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The first reception of James Steuart in Italy: Giovanni Tamassia and his liberal economic reading of the *Principles of Political Economy*

Cecilia Carnino

Department of Historical Studies, University of Turin, Torino, Italy

ABSTRACT

This article has two aims. The first is to explore the early reception of James Steuart in Italy, focusing on Giovanni Tamassia's writings. In his *Dello spirito di riforma*, written between 1799 and 1800, Tamassia was the first Italian author to assume Steuart as a point of reference in economic analysis. Largely re-proposing Steuart's considerations on the issues of redistribution of land, of luxury, and of comparison between ancient and modern times, he contributed decisively to the first circulation in Italy of the *Principles of Political Economy*. The second aim is to shed light on the singular reading given by Tamassia of Steuart's thought. In his works *Lezione di economia politica* and *Delle scienze e della libertà relativamente al commercio*, the Italian author proposed an economic liberal reading of the *Principles*. Deliberately downplaying the importance attributed by Steuart to protectionist policies, he attempted to demonstrate the compatibility between the economic theories of Steuart and those of Smith in the matter of economic freedom. Rather than being based on the grounds of a rigorous economic analysis, Tamassia's reading reflected a deliberate attempt to make Steuart's thought compatible with an economic and political culture centred on the defence of freedom.

KEYWORDS

James Steuart; Giovanni Tamassia; commercial society; economic liberalism; political freedom; Italy

1. Introduction

The main aim of this contribution is to investigate the first circulation in Italy of James Steuart's *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, through the thinking of Giovanni Tamassia, an active patriot during the revolutionary *Triennio* (1796–1799) and then, during the kingdom of Italy (1805–1814), a member of the Napoleonic structure of government. In his work *Dello spirito di riforma considerato relativamente a un progetto di legge agraria*, written between the second half of 1799 and the first half of 1800, Tamassia was the first Italian author to explicitly assume Steuart as a main point of reference in economic analysis. In this way, Tamassia contributed decisively to the circulation in Italy of the economic thinking of the Scottish author.

The paper is divided into four parts. In the first and second parts, I will reconstruct the first penetration of Steuart in Italy, focusing on Tamassia's work *Dello spirito di riforma*. In this writing, the Italian author largely adopts and re-proposes Steuart's considerations on the crucial issues of redistribution of property and land, of luxury, and of the comparison between ancient and modern times. The third and fourth parts will be centred on the singular reading given by Tamassia of Steuart's economic reflection. Tamassia proposed in fact an economic liberal reading of the *Principles*, attempting to demonstrate the tight connections between the economic ideas of Steuart and those of Smith in matters of free trade. Well aware that the liberal economic vision of Smith was in direct opposition to the late-mercantilist economic approach of Steuart, Tamassia proposed an interpretive

reading of *Principles* that deliberately placed less attention on the importance attached by Stuart to protectionist policies in order to support the balance of the trade and the development of national industrial production. Rather than being based on the grounds of a rigorous economic analysis, the reading made by Tamassia was a conscious and deliberate attempt to make Stuart's reflection compatible with an economic and, above all, political culture centred on the defence of freedom.

2. Giovanni Tamassia and the first reception of Stuart in Italy

Between 1799 and 1800 a pamphlet entitled *Dello spirito di riforma considerato relativamente a un progetto di legge agraria* was written and then published in Milan. The author of the work, which appeared shortly after the establishment of the second Cisalpine Republic, was Giovanni Tamassia. A leading force in the Municipality of Mantova that emerged in 1796 after the arrival of French forces in Italy, Tamassia was then nominated, in 1797, as a political representative to the first Cisalpine Republic. Subsequently forced to flee Italy and take refuge in Marseille, during the short period of the first Habsburg Restoration in 1799, Tamassia returned to Italy in 1800, after Bonaparte's victory in Marengo, when he published the pamphlet to support his candidacy for the chair of public economics recently established at the University of Pavia.

Initially conceived as an occasional writing, aimed at obtaining the chair of public economics at the University of Pavia, *Dello spirito di riforma* was the first of Tamassia's attempts to grapple with economic issues. The result was a reflection with few original ideas. Indeed, when he officially submitted his candidacy to the governing committee of the Cisalpine Republic and sent the 'small pamphlet' with his application, he openly admitted in a hand-written cover letter that the work was not at all innovative but merely offered a summary in Italian of the most advanced ideas in 'relation to the economic science,' primarily those that came from Great Britain. He hoped in this way to bridge a gap in 'public education' which partly because of the 'political state of [...] the country' had not yet developed a 'new exposition of the aforementioned theories of use to its own citizens.'¹

Nevertheless, the pamphlet ended up being entirely original in the context of the Italian economic culture of the time, introducing James Stuart for the first time as the main point of reference for economic analysis. In his cover letter Tamassia, after accusing the 'disciples of Quesnay' of having 'permeated [economic thought] with sophisms that are as much pleasant to the imagination as they are pernicious in practice,' had declared his debt to 'the great writers of England,' who had 'brought the most profound analysis to Economic Theories.'² In the pamphlet he went on to say that it had been above all the 'profound Stuart' who had guided him in the reconnaissance of the 'modern system of political economics.'³

James Stuart represented a reference point that was most unusual in the Italian economic culture of the time. Published in 1767, his *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* had not only not been translated into Italian (and never would be), but – despite having been mentioned in 1767 in the section dedicated to new publications in the *Estratto della letteratura europea*,⁴ the periodical founded by Bartolomeo De Felice which from that very year was published in Milan under the direction of those involved in the political circle of the journal *Il Caffè* – up to that moment had never been the subject of specific attention by Italian authors.

