

## PIERRE FORCE

### FROM 'AMOUR-PROPRE' TO 'ÉGOÏSME': THE FRENCH TRANSLATIONS OF *THE WEALTH OF NATIONS*

The reception of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in France and in continental Europe was very much tied to the fortunes of the French translation that Germain Garnier (1754-1821) published for the first time in 1802. This translation was quickly accepted as authoritative. In 1803, Jean-Baptiste Say praised Garnier's translation as "the only one that is worthy of the original."<sup>1</sup> The abundance of endnotes and the extensive preface clearly designated *La Richesse des nations* as a canonical text. In the 1843 edition of the Garnier translation, Adam Smith's work reached the final stage in the process of canonization. As Kenneth Carpenter puts it, this edition "served as a foundation work for the academic discipline of economics in France, no doubt to some extent even internationally."<sup>2</sup> The editor, Adolphe Jérôme Blanqui (1798-1854) who had succeeded Jean-Baptiste Say as the holder of the political economy chair at the *Conservatoire des arts et métiers*, included notes and comments by all the principal economists in Europe: Say, Bentham, Malthus, Buchanan, Sismondi, von Storch, etc. As a result, *The Wealth of Nations* "was no longer an English effort, no longer an English and French work, no more just the labor of two people, but rather a work of many hands from throughout Europe, all people working to develop a body of knowledge."<sup>3</sup>

Given the central role of the Garnier translation, one may suspect that, at least in some ways, it was Garnier's understanding of Smith that provided the basis for the development of economic science in Europe. This will seem especially relevant if we recall that several translations of *The Wealth of Nations* had been published before, and that these translations differ from Garnier's in some important respects. In this paper, I have chosen to focus on the translation of one word: *self-love*. This word appears only twice in the book, but both occurrences are in the same strategic place: the oft-quoted passage in the second chapter of Book I, where Smith discusses the causes of the division of labor:

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail

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<sup>1</sup> "La traduction de Smith par Garnier est la seule qui soit digne de l'original." Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, Paris: Deterville, 1803, p. xxij, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth E. Carpenter, *The Dissemination of The Wealth of Nations in French and in France 1776-1843*, New York: The Bibliographical Society of America, 2002, p. LXI. The 1843 version of the Garnier translation remained the standard edition of *The Wealth of Nations* in French until the 1995 translation by Paulette Taieb (Paris: PUF, 1995, 4 vol.).

<sup>3</sup> *The Dissemination of The Wealth of Nations*, p. LXII.

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if he can interest **their self-love** in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to **their self-love**, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.<sup>4</sup>

Here is how Garnier translates the passage:

Mais l'homme a presque continuellement besoin du secours de ses semblables, et c'est en vain qu'il l'attendrait de leur seule bienveillance. Il sera bien plus sûr de son fait en s'adressant à **leur intérêt personnel**, et en leur persuadant qu'il y va de leur propre avantage de faire ce qu'il souhaite d'eux. C'est ce que fait celui qui propose à un autre un marché quelconque ; le sens de sa proposition est ceci : *Donnez-moi ce dont j'ai besoin, et vous aurez de moi ce dont vous avez besoin vous-même* ; et la très-majeure partie de ces bons offices qui nous sont si nécessaires, s'obtiennent de cette façon. Ce n'est pas de la bienveillance du boucher, du marchand de bière ou du boulanger, que nous attendons notre dîner, mais bien du soin qu'ils apportent à leurs intérêts. Nous ne nous adressons pas à leur humanité, mais à **leur égoïsme** ; et ce n'est jamais de nos besoins que nous leur parlons, c'est toujours de leur avantage.<sup>5</sup>

Smith uses “self-love” twice, but Garnier chooses to translate each occurrence differently, with words he must view as synonyms: “intérêt personnel” and “égoïsme”. This choice of words may not seem particularly problematic to the modern French reader, who is used to reading Smith in Garnier’s translation. However, Garnier’s choice was a deliberate departure from previous practice. In all French translations published before Garnier, “self-love” was translated as “amour-propre”. The anonymous translation of 1778 reads: “s’il peut intéresser **leur amour-propre** en sa faveur...” and “nous ne nous adressons pas à leur humanité, mais à **leur amour-propre**...”<sup>6</sup> In Blavet’s 1779 translation, the same passages are rendered as “en intéressant **leur amour-propre** en sa faveur...” and “ce n'est point à leur humanité, mais à **leur amour-propre** que nous nous

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 [London: Strahan and Cadell, 1776], I.ii.2. Occurrences of “self-love” highlighted in bold.

