

# Ruskin in Translation: Versions of *Unto this Last* in a Few Europeans Languages

## Toward a Reception History of John Ruskin's Social Thought

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**Abstract** The article proposes to review the reception and transmission of John Ruskin's social thought as expressed in *Unto this Last* (1862), translated and edited in different European languages. The text itself offers little room for variation, so that interpretations are voiced mainly in the editors' introductions or afterwords, when they exist. This study finds that very few foreign versions do justice to Ruskin's radicalism in his anti-capitalist and anti-industrial critique of modern society, his rejection of 'progress' and his refutation of political economy, while most take advantage of the occasion to express their own political and social views, often in blatant betrayal of Ruskin's ideas.

**Keywords** Anti-capitalism. Anti-industrialism. Anti-machinism. Christian socialism. Degrowth. Democratic Liberal. Interpretation. Liberalism. Liberal Italy. Marx. Marxism. Political economy. Radicalism. Ruskin. Socialism. Social reform. Social change. Translation. Version. *Unto this Last*.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Dutch Versions. – 3 The German Versions. – 4 The Italian Versions. – 5 The French Versions. – 6 The Spanish Versions. – 7 Conclusion.

### 1 Introduction

*Unto this Last* (hereafter *UTL*) is generally recognised as the book which most clearly marks Ruskin's evolution from a mainly arts-centred thinker (though not without views on society) to a critic of modern society in general (including its art and culture). The book was initially a series of separate articles which appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1860, but the first essays met with such an outraged response from readers that the editor, William Thackeray, though a friend of Ruskin's, resolved (under pressure from the owner George Smith) to cut the series short, and to limit to four the number of articles the magazine would

publish. The scandal was caused by Ruskin's open criticism of both "the modern *soi-disant* science of political economy"<sup>1</sup> and the exploitative attitude of employers towards their workers, which the dominant economic doctrine of the time could be used to justify – although it did not overtly encourage it – through the argument of the priority of self-interest in economic relations.

The first essay of the series, "The Roots of Honour", was probably the most shocking and offensive for ordinary believers in the orthodox economic doctrine of the day. It contains what is probably the strongest formulation of Ruskin's rejection of the claims to scientificity of a doctrine he placed squarely in the same category of "popular creeds" such as "alchemy, astrology, witchcraft".<sup>2</sup> More pointedly, Ruskin attacks in his first essay the fundamental premise of political economy, previously popularised by Adam Smith, that self-interest is the principal motive of actions and exchanges of economic importance. The attack, in spite of the occasional jolliness and pleasantness of tone, is radical and epistemological in nature. It is possibly one of the earliest critiques of the much-debated theory of so-called "instrumentalism".<sup>3</sup> The essay is not entirely eristic however, and Ruskin also proposes his own view that gain or profit should be secondary in all economic activities, as they are (or should be) in medicine or architecture for example: economic relationships are grounded, overtly or covertly, in moral considerations, and are ultimately expressions of a moral code. Ruskin took stock of the results of the economy of his time and concluded that the moral code

on which it was based was harmful for the majority and therefore wrong.

The second essay ("The Veins of Wealth") develops further the idea that service to others is the true meaning of economic relations, and therefore that honour (or honesty) should be the central value in exchanges of all kinds. In the absence of honest foundations for the economy, says Ruskin, the wealth of some entails the exploitation of others: "the art of making yourself rich, in the ordinary mercantile economist's sense, is therefore equally and necessarily the art of keeping your neighbour poor".<sup>4</sup> In "Qui Judicatis Terram", the third essay of the series, Ruskin prolongs the argument of honourable economic relationships and links it to the question of moral assessment. The deep and innate sense of fairness and justice ingrained in human beings always serves as the existential background and moral index for economic interactions. Unfair compensation for work is thus the sign of a relationship in which employers abuse their privileged position of power to steal (value) from their workers, and both categories are (more or less clearly) aware of that fact. The discourse of political economy is produced to justify this relationship or to conceal it when it cannot be justified. When Thackeray decided to interrupt the series of articles, he nevertheless allowed Ruskin, by way of apology, to write a fourth essay that might be longer than the previous ones. In "Ad Valorem" Ruskin redefines terms which he believed political economists had misunderstood or misused. "Value" features prominently among these abused notions, and

<sup>1</sup> *UTL* (= *Works*, 17), 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, 17: 25.