¹Giovanni Tamassia, Manuscript letter dated Brumal 6, year VIII, in State Archives, Milan, *Autografi*, 157 (Giovanni Tamassia). On the circulation of the economic culture in Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Massimo M. Augello and Marco E.L. Guidi, eds., *Associazionismo economico e diffusione dell'economia politica nell'Italia dell'Ottocento. Dalle società economico-agrarie alle associazioni di economisti* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2000); and Massimo M. Augello, Marco Bianchini, and Marco E. L. Guidi, eds., *Le riviste di economia in Italia, 1700–1900. Dai giornali scientifico-letterari ai periodici specialistici* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1996).

²Tamassia, Manuscript letter.

³Giovanni Tamassia, *Dello spirito di riforma considerato relativamente al progetto di una legge agraria. Del cittadino Tamassia* (Milan: Stamperia di S. Zenò, 1799–1800), 18.

⁴*Estratto della letteratura europea* III (1767): 208.

The level of impact and success of the *Principles* in Italy was thus very different to that of Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, which had, in 1777, already been described as a 'distinguished work' in the journal *Diario economico di agricoltura, manifatture, e commercio* directed by Luigi Riccomanni⁵ and was first cited in 1785 by Melchiorre Delfico in his work *Memoria sul tribunal della Grascia*.⁶ After the appearance of the Italian translation, published between 1790 and 1791 in Naples,⁷ it was then widely cited by Italian authors, eventually becoming, as in the case, for example, of Francesco Mengotti's *Dissertazione sul colbertismo*, an established model of theoretical reference for economic thought.⁸

Events surrounding the publication of the *Principles* also seem to have been highly unusual. While only two editions were published in Great Britain during the eighteenth century⁹ (a third English-language edition was produced in Basle in 1796 by the publisher Jean-Jacques Tourneisen who, in 1791, had also promoted an edition of the *Wealth of Nations*¹⁰) the work quickly spread throughout Germany. Two eighteenth-century German translations were made: the first, by J. Von Pauli, was published in Hamburg between 1769 and 1770, and the second, by the professor of Protestant theology and philosophy Christoff Friedrich Schott, was published in Tübingen between 1769 and 1772.¹¹ In contrast, Steuart's ideas struggled to penetrate France, as the late translation of *Principles* shows.¹² It was not until the years of the Revolution that the *Recherche des principes de l'économie politique* was published on the initiative of Alexandre-Théophile Vandermonde, the first French professor of political economy, who would later make widespread use of Steuart's treatise in lectures delivered in 1795 at the *École normale*. An earlier effort to publish the work by the *Société Typographique* in Neuchâtel had failed.¹³

Tamassia had in fact read the *Principles* for the first time in France, and therefore probably in the French translation, during his months in exile in Marseille. As he recalled years later in his work *Lezione di economia politica*,¹⁴ in France he had become friends

with a young Tuscan man of the highest insight and knowledge, who was the first to recommend me to read Steuart, whom I had not even heard mentioned since in Lombardy [...] there is not much news on matters of literature.¹⁵

⁵*Diario economico di agricoltura, manifatture, e commercio* III (January 18, 1777): 17–18; IV (January 25, 1777): 25–7; V (February 1, 1777): 33–6; VI (February 8, 1777): 41–3. On the reception of Smith's ideas in the Italian eighteenth century, see at least Oslavia Vercillo, 'Della conoscenza di Adamo Smith in Italia nel secolo XVIII', *Economia e storia* 3 (1963): 413–24; and Marco E.L. Guidi, Terenzio Maccabelli, and Erica Morato, 'Neo-Smithian Political Economy in Italy: 1777–1848', *Économies et sociétés* 34 (2004): 217–65.

⁶Melchiorre Delfico, *Memoria sul tribunal della Grascia e sulle leggi economiche delle provincie confinanti del Regno* (Naples: Porcelli, 1785).

⁷Adam Smith, *Ricerche sulla natura, e le cagioni della ricchezza delle nazioni. Del Signor Smith. Tradotte per la prima volta in italiano dall'ultima edizione inglese* (Naples: Policarpo Merande, 1790–1791).

⁸Francesco Mengotti, *Il Colbertismo. Dissertazione coronata dalla reale società economica fiorentina, edizione seconda* (Venezia: Bettinelli, 1792). For a reflection on Smith's influence on Italian authors in the framework of the more general penetration of Scottish ideas in eighteenth-century Italy, see Franco Venturi, 'Scottish Echoes in Eighteenth-Century Italy', in *Wealth and Virtue. The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. István Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 345–62.

⁹James Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy being an Essay on the Science of Domestic Policy in Free Nations* (London: Millar and Cadell, 1767); and James Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy Being an Essay on the Science of Domestic Policy in Free Nations* (Dublin: Williams and Moncrieffe, 1770).

¹⁰James Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy. Being an Essay on the Science of Domestic Policy in Free Nations* (Basel: Tourneisen, 1796).

¹¹James Steuart, *Untersuchung der Grundsätze der Staatswirthschaft, oder, Versuch über die Wissenschaft der innerlichen Politik in freyen Staaten* (Hamburg: Verlage der typographischen Gesellschaft, 1769–70); and James Steuart, *Untersuchung der Grundsätze der Staatswirthschaft als ein Versuch über die Wissenschaft der innerlichen Politik bei freyen Nationen* (Tubingen: Cotta, 1769–72). On the dissemination of Steuart's work in Germany and on its first German translations, see Ragip Ege, 'The New Interpretation of Steuart by Paul Chamley', in *The Economics of Sir James Steuart*, ed. Ramón Tortajada (London: Routledge, 1999), 84–101.

¹²James Steuart, *Recherche des principes de l'économie politique, ou essai sur la science de la police intérieure des nations libres* (Paris: Imprimerie de Didot l'ainé, 1789–90).

¹³See Manuela Albertone, *The Difficult Reception of James Steuart at the End of the Eighteenth Century in France*, in *The Economics of James Steuart*, 41–56.