<sup>5</sup> *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, par Adam Smith, traduction nouvelle avec des notes et observations, par Germain Garnier, de l’Institut national, Paris: Agasse, 1802. Italics are the translator’s. Translations of “self-love” highlighted in bold.

<sup>6</sup> *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, traduit de l’anglois de M. Adam Smith, par M\*\*\*, The Hague: 1778. See the “bibliothèque virtuelle” of PHARE (Pôle d’histoire de l’analyse et des représentations économiques) for an excellent electronic edition of all the passages I am discussing here: <http://phare.univ-paris1.fr/bvphare.html>. I thank the editor of the site, Prof. Paulette Taieb, for her patience and generosity in answering my questions.

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adresses”.<sup>7</sup> A small variation can be observed in Roucher (1790): “s'il peut intéresser **leur amour propre** en sa faveur...” and “nous nous adressons, non pas à leur humanité, mais à **leur amour pour eux-mêmes...**”<sup>8</sup> Only the unpublished translation by Abbé Morellet deviates from the norm. The first occurrence reads: “lorsqu'il peut les disposer à ce qu'il désire par la vue de **leur propre intérêt**”. Interestingly, Morellet skips the second occurrence of “self-love”. He translates: “Nous ne nous adressons pas à leur humanité et nous ne leur parlons pas de nos besoins, mais de leur avantage.”<sup>9</sup>

Garnier's decision to use “intérêt personnel” instead of “amour-propre” was perceived as significant at the time. In his review of the Garnier translation, Martial Desrenaudes gave a list of what he said were errors in the latest edition of Blavet's translation (1800), accompanied by the correct translation in Garnier. The list includes the translation of “self-love”: “A la page 25, on lit: *amour propre*, au lieu de, *intérêt personnel* (Self-love).”<sup>10</sup> According to this early reviewer, translating “self-love” as “amour-propre” was a mistake. The proper translation, given for the first time by Garnier, was “intérêt personnel.”

What are the implications of Garnier's decision? In many ways, past uses of a word still are present in its current use. “Amour-propre” and “intérêt personnel” are words with different histories and distinct connotations. They do not belong to the same philosophical and literary traditions. The connotations of “amour-propre” in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century moral philosophy are rich and complex. “Amour-propre” is the translation of a technical term used by Renaissance humanists, *philautia*. It is used by Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Nicole, Bayle, Voltaire, Rousseau, among many others.<sup>11</sup> The English equivalent of “amour-propre” throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Hobbes to Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Butler and Hume, is “self-love.” In other words, when French readers see “self-love” in Shaftesbury or Hume, they read “amour-propre”, and when English readers see “amour-propre” in Nicole or Bayle, they read “self-love.”

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<sup>7</sup> This translation by Abbé Blavet appeared initially in serialized fashion in *Journal de l'agriculture, des arts, et du commerce et des finances* (1779-1780).

<sup>8</sup> *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations, traduites de l'anglais de M. Smith, sur la quatrième édition, par M. Roucher; et suivies d'un volume de notes, par M. le Marquis de Condorcet, de l'Académie Française, et Secrétaire perpétuel de l'Académie des Sciences*, Paris: Buisson, 1790.

<sup>9</sup> Abbé André Morellet, Ms. 2540, Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, quoted by Paulette Taieb in <http://phare.univ-paris1.fr/bvphare.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Martial Borye Desrenaudes, review of Garnier's translation of *The Wealth of Nations*, in *La Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique* no. 36 [17 September 1802], quoted in *The Dissemination of The Wealth of Nations in French and in France*, p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> On the history of the words *philautia* and *amour-propre*, see Hans-Jürgen Fuchs, *Entfremdung und Narzißmus. Semantische Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der 'Selbstbezogenheit' als Vorgeschichte von französisch "amour-propre"*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977.