<sup>3</sup> Instrumentalism, as explained for example by the US American philosopher John Dewey, means that theories are valued not for the realism of their assumptions but for their "predictive capacity". In economics, this epistemological doctrine has been endorsed by most mainstream authors in recent decades, and for example by Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek. Ruskin criticises the very fact that the two aspects can be divorced for one another as symptomatic of the loss of perspective of modern political economy.

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, 17: 44.

Ruskin's analysis leads him to conclude that value is intrinsic to things and objects, and that it consists essentially in their life-enhancing or life-supporting capacity. Ruskin summarised this idea in his famous aphorism "There is no Wealth but Life". This sentence is followed by words that illustrate the moral imperative informing all of Ruskin's investigation of just distribution and criticism of political economy:

Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.<sup>5</sup>

Powerful and shocking as these criticisms and alternative views on political economy might have appeared at the time, the preface written by Ruskin for the book in which the four articles were collected in 1862 must have outraged many a reader beyond anything else the volume contained. But it also contributed not a little to Ruskin's reputation as a "social reformer", anti-capitalist and Communist, among other designations. There Ruskin forewarned readers that the conclusion he would like them to reach after reading the book was no less than the necessity of four broad lines of social reform resulting in

- a. a compulsory public training and education system;
- b. linked to the latter, a public system "for the production and sale of every necessary of life, and for the exercise of every useful art";<sup>6</sup>

- c. a secondary training and placement system to deal with the problems of unemployment and qualification; and
- d. "Lastly, - that for the old and destitute, comfort and home should be provided; which provision, when misfortune had been by the working of such a system sifted from guilt, would be honourable instead of disgraceful to the receiver".<sup>7</sup>

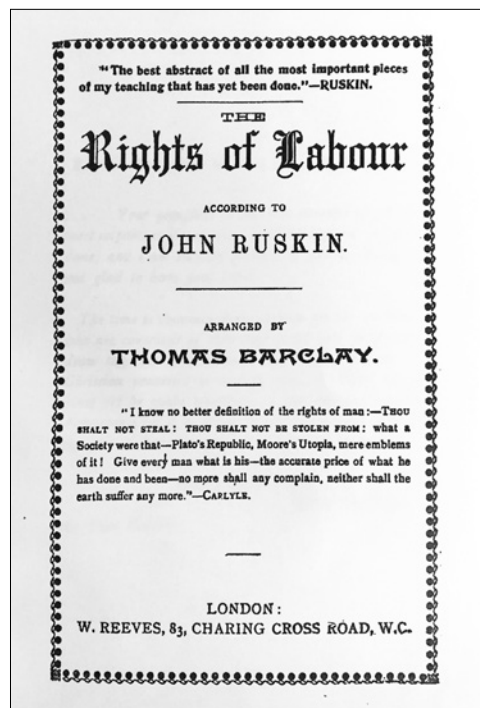
Remarkably, this preface, which probably offers one of the clearest summaries of Ruskin's perspective on social and economic issues, is almost never mentioned, or very laterally, in the foreign versions' introductions or editorial notes - just as in many discussions of the meaning of *UTL* in English-language versions. Certainly, its message does not sit well with most of the ideological prisms through which *UTL*, as an expression of Ruskin's social views, is usually read and translated. This relative obliteration of the preface in foreign versions is in fact surprising, since *UTL* is usually chosen among Ruskin's social theory works for its clarity of purpose and expression. One could be led to suspect that the content of the preface is perhaps *too* clear.

On the whole, although it was cut short by the decision of the director of the *Cornhill* to terminate the series after the fourth essay, *UTL* is probably the more elaborate and complete expression of Ruskin's rejection of the "philosophy" which the business and employing classes (and their social dependents) used as a justification of the dominant order, the doctrine of economic liberalism (or political economy). When he began his attack, Ruskin was coming out of a long spiritual crisis, and entering a new phase in his intellectual life:

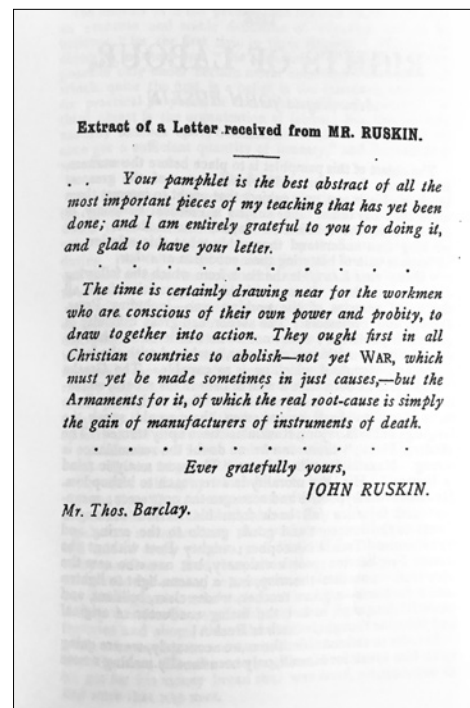
<sup>5</sup> *Works*, 17: 105.