¹⁴Giovanni Tamassia, *Lezione di economia politica* (Brescia: Bettoni, 1807) (1st ed. 1802).

¹⁵Tamassia, *Lezione di economia politica*, 4.

Nothing more is known of the ‘young Tuscan’ who led Tamassia to discover Steuart, but it is possible that this Tuscan man had read the *Principles* in Tuscany where, from at least 1792, the first English edition was in circulation and included in the publisher Giuseppe Molini’s catalogue of books.¹⁶

Tamassia was therefore among the first Italian authors to refer explicitly to the *Principles* as a primary source for economic thought. It should however be noted that the patriot Matteo Angelo Galdi, from 1799 a Cisalpine diplomatic envoy to the Batavian Republic, had referred to ‘the Stewarts’ in his pamphlet *Rapporti economici tra le nazioni libere* of 1798, along with ‘the Humes, the Lockes, the Smiths, the Brotvzn, the Melons, the Dutotts, the Condillacs and the Montesquieus,’ as the ‘peaceful philosophers’ who in the eighteenth century had written about the *ancien régime*.¹⁷ While it has been assumed that he had in mind Dugald Stewart,¹⁸ the frequent confusion between the two Scottish authors, which in Italy lasted at least until the early nineteenth century, means that he may have been referring to the author of the *Principles*. But be that as it may, the fact is Steuart remained largely unknown until the publication of *Dello spirito di riforma*, and even after the publication of the pamphlet and at least for the first decade of the nineteenth century, was, if known at all, seldom cited in Italy.

Among the few authors on whom the Scottish philosopher and economist exerted an influence was Adeodato Ressi, who held the post of professor of political economy in Pavia which Tamassia had coveted, and whose lessons in 1801 were largely inspired by the *Principles*. Not only did Ressi repeat passages from the Scottish author’s work in his lectures, but he also used concepts of value, population and competition that seem to have been taken directly from it.¹⁹ Also in 1801, the Modenese Carlo Bosellini, who between 1816 and 1817 published the work *Nuovo esame delle sorgenti della privata e pubblica ricchezza*, cited Steuart in his *Discorso sui principi in materia di finanze*. Invoking the *Principles* in support of a moderately protectionist manufacturing policy, he quoted a passage from book III on the benefits of large-scale factories in which favourable conditions could be created to incentivise ‘emulation,’ ‘multiply strength’ and ‘develop talent.’²⁰

A few years later the *Principles* were again adduced, this time by Luigi Valeriani, a former member of the Council of the Cisalpine Republic to whom Napoleon had granted the chair in political economy at the University of Bologna in 1801. In *Del prezzo delle cose tutte mercatabili*, published in Bologna in 1806,²¹ Valeriani referred to the Scottish author, who he described as an ‘observer no less than a great gatherer of commercial news, without whom by chance Smith would not have come, like Newton without Galileo,’²² within his reflection on money as a measure of value. Valeriani’s work belonged however to a greatly changed concept of economic culture, since by then Say’s *Traité d’économie*, which cited the *Principles*, had helped spread and increase understanding of the Scottish author’s ideas even in Italy.²³

¹⁶*Catalogo di lingua inglese dei libri vendibili presso Giuseppe Molini* (Florence: Molini, 1792), 20.

¹⁷Matteo A. Galdi, *Del rapporti politico-economici fra le nazioni libere* (Milan: Pirotta e Maspero, 1798), 215.

¹⁸Delio Cantimori and Renzo De Felice, eds., *Giacobini italiani*, vol. II (Bari: Laterza, 1964), 332.

¹⁹See, Marco Bianchini, ‘Una difficile gestazione: il contrastato inserimento dell’economia politica nelle università dell’Italia nord-orientale (1769–1866)’, in *Le cattedre di economia politica in Italia. La diffusione di una disciplina «sospetta» (1750–1900)*, ed. Massimo M. Augello et al. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1988), 47–92.

²⁰Carlo Bosellini, *Discorso sui principi di giustizia in materia di finanze, o Nuova teoria delle imposte* (Milan: Tipografia milanese, 1801), 59. On Bosellini’s economic ideas, see Danilo Bano, ‘Un economista pre-neoclassico: Carlo Bosellini’, *Ricerche economiche* 36 (1982): 75–95.

²¹Luigi Valeriani, *Del prezzo delle cose tutte mercatabili trattato legale-economico ove incidentemente si additano i veri principj della moneta* (Bologna: Tipografia di Ulisse Ramponi a San Damiano, 1806). On Valeriani, see Luigi Pucci, *Luigi Valeriani Molinari (1758–1828). Un economista tra rivoluzione e restaurazione* (Florence: Arnaud, 1990).

²²Valeriani, *Del prezzo delle cose tutte mercatabili*, X.

²³Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d’économie politique, ou simple exposition de la manière dont se forment, se distribuent, et se composent les richesses* (Paris: Deterville, 1803), now in Jean-Baptiste Say, *Œuvres complètes*, critical edition, ed. A. Tiran (Paris: Economica, 2006), vol. I.