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The words “amour-propre” and “self-love” carry with them the Augustinian paradox that was initially formulated in La Rochefoucauld’s *Maxims*,<sup>12</sup> and subsequently popularized by Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees*:<sup>13</sup> self-love (a vice) is the root of human virtues; private vices produce public benefits. *The Fable of the Bees* produced a flurry of responses and refutations. Virtually every moral philosopher in the first half of the eighteenth century felt compelled to articulate a response to Mandeville’s paradox.<sup>14</sup> Two questions were at stake in those debates: is self-love a vice? Is self-love the cause of all human actions? For authors in the Augustinian tradition like La Rochefoucauld, Bayle, and Mandeville, both questions were answered in the affirmative: self-love is a vice, and it is the cause of all human actions, except when God’s grace is at work. On the contrary, for Hume and Smith, self-love is neither a vice nor the cause of all human actions. In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, self-love is described as a morally neutral category, and the first sentence of the book alludes to what Hume once called the “selfish hypothesis”<sup>15</sup> in order to refute it: “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others...”<sup>16</sup> In the system that Smith develops in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, human behavior is derived not from one, but two principles: self-love and sympathy. As I argued in my recent book, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith*, Smith’s response to Mandeville in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is very close to the one Rousseau put forward a few years before in the *Second Discourse*, especially with regard to first principles. Both authors respond to Mandeville’s exposition of the “selfish hypothesis” by singling out pity, a subsidiary element in Mandeville’s narrative, and elevating it to the status of her first principle. As first principles, self-love and sympathy in Smith correspond to “amour de soi” and “pitié” in Rousseau.<sup>17</sup> In France, aside from Rousseau, the notion that self-love is the cause of all or most of human actions was rarely challenged. The focus was on refuting the idea that self-love is a vice. For instance, in the “Amour-propre” article of the *Dictionnaire*

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<sup>12</sup> François de La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, Paris: Barbin, 1665.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Mandeville *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits*, sixth edition, London: J. Tonson, 1732.

<sup>14</sup> For an overview of the debate on self-love as a first principle, see Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith. A Genealogy of Economic Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, esp. chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>15</sup> David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by J. B. Schneewind, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983 [1777 edition–1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1751], p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, (sixth edition) London and Edinburgh, 1790 [1759], *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, vol. I, edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, I.i.1.

<sup>17</sup> See *Self-Interest before Adam Smith*, chapter 1.

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*philosophique*, Voltaire presents the “selfish hypothesis” as universally acknowledged and self-evident:

Those who have said that the love of ourselves is the basis for all our feelings and all our actions have been quite right in India, in Spain, and all across the inhabitable earth. As one does not write to persuade men that they have a face, there is no need to give them proof that they possess self-love. Self-love is the instrument of our preservation; it resembles the instrument of the perpetuation of the species. We need it, it is dear to us, it gives us pleasure, and we must hide it.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, Voltaire is vehement in his criticism of the notion that self-love is a vice. In another article of the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, he savages Jacques Esprit, the author of the treatise *On the Falsity of Human Virtues*, for having written that virtues cannot be genuine because they are based on “amour-propre”:

After the duke of La Rochefoucauld wrote his thoughts on self-love and uncovered this motive of human action, a certain Monsieur Esprit, of the Oratory, wrote a specious book entitled *On the Falsity of Human Virtues*. This Esprit says there is no such thing as virtue, but he does us the favor of ending each chapter by mentioning Christian charity. Thus according to Monsieur Esprit, neither Cato, nor Aristides, nor Marcus Aurelius, nor Epictetus, were good people; such people can only be found among Christians. Among Christians, only Catholics have virtue; among Catholics, Jesuits (enemies of the Oratorians) must be excluded; so much so that virtue can only be found among the Jesuits' enemies. (...) Such arrogance is revolting. I will not say more, because it would make me lose my temper.<sup>19</sup>

Jacques Esprit's book was a theological exposé that turned the Augustinian assumptions of La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims* into a systematic and explicit doctrine based on the original sin and the fall of man. Because the Augustinian theology of the *Maxims* remained implicit, Voltaire and the *philosophes* could very well perform a secular reading of La Rochefoucauld, and endorse his illustration of the “selfish hypothesis”

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<sup>18</sup> “Ceux qui ont dit que l'amour de nous-mêmes est la base de tous nos sentiments et de toutes nos actions ont donc eu grande raison dans l'Inde, en Espagne, et dans toute la terre habitable: et comme on n'écrit point pour prouver aux hommes qu'ils ont un visage, il n'est pas besoin de leur prouver qu'ils ont de l'amour-propre. Cet amour-propre est l'instrument de notre conservation; il ressemble à l'instrument de la perpétuité de l'espèce: il nous est nécessaire, il nous est cher, il nous fait plaisir, et il faut le cacher.” Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, edited by J. Benda and R. Naves, Paris: Garnier, 1954 [1764], art. “amour-propre.”

