modern European political thought is, indeed, compelling. Moreover, this reviewer fully agrees with the necessity underlined by the author in several places to consider the history of political economy in a European and even global setting instead of focusing on one national context, be it the English classical school, the French physiocrats, or the Scottish Enlightenment.

This said, Reinert gets sometimes carried away with his own flamboyance and develops a strong argument on thin historical evidence. For instance, I am rather skeptical about the overall argument that one could gain some insight in the history of enlightened economies from drawing bilateral balance of trade translations. At best, Reinert simply transposes Joel Mokyr's *Enlightened Economy* argument that more and better knowledge was key to England's rise to pre-eminence in the early modern world. However, the methodology behind the construction of these balances is remarkably shaky, as the example of the *Essay* itself makes clear. How should we count the translation of Cary's *Essay* into Italian? Is it an export from England or from France to Italy? Likewise, Wichmann's translation was based on the Italian version, but I believe that it was counted as an export from England to Germany. More generally, when one commodity passes from one country to another, it does not change shape, but as Reinert himself has forcefully demonstrated, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century economic texts did just this and to no small extent. Hence, the use of balances of trade is no more than a doubtful metaphor. More generally, it would have been nice to have had a thorough discussion of the social and economic history of the translation of works of political economics and to have a clearer picture of its European market(s). I wish that Reinert had emulated Robert Darnton's canonical study of the business of the *Encyclopédie*.<sup>1</sup> Reinert does provide an impressionistic account of the prices of copies of Cary's *Essay* in the original as well as in translation, but as it is unrelated to a precise historical argument, I am unsure what it demonstrates beyond his impressive erudition.

Finally, when, in the opening of the "Epilogue," Reinert states, "The extraordinary international influence of Cary's *Essay* forces us to rethink the history of political economy," (p. 271) he clearly overplays his hand. There are a number of other works from the same period—some English, such as Josiah Child's *A New Discourse on Trade*; Scottish, such as Hume's *Political Discourses*; French, such as Forbonnais's *Elements of Commerce*; or even Spanish, such as Geronimo de Ustariz's *On the Theory and Practice of Commerce*—that moved through the same circuit of multiple European translations as did Cary's *Essay*. Moreover, it is unclear how much influence and admiration the *Essay* really enjoyed in eighteenth-century Europe. The French intendant of commerce Vincent de Gournay believed that it was Josiah Child's *Discourse* rather

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<sup>1</sup>*The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

than Cary's *Essay* that was the urtext of the English government. Indeed, his 1752 translation circulated within the French administration before it was finally published despite strong opposition from his superiors.<sup>2</sup> More generally, I believe that there is little historiographical gain to be expected from replacing Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* with John Cary's *Essay* (or Josiah Child's *Discourse*) as the canonical basis of European economic policies. If one want to reconcile the history of political economy with broader historiographical trends, such as the search for a global perspective and a renewed attention for the interaction of the social-economic and the cultural-intellectual, I believe it is best to dispense with the issue of influence altogether. We should follow Reinert and try to provide a better understanding of this—enormous and undeservedly sidelined by generations of historians and economists alike—“mercantilist” literature.

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<sup>2</sup>“It is by following the maxims of M. Child which have been for 50 years, just as he wished, the basis and the ruler of the administration of trade in England that the English nation has not only regained all the trades that she had lost, but has also increased its power and its influence, on the sea as well as on the continent, to the level we see it today.” In Simone Meyssonier, ed., *Traité sur le commerce de Josiah Child suivis des Remarques de Jacques Vincent de Gournay* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), p. 37.