3. Dello spirito di riforma

Dello spirito di riforma was thereby the first channel through which an Italian summary of the theories propounded by Steuart in the *Principles* circulated, contributing decisively to the initial penetration of the Scottish author's ideas in Italy. In the above-mentioned *Lezione di economia politica*, published a few years after *Dello spirito di riforma*, Tamassia declared that Steuart had triggered a veritable 'revolution' with his economic ideas.²⁴

Before reading the *Principles*, there were two works that had prompted him to reflect on political economy: Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* and Filangieri's *Scienza della legislazione*. Montesquieu – 'too brisk in the discussion of his subjects' – had left him with little more than 'vague and superficial ideas.'²⁵ From the *Scienza della legislazione*, in which Filangieri deemed the theory of equal distribution of wealth and land to be utopian and no longer applicable to modern societies,²⁶ Tamassia declared that he had drawn the belief that 'healthy politics' must always promote 'the subdivision of property as being extremely favourable to agriculture and the simplicity of customs.'²⁷ The *Principles* had conversely led him to mature the idea that 'politics' stopped being such 'when its operations are not adapted to customs and habits.'²⁸ Apropos of this he quoted almost verbatim a passage from the preface to book I of the *Principles*: 'According to my way of treating this subject no general rule can be laid down in political matters: everything there must be considered according to the circumstances and spirit of the nations to which they relate.'²⁹

While with these words, Steuart had intended to underline the need to bear in mind the specificity of national contexts when assessing the possibilities of particular economic policies, Tamassia instead applied them to the political-economic debate of the Italian revolutionary *Triennio*. His objective was to close the accounts with those who during the brief revolutionary phase had entertained the possibility of a model of political economy based on old republican models, that is to say on frugality, on agricultural activity and on the redistribution of land ownership. Since the fall of the *ancien régime* called for a new way of thinking about economic issues in a way compatible with the new republican and democratic principles, to Tamassia's mind the *Principles* represented a proposal for a modern republican economic model to set against the ancient one envisaged by authors like Mably and Rousseau.³⁰

In this perspective, Tamassia's pamphlet drew mainly from four chapters of the *Principles*, namely chapter V (*In what Manner, and according to what Principles, and political Causes, does Agriculture augment Population?*) of book I and chapters XIV (*Security, Ease and Happiness, no inseparable Concomitants of Trade and Industry*), XXVI (*Of the Vibration of the Balance of Wealth between the Subjects of a modern State*) and XX (*Of Luxury*) of book II. These choices make clear how Tamassia's interest did not centre on Steuart's ideas on monetary and banking issues, nor on his theory of price or even on his protectionist propositions, but rather on the schematic description of commercial society that he expounded. He focused exclusively on the model of 'political oeconomy' of 'modern times,' as opposed to the 'political oeconomy' of 'antient times,'³¹ that is, on a model of political

²⁴Tamassia, *Lezione di economia politica*, 4.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 2.

²⁶On the economic reflections of Filangieri, see Maria Teresa Silvestrini, 'Free Trade, Feudal Remnants and International Equilibrium in Gaetano Filangieri's Science of Legislation', *History of European Ideas* 32 (2006): 502–24.

²⁷Tamassia, *Dello spirito di riforma*, 2.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 4. For a detailed analysis of Steuart's reflection on the issue of the redistribution of land, see Andrew S. Skinner, 'Sir James Steuart: Economics and Politics', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 9 (1962): 17–37.

²⁹Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, Book I, *Preface*.

³⁰On the level of impact and circulation of Rousseau and Mably in Italy during the revolutionary period, see at least Silvia Rota Ghibaudi, *La fortuna di Rousseau in Italia. 1750–1815* (Torino: Giappichelli, 1961); Fernanda Mazzanti Pepe, 'Mably e le traduzioni italiane di epoca giacobina', in *Il genio delle lingue. Le traduzioni nel Settecento in area franco-italiana* (Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 1989), 225–37; and Antonino De Francesco, 'Un caso di estremismo politico nella Napoli del 1799: Francesco Lomonaco traduce Mably', in *Napoli 1799 fra storia e storiografia*, ed. Anna Maria Rao (Napoli: Vivarium, 2002), 375–91.

³¹Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, book I, chap. XX.

economy based not only on agriculture but also on the development of trade, manufacturing and industry.

Dello spirito di riforma began with an analysis of the different ‘classes’ that made up modern societies, namely the ‘lazy consumers’ (*consumatori oziosi*), who ‘live on an already acquired income,’ the ‘manufacturers’ (*manifatturieri*) who used ‘their industry to modify the products of nature,’ and the ‘cultivators’ (*coltivatori*) who ‘direct their labour on the cultivation of the earth to provide our general subsistence.’³² This subdivision, the expression of a wholly economic vision of society, was taken directly from the *Principles*, where Steuart had distinguished between ‘idle consumers,’ ‘farmers’ and ‘free hands.’³³ Starting from this analysis of the productive classes, Tamassia discussed at length and in detail the consequences, entirely negative and again taken entirely from Steuart, of an equal distribution of land.

First of all, Tamassia argued that this socio-economic system would prove to be ineffective, since it would end up reproducing, given the ‘different attitude of the three classes’ to the cultivation of land, the inequality that it ‘aimed to eliminate,’ causing some to ‘live with difficulty’ and others ‘to be provided sufficiently with the necessary sustenance.’³⁴ Furthermore, an equal division of property would hinder any population increase, in that it would remove an outlet for any eventual surplus workforce of the manufacturing sector.³⁵ In his opinion, the two other remedies explored – the ‘destruction of excess population’ and emigration – seemed much more ‘barbarian’ than the economic inequality which the agrarian law was designed to eliminate. While referring extensively in his consideration to the *Principles*, in particular to chapter V of book I,³⁶ Tamassia greatly simplified Steuart’s ideas: the Scottish author had in fact followed an in-depth and articulated line of analysis, indicating three possible solutions to population growth in a purely agricultural society: charity, barter and slavery.³⁷

A third argument, also drawn from Steuart, touched more directly on the question of economic development. Without a large class of ‘manufacturers,’ in other words a class of non-landowners, not only would the development of the manufacturing system remain a chimera, but agriculture would not rise beyond subsistence level. The main driver of agricultural development was the desire of landowners to obtain a surplus from land cultivation to spend on things unconnected to subsistence:

if in the political economy of modern times the cultivator produces a surplus [...] it is because he has an interest in producing one that he can exchange with the industrious, who provides for his other needs: if he does not care to produce any surplus from his land, he cannot satisfy his tastes.³⁸

In this theoretical framework, which Tamassia made his own by rejecting the old frugal republican model, not only were hope and desires for a better life responsible for generating growth in the agricultural sector, but, more generally, the aspiration for happiness and well-being constituted the foundation of economic development by virtue of a determined effort to realise work-based desires, and was capable, precisely for that reason, of combining personal interest and public happiness. The development of a market economy would moreover enable the launch of a real process of wealth circulation, unachievable in a society stuck fast at the level of pure subsistence.³⁹

³²Tamassia, *Dello spirito di riforma*, 5.