<sup>19</sup> “Quand le duc de La Rochefoucauld eut écrit ses pensées sur l'amour-propre, et qu'il eut mis à découvert ce ressort de l'homme, un monsieur Esprit, de l'Oratoire, écrivit un livre captieux, intitulé: *De la Fausseté des vertus humaines*. Cet Esprit dit qu'il n'y a point de vertu; mais par grâce il termine chaque chapitre en renvoyant à la charité chrétienne. Ainsi, selon le sieur Esprit, ni Caton, ni Aristide, ni Marc-Aurèle, ni Épictète n'étaient des gens de bien; mais on n'en peut trouver que chez les chrétiens. Parmi les chrétiens, il n'y a de vertu que chez les catholiques; parmi les catholiques, il fallait encore en excepter les jésuites, ennemis des oratoriens; partant, la vertu ne se trouvait guère que chez les ennemis des jésuites. (...) Une telle insolence révolte. Je n'en dirai pas davantage, car je me mettrais en colère.” *Dictionnaire philosophique*, art. “Fausseté des vertus humaines.”

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while denying that self-love was a vice. No such reading was possible with Esprit, who became of polemical target.

Another Port-Royal author who met the same fate was Nicole. In the "Intérêt" article of the *Encyclopédie*, Saint-Lambert vilified him for writing that "amour-propre" could not be the source of virtues:

Friendship will always be a virtue, even though it is based on the need a soul has for another soul.

Love of order, justice, will always be the prime virtue and the true heroism, even though it has its source in the love of oneself.

These truths should be commonplace and never questioned, but a certain group of people in the last century meant to turn self-love into an ever-malign principle.

This was the basis on which Nicole made twenty volumes of morals, which are but a collection of methodically arranged and gracelessly written sophisms.

Pascal himself, the great Pascal, meant to view as an imperfection this love of ourselves that God gave us (...). M. de la Rochefoucauld, who expressed himself with precision and grace, wrote nearly in the same spirit as Pascal and Nicole. (...) La Rochefoucauld's book, and Pascal's, which were in everybody's hands, have gradually accustomed the French public to take the word *self-love* always in a bad sense. It is only recently that a small number of men have begun to dissociate it from the ideas of vice, pride, etc.<sup>20</sup>

This passage is particularly interesting for our purposes because it spells out the connotations of the word "amour-propre" in the middle of the eighteenth century. The word is still associated with the Augustinian critique of virtues, which had become almost a matter of conventional wisdom with the success of Pascal's *Pensées*, La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*, and Nicole's *Essais de morale*. At the same time, Saint-Lambert presents the *encyclopédistes* as a small group of enlightened men whose critique

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<sup>20</sup> "L'amitié sera toujours une vertu, quoiqu'elle ne soit fondée que sur le besoin qu'une âme a d'une autre âme.

La passion de l'ordre, de la justice, sera la première vertu, le véritable héroïsme, quoiqu'elle ait sa source dans l'amour de nous-mêmes.

Voilà des vérités qui ne devraient être que triviales et jamais contestées ; mais une classe d'hommes du dernier siècle a voulu faire de l'amour-propre un principe toujours vicieux ; c'est en partant d'après cette idée que Nicole a fait vingt volumes de morale, qui ne sont qu'un assemblage de sophismes méthodiquement arrangés et lourdement écrits.

Pascal même, le grand Pascal, a voulu regarder en nous comme une imperfection ce sentiment de l'amour de nous-mêmes que Dieu nous a donné (...). M. de la Rochefoucauld qui s'exprimait avec précision et avec grâce, a écrit presque dans le même esprit que Pascal et Nicole ; (...) Ce livre de M. de la Rochefoucauld, celui de Pascal, qui étaient entre les mains de tout le monde, ont insensiblement accoutumé le public français à prendre toujours le mot d'amour-propre en mauvaise part ; et il n'y a pas longtemps qu'un petit nombre d'hommes commence à n'y plus attacher nécessairement les idées de vice, d'orgueil, etc." *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Paris, 1751-1772 (17 vol.), art. "Intérêt".

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of the critique of virtues is only beginning to change the connotations associated with the word “amour-propre.”

A common practice among eighteenth-century philosophers consisted in presenting philosophical disputes as semantic ones. Near the beginning of *De l'Esprit*, in a chapter entitled “On the Abuse of Words,” Helvétius discusses the meaning of “amour-propre” in La Rochefoucauld. He claims that readers have misunderstood the word by associating it with vices like pride and vanity:

When the famous M. de La Rochefoucauld said that self-love is the principle of all our actions, how many people, ignorant as they were of the true meaning of the word *self-love*, did not rise against this illustrious author? They took self-love to mean pride and vanity; consequently, they imagined that M. de La Rochefoucauld held vice to be the source of all virtues. Yet it was easy to see the self-love, or the love of oneself, is nothing but a feeling that nature has engraved in us; that such feeling is transformed into a vice or a virtue within each man according to the tastes and the passions that animate him; that self-love, differently modified, can result in pride as well as in modesty.<sup>21</sup>