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, 17: 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, 17: 22.



**Figures 1a-b** Thomas Barclay, *The Rights of Labour* according to John Ruskin, 1890 ca. London: Reeves. Original cover. Free of rights



Putting his zeal at the service of this world, he set himself the mission of showing, by every possible means, criticism, satire, invective and sarcasm, that modern society was fundamentally evil, that the freedom on which it purported to rest, more formal than real, served to hide greed.<sup>8</sup>

The book was clearly perceived as a danger by the propo-

nents of free trade and the defenders of a separation between economics and ethics. As Anthony notes, “[t]he reaction was also significant in its hostility, as though his critics saw more clearly than his friends had done, the truly radical nature of the attack that he directed”.<sup>9</sup> A leading article in that bastion of free-trade, the *Manchester Examiner*, expressed in October 1860 the fear that if Ruskin was not crushed “his wild words will touch the

<sup>8</sup> Jaudel 1973, 19. Unless otherwise specified, all the translations are made by the Author.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony 1983, 73.

springs of action in some hearts, and ere we are aware a moral floodgate may fly open and drown us all".<sup>10</sup>

But *UTL* also garnered the sympathetic attention and enthusiasm of many social reformers, radicals and socialists (who must have looked beyond Ruskin's professed anti-socialism). In a small pamphlet published by a certain Thomas Barclay around 1890 entitled *The Rights of Labour according to John Ruskin* [fig. 1a], the author offers in his introduction an interesting (if somewhat sycophantic) characterisation of Ruskin as a social and political prophet: "one of the greatest thinkers of any age" – no less – "Ruskin has been aptly termed the 'Modern Plato'".<sup>11</sup> Ruskin's views, according to Barclay, can enlighten the working class and help it in its struggle toward emancipation. The subject of the pamphlet, Barclay writes in the introduction, is "Political Economy, in other words the relation of Capital and Labour", and Ruskin's teachings in this respect are essential, because:

[u]ntil working men understand thoroughly what this relation is, all hope is vain of bettering their condition as a class [...] *Unto this Last* is the book from which the following extracts are taken. It met with bitter opposition from all the usual enemies of the working man, including Press, Priests and Professors. The author had great difficulty in getting it published; a fact not to be wondered at when we consider its revolutionary character, combined with the logic, grace, and vigour of which he is so capable.<sup>12</sup>

There are other reasons, beyond the kind of reverence for both message and style displayed by Barclay in his pamphlet, for the relative success of *UTL*, at home and abroad, to do with the form and structure of the collection of essays. Jeanne Clegg in her study of Ruskin's "presence" in Italy at the beginning of the Twentieth century, remarks that "the predilection for *UTL*, with the consequent exclusion of *Munera Pulveris* and *Fors Clavigera*" was largely due to "its methodical organisation" (four essays written in numbered sections) as well as "its abstract approach".<sup>13</sup> That predilection had a purpose:

The desire of extracting from Ruskin's writings a set of distinct, concise and coherent ideas is an almost constant aspect of their reception and transmission in the first half of the Twentieth century, in England as well as in Italy.<sup>14</sup>

This is still true, as the present article will try to show, not only for these two countries, but in the wider international context of the various translations and the different 'versions' suggested by the editors. There are versions of *UTL* in Japanese, Chinese and I found a reference to one in Malayalam, the main language of the Indian state of Kerala. The ambit of the present investigation is limited to Europe – only a small part of Europe really – but this is a beginning and there is scope for yet more interesting discoveries. The reasons for *UTL*'s worldwide success as a favoured aspect of Ruskin's social ideas cannot be discussed further here at any great

<sup>10</sup> *Works*, 17: xxxi.

<sup>11</sup> Barclay 2017, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Barclay 2017, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Clegg 2006, 102.