³³Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, book I, chap. VII. For a detailed synthesis of the economic ideas that are presented in the *Principles*, see Andrew S. Skinner, ‘Sir James Steuart’s Principles of Political Economy’, in *A history of Scottish economic thought*, ed. Alexander Dow and Sheila Dow (London: Routledge, 2006), 71–101.

³⁴Tamassia, *Dello spirito di riforma*, 4.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 4.

³⁶‘Agriculture among a free people will augment population, only in proportion as the necessitous are put in situation to purchase subsistence with their labour’ (Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, book I, chap. V).

³⁷Tamassia, *Dello spirito di riforma*, 36.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 36 ss. On Steuart’s reflection on the issue of population, see J.J. Gislán, ‘James Steuart. Economy and population’, in *The Economics of James Steuart*, 169–85.

³⁹Tamassia, *Dello spirito di riforma*, 23. On these aspects, see also Cecilia Carnino, *Giovanni Tamassia, “patriota energico”. Dal Triennio rivoluzionario alla caduta di Napoleone (1796–1814)* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2017), 89–97.

In addition, Tamassia took from the *Principles* the idea that ties between individuals, seen as the only true foundation of societies, derived in the final analysis from the need to satisfy ‘reciprocal needs,’ that is, in the words of Steuart, those ‘reciprocal wants’ that ‘promote industry’ and in the exercise of which Tamassia saw, in open disagreement with Rousseau, the only ‘true happiness.’⁴⁰ Looking at it this way it is not surprising to find that a large part of *Dello spirito di riforma* was dedicated to the subject of luxury, defined, in the course of a mature economic conceptualisation and in the wake of Steuart, as ‘the acquisition of superfluous things with the aim of consuming them.’⁴¹ Once again Tamassia did not even try to appear original, admitting that his argument had been ‘copied almost literally from Steuart’s research into the principles of political economy. And what else could I have substituted for it that would have been more accurate and more eloquent?’⁴²

Summarising chapter XX of the second book of the *Principles*,⁴³ which in turn was strongly influenced by Hume’s *Discourse of Luxury* (a title significantly changed to *Of refinement in the Arts* from the 1760 edition onwards),⁴⁴ Tamassia presented luxury as a driver of economic growth. Luxury was a crucial factor in the progress of international trade, in the development of the manufacturing sector and in the incentive to work. At the same time, luxury was perceived as an instrument of greater distribution of wealth, which by way of luxury could pass from the hands of the rich consumer to those of the hard-working artisan. Reflecting on these arguments, Tamassia confirmed that above all he wanted to take from Steuart his adherence to a commercial economic model based on the development of international economic relations. A model characterised by a strong degree of interdependence between the productive sectors and between individuals (i.e. the productive classes), and in which private passions and well-being were the prime stimulus to national prosperity.

4. Steuart and Smith

If *Dello spirito di riforma* was the first channel through which the *Principles* was circulated in Italy, the pamphlet proposed and codified a specific and partial reading of Steuart’s work. This reading accentuated certain aspects of Steuart’s work while leaving others in the shade, especially the protectionist orientation that characterised the Scotsman’s work. In this perspective, Steuart could be an author of reference also for those who, like Tamassia and more generally many economist authors of the revolutionary *Triennio* and then of the Italian Republic, took the side in favour of a system of economic freedom. After the dismantling of the political and social structures of the *ancien régime*, economic liberty, on the lines of the French experience, expressed in full the revolutionary principles of freedom and equality as opposed to the limitations and regulations based on the privileges of *ancien régime* society.

In the *Dello spirito di riforma* Tamassia had not even felt the need to justify the coexistence in his work of the adherence to economic freedom with his assumption of Steuart as a reference for his economic analysis, but the perspective changed some years later. Tamassia’s reading of Smith, who he discovered after Steuart, and his comparison of the two authors’ ideas led him to explain his position more clearly. The traces of this comparison can clearly be found in the already quoted *Lezione di economia politica*, published in 1802 and reprinted in 1807 following its publishing

⁴⁰Tamassia, *Dello spirito di riforma*, 8–9.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 26. Steuart defined luxury: ‘the providing of superfluities, in favour of a consumption’ (Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, book II, chap. XX).

⁴²Tamassia, *Dello spirito di riforma*, 32.

⁴³Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, book II, chap. XX. For a detailed analysis of Steuart’s ideas on luxury, see Aida Ramos, *Economy, Empire, and Identity: Rethinking the Origins of Political Economy in Sir James Steuart’s Principles of Political Economy* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 161–88; Aida Ramos, ‘Luxury, Crisis and Consumption: Sir James Steuart and the Eighteenth-Century Luxury Debate’, *History of Economics Review* 53, no. 1 (2011): 55–72; Samar R. Sen, *The economics of Sir James Steuart* (London: Bell and Sons, 1957), 46–9; Dominique Caboret, ‘The Market Economy and Social Classes in James Steuart and G. W. F. Hegel’, in *The Economics of James Steuart*, 57–75; and Hong-Seok Yang, *The Political Economy of Trade and Growth. An Analytical Interpretation of Sir James Steuart’s “Inquiry”* (Hants-Brookfield-Aldershot: Elgar, 1994), 93–103.