While he claims La Rochefoucauld as a predecessor, Helvétius, presumably because of the moral and religious connotations still attached to the word, never uses “amour-propre” in his own doctrine. Instead, he uses “intérêt personnel”:

What man, if he gives up the pride of claiming a superior virtue for the pride of being more truthful, if he scrupulously looks into the recesses of his soul, will not realize that virtues and vices arise exclusively from the various ways in which personal interest is modified? That all men are driven by the same power?<sup>22</sup>

Helvétius agrees with his fellow *encyclopédistes* that the word “amour-propre” should be free from the moral and religious connotations that are traditionally associated with it. Yet, after arguing about the meaning of “amour-propre,” he takes the additional step of dispensing with the word altogether, and using a word with much less baggage: “intérêt personnel,” which is not widely used until the 1740s, and is free of the negative overtones of “amour-propre.”<sup>23</sup> The word is perfectly suited to designate the first principle in

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<sup>21</sup> “Lorsque le célèbre M De La Rochefoucault dit que l’amour-propre est le principe de toutes nos actions, combien l’ignorance de la vraie signification de ce mot *amour-propre* ne souleva-t-elle pas de gens contre cet illustre auteur? On prit l’amour-propre pour orgueil et vanité; et l’on s’imagina, en conséquence, que M De La Rochefoucault plaçoit dans le vice la source de toutes les vertus. Il étoit cependant facile d’appercevoir que l’amour-propre, ou l’amour de soi, n’étoit autre chose qu’un sentiment gravé en nous par la nature; que ce sentiment se transformoit dans chaque homme en vice ou en vertu, selon les goûts et les passions qui l’animoient; et que l’amour-propre, différemment modifié, produisoit également l’orgueil et la modestie.” Claude-Adrien Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, Paris: Durand, 1758, I, IV.

<sup>22</sup> “Quel homme, en effet, s’il sacrifie l’orgueil de se dire plus vertueux que les autres à l’orgueil d’être plus vrai, et s’il sonde, avec une attention scrupuleuse, tous les replis de son ame, ne s’apperceva pas que c’est uniquement à la maniere différente dont l’intérêt personnel se modifie, que l’on doit ses vices et ses vertus? Que tous les hommes sont mus par la même force?” *De l'Esprit*, I, II, II.

<sup>23</sup> According to the ARTFL database, the earliest occurrence of “intérêt personnel” is in Cardinal de Retz’s *Mémoires* (1717).

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Helvétius's doctrine: a natural impulse that is universal, morally neutral, and the cause of all human actions.

If "intérêt personnel" was relatively free of connotations in 1758, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was very much associated with the doctrine of Helvétius and neo-Epicureanism in general. A good witness to this fact is Mme de Staël. On the one hand, she complains, in a very general way, that the nineteenth century seems to be the century of "intérêt personnel": "We live in a century in which personal interest seems to be the only principle of human actions."<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, she assigns a clear genealogy to this way of thinking. Staël distinguishes between a French philosophical school (Helvétius, Diderot, Saint-Lambert) whose ethics was based on the principle of "intérêt personnel," and an English school (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith), who rejected the "selfish hypothesis":

On ethical systems based on personal interest

French writers have been quite right to see the ethical system based on self-interest as a consequence of the metaphysical doctrine that derived all ideas from sensations. If there is nothing in the soul but that which sensations have put in it, pleasure and pain must be the only motives underlying our will. Helvétius, Diderot, Saint-Lambert never deviated from this line, and they explained all actions, including the sacrifice of martyrs, by referring to the love of oneself. As to the English, even though most of them adhere to experimental philosophy when it comes to metaphysics, they have never tolerated these ethical systems based on self-interest. Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Smith, etc., have held that moral sense and sympathy are the source of all virtues. Even Hume, the most skeptical of English philosophers, could not read without disgust this theory of the love of oneself, which tarnished the soul's beauty.<sup>25</sup>

As to the word "égoïsme," it is fairly new when Garnier uses it in 1802. Like "intérêt personnel," it is not common until the middle of the eighteenth century,<sup>26</sup> and both words are often used as synonyms.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Nous vivons dans un siècle où l'intérêt personnel semble le seul principe de toutes les actions des hommes." Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, ou de l'Italie*, London: Peltier, 1807.

<sup>25</sup> "De la morale fondée sur l'intérêt personnel.

