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Condorcet's *Vie de Monsieur Turgot*

Anton Gerits

Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794) had been nominated in December 1785 as professor of mathematics at the Lycée, where he would be teaching by the side of Marmontel (history), La Harpe (literature), Fourcroy (chemistry and natural history), and Deparcieux and Monge (physics). The new position was not, however, Condorcet's main interest at that time. He was entrusting the actual teaching to the young and talented S. F. Lacroix. He wanted to devote himself to politics.

Condorcet was, in fact, about to create a stir, for he had just finished his *Vie de Monsieur Turgot*, which appeared in January 1786. Contrary to what is suggested by the title, this book was not a biography but rather an exposé of Turgot's educational, political, and economic ideas. In fact, Stanley Jevons has called it one of the earliest works on "économie pure," He also included it in his famous list of "mathematico-economic" works, for Condorcet expressed his ideas on fiscal reform and on freedom of commerce and trade in mathematical terms.¹

The book was an immediate success, with four editions in 1786, all of which give "Londres" as the place of publication. Each can be clearly distinguished from the others:

ANTON GERITS, an antiquarian bookseller, is founder of the firm of A. Gerits & Son in Amsterdam.

EDITION A: *Vie de Monsieur Turgot*

Collation: [4], [1]-299, [1] p.

Signatures: π^2 A-S⁸ T⁶

Contains an Avertissement followed by an Avis de l'Editeur, which informs the reader where these notes are to be inserted.

Errata list has a misprint: page 134 instead of 104.

Contains two long notes printed at end. The first of these notes comments on recently published works and considers Turgot's fiscal ideas. The second concerns the right to establish a business wherever one wishes, which Turgot favored for all businesses save makers of wigs, printers and booksellers, workers in precious metals and the arts, and pharmacists.

Copy in the Kress Library of Business and Economics, Harvard Business School.

¹ W. Stanley Jevons, *The Theory of Political Economy*, 5th edition (1957; reprint New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965), 323–24.

EDITION B: *Vie de Monsieur Turgot*

Collation: [6], [1]-246 p.

Signatures: π^4 (- π_4 blank) A-R⁸ X⁴ (-X₄ blank)

Contains two long notes printed at end. Following the Avertissement is an Avis de l'Editeur informing the reader where these notes are to be inserted.

No Errata list, and the errors have been corrected.

The following two editions (C and D) are both improved editions. In both, the long notes that in A and B were at the end of the volumes, are printed in the appropriate places.

EDITION C: *Vie de Monsieur Turgot*

Collation: [i-iii], iv, [5]-287 p.

Signatures: π^2 (- π_2 blank) A-S⁸. Signature A misspelled as follows: A₁ unsigned; A₂ signed A₁; A₃ signed A_{ii}; A₄ signed A_{iv}.

The notes that in Editions A and B are at end are printed in the appropriate place; there is no Avis de l'Editeur, for it has become superfluous.

Although there is no errata list, there are misprints. In one copy that has passed through my hands, the misprints have not been corrected, but in another, from the library of the Turgot family, the misprints have been corrected in a contemporary hand.

Copy in the Kress Library of Business and Economics, Harvard Business School.

EDITION D: *Vie de Monsieur Turgot*

Collation: [4], [1]-322 p.

Signatures: π^2 A-V⁸ X² (-X₂)

The notes that in Editions A and B are at end are printed in the appropriate place; there is no Avis de l'Editeur, for it has become superfluous.

The misprints of Edition C have been corrected.

Copy in the Kress Library of Business and Economics, Harvard Business School.

Although all of the 1786 editions give "Londres" as place of publication, it seems that all but Edition A were printed in France. It appears to have been printed outside France; for it has the signature marks in the center of the lower margins, whereas French printers placed the signature marks toward the right margin, as was done in Editions B, C, and D. Only in Edition D does the paper have a watermark, that of "J. Nourrisson, Auvergne 1778." Nourrisson's paper was also used over the border in Switzerland.

Two 1787 editions exist, each textually identical with Edition D. They are here designated editions E and F.

EDITION E, WITH THE DATE "1787" AND THE IMPRINT "LONDRES."

Collation: Part 1: iv, 162; part 2: [ii], 136 p.

Signatures: a² A-K⁸ L² (-L₂ blank); π^2 (- π_2 blank) A-H⁸ I⁴

EDITION F, WITH THE DATE "1787" AND THE IMPRINT OF "KIRCHBERGER & HATTER AT BERNE."

Collation: [6], 258 p.

Signatures: π^4 ($-\pi_4 = R_1?$ blank) A-Q⁸ R² ($-R_2$ blank)

Copy in the Kress Library of Business and Economics, Harvard Business School.

There was also an English edition of 1787, London, Printed for J. Johnson. These seven editions within two years make the *Vie de Turgot* one of the bestselling works of economics, albeit one that did not long interest contemporaries.²

² Condorcet's work was not dealt with in Kenneth E. Carpenter's *The Economic Bestsellers before 1850* (Baker Library, 1975).