⁴⁴David Hume, *Political Discourses, Discourse II, Of Luxury* (Edinburgh: Fleming, 1752).

success. On the whole, the pamphlet was presented as a veritable compendium of what in his opinion constituted the foremost theories of economic science, the knowledge of which he deemed necessary and sufficient for grasping the principles of political economy. While citing Italian, English, French, Swiss and Spanish authors – from Smith to Hume, from Verri to Mengotti, from Galiani to Genovesi, from Forbonnais to Montesquieu, from Herrenschwand to Ustariz, and from Condillac to Bielfeld – Tamassia once again accorded primacy to Steuart, whose ‘great and illuminating’ principles had demonstrated first and most clearly the need to adapt economic policies to the specificities of local realities.⁴⁵

He revived Steuart’s condemnation – already advanced in *Dello spirito di riforma* – of the classical republican model based on frugality and the contraction of consumption, even if by then the issue of agrarian law was given less emphasis in order to focus more on the drivers of economic growth. The crucial factor in economic development was identified in ‘industry,’ in the sense of industriousness or diligent endeavour, which in turn lay at the root of social justice through a process of wealth circulation based on labour, which made possible the flow of the surplus from the rich to the poor.⁴⁶ The idea that the ‘formation of surplus’ was ensured only by the presence of large estates was also taken from Steuart. The lengthy ‘Annotation I,’ in which Tamassia cited Arthur Young’s *Travels* in support of his own theories, was dedicated to demonstrating the economic advantages of large landholdings, which could guarantee the ‘large capital’ required for agricultural development and which had been bolstered in Lombardy by the policy of selling domestic goods.⁴⁷

In order of importance, after Steuart came Smith. The main point of attention was of course *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, with Germain Garnier’s French translation being recommended ‘for the youth that cannot read the original English’ and praised as ‘excellent in itself and enriched by interesting notes.’⁴⁸ In an attempt to summarise in just a few pages the *Wealth of Nations*, whose complexity of economic analysis was emphasised,⁴⁹ Tamassia concentrated on two of ‘Smith’s main theories.’ These were the division of labour, defined as ‘the main albeit little observed cause’ of public and private wealth, and the accumulation of capital.⁵⁰ Following an approach that looked at the economic role of all classes in society – that is, of all the productive classes – the capital to which Tamassia referred, complying with Smith, were the ‘gradual’ savings that came as much from the revenues of landowners and businessmen as from the work of ‘the hard-working individual.’⁵¹ An essential condition for the reinvestment of this capital in the economic circuit was the unrestricted pursuit of individual interests, considered to be always compatible with the public interest. The intervention of public power in the economy had to be limited as much as possible and never be allowed to clash with private interest since this would cause ‘grave damage to annual production’ on which public wealth was founded.⁵²

Tamassia was perfectly well aware of the contrast between Smith’s free trade approach and Steuart’s late-mercantilist economic approach, in which political power is expected to provide direct leadership for the well-being of the collective. The joint use of the two Scottish authors as privileged points of reference for economic ideas therefore required some clarification. First of all, Tamassia underlined the strong affinity between the works of the two authors, pointing out, on the one hand, how Smith seemed to have taken some of his ideas from Steuart and, on the other, the originality of the two authors:

⁴⁵Tamassia, *Lezione di economia*, 4.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁷‘Annotazione I,’ in Tamassia, *Lezione di economia*, 19–23; and Arthur Young, *Travels During the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789, Undertaken more Particularly with a View of Ascertaining the Cultivation, Wealth, Resources, and National Prosperity, of the Kingdom of France. To Which Is Added, the Register of a Tour into Spain* (Dublin: M’Kenzie, and Rice, 1793).

⁴⁸Tamassia, *Lezione di economia*, 8; and Adam Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations, Traduction nouvelle, avec des notes et observations; par Germain Garnier, ... avec le portrait de Smith* (Paris: Agasse, 1802).

⁴⁹Tamassia, *Lezione di economia*, 9.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 10.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 11.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 11.

I should not hide that some of the fundamental principles of political economics noted by Smith seem to have been taken from Steuart. Also, observing the detail of these principles in the two authors that I propose, the originality shines through easily in the writings of the one and the other.⁵³

However, Tamassia also carried out a more significant and original task, trying to expound a liberal reading of the author of the *Principles*. In this perspective, he tried to demonstrate how the differences between Smith and Steuart in matters of free trade were ‘only apparent’:

[Smith’s] free trade [...] will seem, at first glance, in opposition with the teachings of Steuart; but do not tire to read and compare these two celebrated authors, and eventually you will realise that the disparity between their opinions is only apparent, and that the result of their profound meditations are almost similar.⁵⁴

The *Annotazione III* placed at the end of his *Lezione di economia* was dedicated to this question. Here Tamassia explicitly recognised for the first time how Steuart had been, ‘like the majority of the Economic Writers of his time,’ in favour ‘of the brilliant but futile idea of the *balance of trade*; and his arguments are sometimes affected by this predisposition.’ At the same time, however, Tamassia showed how a deeper reading of the *Principles* would demonstrate that Steuart’s ‘final maxim’ was ‘only a little dissimilar from that of Smith.’⁵⁵ This reading, made through his interpretative lens, deliberately downplayed the importance attributed by Steuart to protectionist policies in support of equilibrium in the balance of trade and the development of national manufacturing. According to Tamassia, the state interventionism invoked by Steuart was in fact confined to the theoretical, being seldom realised practically. Translating a long passage from chapter XXIV of book II of the *Principles* on public intervention in the balance of trade,⁵⁶ Tamassia strove to demonstrate how in Steuart’s interpretation it was possible to intervene usefully in favour of a positive trade balance only when a government had a real understanding of ‘the entire chain of consequences’ that might result from this action. Since the complexity of the commercial exchange of modern societies ruled out this understanding, for Steuart – according to Tamassia – any protectionist intervention had to be ‘merely hypothetical.’⁵⁷