Les écrivains français ont eu tout-à-fait raison de considérer la morale fondée sur l'intérêt comme une conséquence de la métaphysique qui attribuoit toutes les idées aux sensations. S'il n'y a rien dans l'âme que ce que les sensations y ont mis, l'agréable ou le désagréable doit être l'unique mobile de notre volonté. Helvétius, Diderot, Saint-Lambert n'ont pas dévié de cette ligne, et ils ont expliqué toutes les actions, y compris le dévouement des martyrs, par l'amour de soi-même. Les anglais, qui, pour la plupart, professent en métaphysique la philosophie expérimentale, n'ont jamais pu supporter cependant la morale fondée sur l'intérêt. Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Smith, etc., ont proclamé le sens moral, et la sympathie, comme la source de toutes les vertus. Hume lui-même, le plus sceptique des philosophes anglais, n'a pu lire sans dégoût cette théorie de l'amour de soi, qui flétrit la beauté de l'âme." Germaine de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, Paris: Hachette, 1958-60 [1810], p. 284.

<sup>26</sup> According to the ARTFL database, the earliest occurrence of "égoïsme" is in 1757.

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When Roucher, Blavet, and the anonymous translator of 1778 use “amour-propre” to translate “self-love,” their choice is consistent with a philosophical tradition going back to the seventeenth century, a tradition in which English and French authors continuously respond to each other. In this dialogue, “amour-propre” means “self-love” and “self-love” means “amour-propre.” At the same time, because “amour-propre” and “self-love” are so widely used, and especially used in polemical contexts, their very definition is at stake in the constant battle between advocates and adversaries of the “selfish hypothesis.” Consequently, in the 1780s and 1790s, someone seeing “amour-propre” twice in the same paragraph of the French translation of *The Wealth of Nations*, would, at least in some way, also remember the complicated history of the word: its longstanding association with the critique of virtues, the efforts by the *philosophes* to dissociate it from the critique of virtues, and Rousseau’s claim that self-love is *not* the cause of all human actions. These connotations are roughly equivalent to the connotations of “self-love” in 1776: its early association with Mandeville’s paradox, and the refutation of this paradox by Butler, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith himself.

On the other hand, the words Garnier uses in 1802, “intérêt personnel” and “égoïsme,” are more univocal. They have a shorter history behind them, and they are associated with a neo-Epicurean approach that tends to explain all human behavior on the basis of a single principle: Helvétius often calls it “intérêt personnel” but also “intérêt tout court, and sometimes “plaisir.”

At the same time, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the complex connotations of “amour-propre” are beginning to fade away, and the word is gradually restricted to the narrower meaning it has in modern French: personal vanity. This evolution appears very clearly in the successive edition of Jean-Baptiste Say’s *Traité d’économie politique*. In the “Discours préliminaire” of the original edition (1803), Say distinguishes between “vanité personnelle” and “intérêt personnel” as motives that may cloud someone’s judgments on economic issues:

De ce que l’Economie politique est l’affaire de tout le monde, naît un autre genre de difficulté : c’est qu’on a pour juges, non seulement ceux qui se sont occupés des ces matières, mais encore ceux qui n’y entendent rien. Comme chacun a donné quelques soins aux valeurs dont sa fortune est composée, chacun se croit en droit d’avoir une opinion sur les valeurs, une opinion qui se trouve exaltée par la **vanité personnelle**, comme toutes les opinions, et de plus par l’**intérêt personnel**, qui, à notre insu, exerce tant d’empire sur nos jugements.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For instance: “Voilà où vous conduit le detestable intérêt personnel, l’égoïsme réduit en action...” Abbé Barruel, *Les Helviennes*, Paris: Poilleux, 1830 [1781], p. 148.

<sup>28</sup> Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d’économie politique*, Paris: Deterville, 1803, vol. 1, p. xl.

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In the second edition (1814) Say proposes a variation on the same thought, but the keywords are almost the same:

Les opinions en économie politique ont même ce malheur particulier, c'est qu'elles ne se trouvent pas seulement soutenues par la **vanité**, la plus universelle des infirmités humaines, mais par **l'intérêt personnel** qui ne l'est guère moins, et qui, à notre insu, et malgré nous, exerce tant d'empire sur notre façon de penser.<sup>29</sup>

In the fifth edition (1826), however, a major change occurs:

Lorsqu'une fois un auteur a manifesté une opinion, **la vanité**, la plus universelle des infirmités humaines, veut qu'il la soutienne. **L'intérêt personnel** se joint quelquefois à **l'amour-propre** ; et l'on sait quelle influence il exerce, même à notre insu, sur nos opinions. De là les doctrines hasardées qu'on voit naître chaque jour et les objections qu'on reproduit après qu'elles ont été cent fois réfutées.<sup>30</sup>

In 1826, the meaning of "amour-propre" has diverged so much from the meaning of "intérêt personnel" that Say does not hesitate to use both words in the same paragraph in order to designate psychological motives that work together but are entirely distinct. "Amour-propre" is a synonym for "vanité." It has to do with self-image, self-delusion, and its connotation is entirely negative. "Personal interest" is more ambiguous. On the one hand, it is the impulse that causes us to prefer ourselves to others and makes us biased in the evaluation of the opinions we profess; on the other hand, it is the drive behind economic activity: the motive that prompts human beings to save and invest. When Say elaborates on the parts of *The Wealth of Nations* that discuss the role of private interests in the optimal allocation of capital, he uses the word "intérêt personnel":

Il est heureux que **l'intérêt personnel** veille sans cesse à la conservation des capitaux des particuliers, et qu'on ne puisse en aucun temps distraire un capital d'un emploi productif, sans se priver d'un revenu proportionné.

Smith pense qu'en tout pays, la profusion ou l'impéritie de certains particuliers, et des administrateurs de la fortune publique, est plus que compensée par la frugalité de la majorité des citoyens, et par le soin qu'ils prennent de **leurs intérêts**.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, in a passage that develops Smith's view on the freedom of trade, Say argues that the criterion for deciding whether a particular good should be purchased locally or imported is "intérêt personnel":

Le sacrifice au prix duquel nous obtenons des étrangers cette matière première, n'a rien de plus fâcheux que le sacrifice des avances et des consommations que nous faisons en chaque genre de production pour obtenir un nouveau produit. **L'intérêt personnel** est toujours le meilleur juge de l'étendue de ce sacrifice et de l'étendue du dédommagement qu'on peut s'en promettre ; et quoique **l'intérêt**

<sup>29</sup> Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Paris: Renouard, 1814, vol. 1, p. lxxviii.

<sup>30</sup> Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris: Rapilly, 1826, vol. 1, p. xc.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, Paris : Guillaumin, 1841, p. 116.

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**personnel** se trompe quelquefois, c'est, au demeurant, le juge le moins dangereux, et celui dont les jugemens coûtent le moins.<sup>32</sup>

The importance of the concept of “intérêt personnel” for French readers of Smith at the beginning of the nineteenth century is underscored by the presence of an index entry entitled “INTÉRÊT *privé* ou *personnel*” in the Garnier translation in 1802. The entry refers to four passages in *The Wealth of Nations* where Smith discusses the relationship between private interests and the public interest, and the role of private interests in the optimal allocation of capital:

INTÉRÊT *privé* ou *personnel*. Dans l'état de liberté, dirige l'industrie vers la route la plus profitable à toute la société. III, 58. Et tout capital vers l'emploi le plus conforme à l'intérêt général. *Id.*, 435. Est un guide plus sûr, à cet égard, que tout homme d'Etat ou législateur quelconque. *Id.*, 60. Ce concours entre l'intérêt privé et l'intérêt public est dérangé par les réglemens du *système commercial*, et comment. *Id.*, 436.<sup>33</sup>

Remarkably, in the index that appears for the first time in the third edition of *The Wealth of Nations* (1784),<sup>34</sup> there is no such entry. “Personal interest” or “private interest” are nowhere mentioned as keywords.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, this index has an entry for “self-love,” defined as “the governing principle in the intercourse of human society.”<sup>36</sup> The reference is of course to the only passage where the word appears, the second chapter of Book I, which discusses the causes of the division of labor.

Why is “self-love” a keyword, while there is no entry for words like “interest,” “private interest,” or “self-interest”? It is because the word “self-love” is used in the only passage in *The Wealth of Nations* where Smith discusses (or at least comes close to discussing) first principles.<sup>37</sup> As we have seen before, “self-love” is a widely used concept that is almost always used as a first principle in eighteenth-century moral philosophy. On the other hand, if we check the passages where Garnier uses “avantage personnel” or “intérêt personnel” against the original English, we will find that Smith uses expressions like “his own advantage,” or “his own interest.” The passage that the Garnier index summarizes as: “INTÉRÊT *privé* ou *personnel*. Dans l'état de liberté,

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<sup>32</sup> *Traité d'économie politique*, p. 156.

<sup>33</sup> *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Garnier translation (1802), Table générale des matières, “Intérêt” entry.

<sup>34</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, London: Strahan and Cadell, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1784. See K. Haakonssen and A.S. Skinner, *Index to the Works of Adam Smith*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> There is an entry for “interest” in the sense of monetary interest. See *Index to the Works of Adam Smith*, p. 193.