In particular, through the specific quotation of the above-mentioned passage of the *Principles*, the Italian author focused his attention above all on the internal economic dynamics of the nation. In this perspective, it seemed necessary to evaluate all the consequences for the national manufacturing system that could derive from the ban on the importation of certain goods. For example, a part of the imported goods could in fact be exported, at a later stage, ‘with profit’ or even be employed in ‘other branches of national industry.’⁵⁸ Precisely the complexity of this evaluation had to convince the government to renounce to intervene in the regulation of commerce. Moreover, in Tamassia’s view, the intervention of the state in the economy was not desirable even if it was possible to calculate exactly the consequences of each action. For him, the best solution remained the reliance on the principles of the ‘wise economic freedom.’

⁵³Ibid., 9.

⁵⁴Ibid., 13–14.

⁵⁵Ibid., 32.

⁵⁶‘Nothing is more complex than the interests of trade, considered with respect to a whole nation. It is hardly possible for a people to have every branch of trade favourable for the increase of her wealth: consequently, a statesman who, upon the single inspection of one branch, would lay the importation of it under limitations, in proportion as he found the balance upon it unfavourable to the nation, might very possibly undo a flourishing commerce. He must first examine minutely every use to which the merchandize imported is put: if a part is re-exported with profit, this profit must be deducted from the balance of loss incurred by the consumption of the remainder. If it be consumed upon the account of other branches of industry, which are thereby advanced, the balance of loss may still be more than compensated. If it be a mean of supporting a correspondence with a neighbouring nation, otherwise advantageous, the loss resulting from it may be submitted to, in a certain degree. But if upon examining the whole chain of consequences, he find the nation’s wealth not at all increased, nor her trade encouraged, in proportion to the damage at first incurred by the importation; I believe he may decide such a branch of trade to be hurtful; and therefore that it ought to be cut off, in the most prudent manner, according to the general rule’ (Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, book II, chap. XXIV).

⁵⁷Tamassia, *Lezione di economia politica*, 34.

⁵⁸Ibid., 33.

Tamassia would put forward the same liberalist reading of Steuart a few months later in the pamphlet *Delle scienze e della libertà relativamente al commercio*, published in 1802.⁵⁹ In this work Steuart was cited, along with Smith, in support of the economic freedom of all productive sectors, conceived as a prerequisite for achieving the economic balance between supply and demand on which national prosperity relied. In the long final appendix he argued against the thesis, sustained by ‘many writers of public Economics,’ that the prohibition on the importation of foreign goods was ‘the primary cause of the prosperity of trade.’⁶⁰ Significantly, Steuart was not listed among the ranks of those who had upheld this principle, but was named as an author who had warned against adopting protectionist policies without first having a thorough understanding of the effects that these would have on the national economy as a whole. He was referring again to chapter XXIV of book II of the *Principles*, in particular to the ‘chain of consequences’ that it was necessary to draw up and assess before resorting to such policies. Steuart was once more placed alongside Smith. The latter had set out a few exceptions to the ‘general rule of free trade,’ and Steuart had done nothing more than ‘declaring in more general terms the same exceptions.’⁶¹ According to Tamassia, the ‘wise economic freedom’ – whose defence also acquired a clear political value of denouncing the group interests inherent in the protectionist orientation – was the cardinal principle behind the economic development and progress of society.⁶²

5. Tamassia’s reading of Steuart between economics and politics. Some conclusions

This interpretation of Steuart’s ideas, conditioned by the desire to demonstrate the compatibility between the model of political economics envisaged in the *Principles* and a distinctly economic liberalist orientation, was naturally incomplete and in some ways appears forced. In this perspective, there are two different considerations at play. The first concerns more directly the dimension of the history of economic ideas. When, in 1802, Tamassia published the two pamphlets, Steuart and Smith could still be evoked together as points of reference for economic analysis as their economic models were not yet completely perceived as incompatible. The situation would change entirely in the following year, in 1803, with the publication of the *Traité d’économie politique*. Only after Say’s work, the reading of Steuart as a champion of protectionism directly opposed to Smith, who was represented as the defender of economic freedom, asserted itself and became codified:

On a dit que Smith avait de grandes obligations à Steuart, qu’il n’a pas cité une seule fois, même pour le combattre. Je ne vois pas en quoi consistent ces obligations [...] Steuart a soutenu un système déjà embrassé par Colbert, adopté ensuite par tous les écrivains français et étrangers qui ont écrit sur le commerce jusqu’aux économistes du dix-huitième siècle, constamment suivi par la plupart des gouvernements européens, et qui fait dépendre les richesses d’un pays, non du montant de ses productions, mais du montant de ses ventes à l’étranger. Smith a consacré une partie importante de son livre à confondre ce système. S’il n’a pas réfuté Steuart en particulier, c’est que Steuart n’est pas chef d’école, et qu’il s’agissait de combattre l’opinion générale d’alors, plutôt que celle d’un écrivain qui n’en avait point qui lui fût propre.⁶³

⁵⁹Giovanni Tamassia, *Delle scienze e della libertà relativamente al commercio* (Milan: Stamperia del Genio tipografico, 1802).

⁶⁰‘Appendice’, in Tamassia, *Delle scienze e della libertà relativamente al commercio*, 42.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 52.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 18–19.