<sup>36</sup> *Index to the Works of Adam Smith*, p. 203.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the status of self-love as a first principle in *The Wealth of Nations*, see Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith*, pp. 121-134.

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dirige l'industrie vers la route la plus profitable à toute la société" is the very famous passage where the Invisible Hand appears. Here is how it reads in Garnier:

...En cela, comme dans beaucoup d'autres cas, il est conduit par une main invisible, pour remplir une fin qui n'entre nullement dans ses intentions ; et ce n'est pas toujours ce qu'il y a de plus mal pour la société, que cette fin n'entre pour rien dans ses intentions. Tout en ne cherchant que **son intérêt personnel**, il travaille souvent d'une manière bien plus efficace pour l'intérêt de la société, que s'il avait réellement pour but d'y travailler.<sup>38</sup>

In the original English, the expression that corresponds to "tout en ne cherchant que son intérêt personnel" is "by pursuing his own interest." In French, "intérêt personnel" sounds very much like a basic concept, a first principle that deserves its own entry in the index. This is confirmed by the fact that Jean-Baptiste Say, the leading interpreter of Smith at the time, uses the word "intérêt personnel" whenever he elaborates on the passages from Book IV of the *Wealth of Nations* that are mentioned in Garnier's index entry. In the original English, however, it is much more difficult to read an expression like "his own interest" as a basic concept, especially since there is no entry for words like "personal interest" or "self-interest" in the index. Only the passage from Book I where the word "self-love" appears can be construed as referring to first principles.

This is where Garnier's choice of "intérêt personnel" instead of "amour-propre" has the weightiest consequences. In all previous translations, "amour-propre" appeared only at the beginning of the book, just as "self-love" does in the original. In the Garnier translation, "intérêt personnel" appears not only at the beginning (to translate "self-love"), but also in Book IV (to translate "his own interest"). Thanks to the use of an identical word, a conceptual connection is established between the principle underlying the division of labor (in Book I), and the principle underlying saving and investment (in Book IV). This connection is established not only with the specific passage in Book IV where Garnier uses "intérêt personnel," but also in the many passages in Book IV where Garnier uses "intérêt" and "intérêts privés" to translate Smith's analysis of the relationship between private interests and the public interest.

I am of course not claiming that Garnier's translation is the prime motivating factor behind the conventional reading of *The Wealth of Nations* that developed in the nineteenth century and was prevalent for most of the twentieth century: self-interest is the first principle of Smith's doctrine and of economic science in general.<sup>39</sup> I would simply submit that Garnier's choice of words is an early manifestation of what would later

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<sup>38</sup> Translation of *The Wealth of Nations*, IV.ii.9.

<sup>39</sup> For instance, see George Stigler, who characterizes *The Wealth of Nations* as "a stupendous palace erected upon the granite of self-interest." "Smith's Travels on the Ship of State," *History of Political Economy* 3 (1971), p. 265.

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cohere into the modern, conventional reading of Smith. When economics asserted itself as a science in the nineteenth century, it relied on Bentham, rather than Smith, for its psychological assumptions. In that sense, the psychological underpinnings of orthodox economic theory were neo-Epicurean, and, beyond Bentham, they could be traced back to Helvétius. As Henry Sidgwick put it in 1877, “the premises of Bentham are all clearly given by Helvetius,” whose psychological theory was very clear and simple:

Helvetius puts with a highly effective simplicity, from which Hume was precluded by his more subtle and complex psychological analysis, these two doctrines: first, that every human being “en tout temps, en tout lieu” seeks his own interest, and judges of things and persons according as they promote it; and secondly, that, as the public is made up of individuals, the qualities that naturally and normally gain public esteem and are called virtues are those useful to the public.<sup>40</sup>

Given the widespread acceptance of these psychological assumptions among economists, it is not surprising that *The Wealth of Nations* was read and interpreted from a neo-Epicurean or utilitarian point of view. This produced a number of puzzles, the most famous being the “Adam Smith problem,” which came from the hypothesis that *The Wealth of Nations* was based on the psychological theory of Helvétius.<sup>41</sup> The idea that Smith might have borrowed from the philosopher of “intérêt personnel” was discarded a long time ago. Still it is clear that making “intérêt personnel” the first principle of Smith’s doctrine is much easier if you read the book in Garnier’s translation than if you read it in the original.

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<sup>40</sup> Henry Sidgwick, “Bentham and Benthamism in Politics and Ethics” *The Fortnightly Review* 21 (1877) p. 638.

<sup>41</sup> See *Self-Interest before Adam Smith*, pp. 256-263.