⁶³Say, *Traité d’économie politique*, Discours préliminaire, xxii. In the review of the *Traité* published in the French periodical *Décade philosophique, Littéraire et Politique*, Say’s opinion on the two authors was clearly understood and emphasised: ‘J-B. Say apprécie parfaitement cet écrivain [Smith]. Il le justifie du reproche qui lui a été fait d’avoir beaucoup profité de Steuart, sans l’avoir même nommé. Il montre entre l’auteur de la richesse des nations et celui des principes de l’Économie politique, une distance immense. Le premier plane, et le second se traîne: l’un a puisement conçu son sujet et crée son plan. Steuart a soutenu un système précédemment adopté par Colbert [...] et qui fait dépendre la richesse d’un pays non du montant de ses productions, mais du montant de ses ventes à l’étranger. Les Économistes ont pris un autre extrême. Enfin c’est Smith seul qui a trouvé les véritables fondements de la richesse’ (*‘Économie politique’, Décade Philosophique, Littéraire et Politique XXXIII, IV^{ème} trimestre, 1803*). From a less critical perspective concerning Steuart, across the Channel, the British periodical *Montley Review* synthesised and fixed this interpretation of Steuart as a theoretician of the mercantilist system, as opposed to Smith: ‘The mind of Sir James Steuart, thought vigorous and energetic, failed to soar above the prejudices of the mercantile system. Like all his predecessor, he gives the preferences to foreign over internal commerce; and he represents the former has beneficial only in proportion to the money balance

The progressive definition of the paradigm of classical economics, by contributing to establishing a negative interpretation of mercantilist economic policies, significantly reduced the space for alternative readings of the *Principles*, which was often invoked as an emblematic example of the 'mercantile system'.⁶⁴ The first penetration of Steuart in Italy had, however, taken place in a different background of economic culture, in which economic science appeared in some ways more fluid and less restricted to narrow analytical and interpretative categories. The primacy ascribed to the evaluation of local circumstances with respect to defining abstract economic law and paying heed to the practical dimension of political economy, which characterised Italian economic thought during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth, had allowed Tamassia to present the model of political economy outlined in the *Principles* as compatible with an invisible hand that had the capability to refashion the individual interests which undergird public prosperity.

The second consideration is more directly related to the political dimension, or more precisely to the links between economic reflection and political implications. If the *Principles* had appeared to Tamassia as an appropriate model for the exaltation of the modern commercial society, the Italian author never shared Steuart's protectionist approach. Starting from his pamphlet *Dello spirito di riforma*, Tamassia became a convinced proponent, in consonance with the broader economic reflection of the revolutionary *Triennio*, of the adoption of principles of economic freedom. The insistence on the need to pursue an essentially liberalist economic model, which reveals itself as something of an obsession for revolutionary authors aiming to smash the obligations and limits imposed by the governments of the *ancien régime*, was above all intended to bring to light the discontinuity between the past and present and thus provide legitimacy for the new democratic republics. This adherence to economic freedom was rooted in the battles for free trade in grain fought by the reformist movement in the second half of the eighteenth century and also drew support from ideas emerging in revolutionary France.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, during the revolutionary and early post-revolutionary periods the demand for economic freedom also took on a more expressly political dimension through an emphasis on the link, which was brought into focus in revolutionary France and which Tamassia made his own in the *Spirito di riforma*, between the political freedom obtained with the defeat of *ancien régime* society and economic freedom.⁶⁶ This led to the insistence on the connection between republicanism, political freedom and economic development: freedom and the destruction of established hierarchies formed the foundations of the happiness of the citizens and of public prosperity.

In particular, after the end of the revolutionary period, with the creation of the Italian Republic in 1802 and the gradual manifestation of Napoleonic authoritarianism, the defence of economic freedom also became a form of opposition to Bonapartist politics. The assertion of the arguments in favour of economic freedom was in fact intrinsically linked to the political struggle for freedom, and the principles of economic freedom thus derived directly from political ideas aimed at safeguarding the ground won by the revolution. It is in fact on this level that the full significance of Tamassia's attempt to propose a liberalist interpretation of the *Principles*, as well as the motivations behind it,

which it produces [...]. For these fundamental errors, which Dr. Smith has since demonstratively refuted, Sir James strenuously contented; and he is guilty of a scarcely less capital and injurious mistake, when he insists on the Statesman's constant superintendence over trade' ('Art. 1. The Works, Political, Metaphysical, and Chronological, of the late Sir James Steuart of Coltness', *The Monthly Review* (June 1806): 113–21).

⁶⁴From this perspective, see for example Simonde de Sismondi in his work *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique*: 'Le système mercantile se trouve développé dans divers ouvrages de Charles Davenant, 1699, 1700; dans Melon, *Essai politique sur le Commerce*, 1734; dans James Steuert, *Inquiry into the Principles of political oeconomy*, 4 vol. Lond., 1763; et dans Anton Genovesi, *Lezioni di Commercio, ossia d'Economia civile*. Milano, 1 vol., 1768' (Jean Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique, ou de la richesse dans ses rapports avec la population* (Paris, 1819), vol. II, 30).

⁶⁵On these aspects, see Cecilia Carnino, 'Libertà e prosperità: l'economia politica dell'Italia rivoluzionaria (1796–1799)', *Révolution française* 14 (forthcoming).

⁶⁶On the close link between political freedom and economic freedom as integral to the economic debate of revolutionary France, then picked up by the liberal economic thinking during 1820s and 1830s, see Francis Démier, 'Une source de légitimité pour le libéralisme économique de la monarchie constitutionnelle: la Révolution française', in *Le XIX^e siècle et la Révolution française*, ed. Maurice Agulhon (Paris: Créaphis, 1992), 369–87.

can be fully understood. These motivations were not rooted in an in-depth economic analysis, which however never characterised Tamassia's thinking and writings. Instead, they should be sought in his deliberate attempt to make Steuart's reflection compatible with an economic and political culture – which, in the passage from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, Tamassia shared with many men of his time – centred on the defence of freedom.

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