<sup>14</sup> Clegg 2006, 102.

length. However, it cannot suffice of course to explain it by motives of form or structure, or, as Barclay put it, the “logic, grace, and vigour” of Ruskin’s prose. Essentially, *UTL*’s appeal has to do with what Barclay calls its “revolutionary character”.

Barclay’s booklet displays on page 2 an extract from an undated letter [fig. 1b] from Ruskin to the author which gives another intimation of Ruskin’s views in matters of relations between Capital and Labour. Ruskin first kindly describes the pamphlet as “the best abstract of all the most important pieces of my teaching that has yet been done”, and further assigns to workers “first of all in all Christian countries” the historical task of abolishing not War itself, but the means of waging war, that is “the Armaments for it, of which the real root-cause is the gain of manufacturers of instruments of death”.<sup>15</sup> For Ruskin, war between “Christian countries” – his approximation for Europe – was fostered by and for the profit of capitalists, as is made clear in many more precise passages in *Munera Pulveris*, Ruskin’s second series of economic essays, notably, but subsequently also in *Fors Clavigera*. As P.D. Anthony remarked in his study of Ruskin’s “social theory”<sup>16</sup> “it was Ruskin, not Marx nor Engels” who wrote the following, one of the harshest and most direct condemnations of European capitalists:

Occult Theft – Theft which hides itself even from itself, and is legal, respectable, and cowardly, – corrupts the body and soul of man... And the guilty Thieves of Europe, the real sources of all deadly war in it, are the Capitalists – that is to say people who by percentages on the labour of them; instead of by fair wages of their own. The real war in Europe, of which

this fighting in Paris is the inauguration, is between these and the workman, such as they have made him.<sup>17</sup>

Ruskin’s anticapitalism originally stemmed from his visceral opposition to industrialism as a mode of social organisation and its associated cultural expressions. In effect, the twin streaks of anti-capitalism and anti-industrialism run unbroken through all of Ruskin’s later social commentary writings, but their early roots are in his art criticism, where they also continued to develop in the later phase. Clive Wilmer in his introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of Ruskin’s works – tellingly entitled *UTL and others writings* – outlines the trajectory of a thinker apparently interested only in art initially, but whose commentary and critique becomes increasingly loaded with social preoccupations, and whose aesthetic ideas are ever more linked to or even based on ethical concerns, until this evolution reached a tipping point:

With *The Political Economy of Art* the balance of Ruskin’s work is turned on its head. He began as a critic of art who incidentally commented on the state of society. In the Manchester lectures he was transformed into a social critic who illustrates his arguments with observations about art. [...] That is not to say that Ruskin criticized his age merely because its ugliness offended him. His condemnation of modern culture implied a condemnation of more deeply rooted social failures. What he sought to expose was a society statistically rich that could find no employment for its workers, lamented over-production as a cause of poverty, accepted the notion of planned obsolescence, encouraged an arms race as a source of eco-

<sup>15</sup> Barclay 2017, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony 1983, 186.

<sup>17</sup> *Fors Clavigera I* (= *Works*, 27), 127.

conomic growth, allowed extremes of poverty and starvation to co-exist with ostentatious luxury, professed Christianity but saw poverty as a law of nature not to be tampered with, and expected the majority of its people to rest content in conditions of squalor and brutal ugliness.<sup>18</sup>

In *UTL*, however, Ruskin's anti-industrialism extends chiefly to the relationship between workers and employers, which he finds finally to be dishonourable and exploitative. Ruskin does not deal extensively in *UTL* with the questions of inferior standards of work and production, the stultifying and dehumanising routines which operatives are subjected to in manufactures, or the disciplinary implications of factory work, all of which and more are developed elsewhere. The anti-industrial element in *UTL* is not yet anti-machinist,<sup>19</sup> and is therefore mostly a function of his anti-capitalist outlook.

The question of the interpretation of Ruskin's critique of capitalism and modern society as expressed in *UTL* is potentially contentious given the number and considerable variety of the contenders, as the review of some foreign examples will illustrate. Beyond that variety, his intellectual legacy falls broadly into two rather distinct categories. On the one hand there are those who, like the so-called "Organic Radicals"<sup>20</sup> and various degrowth movements, along with other social critics (J.-C. Michéa in France and Eugene McCarragher in the USA for example)<sup>21</sup> believe that the critique which Ruskin formulat-

ed more than 150 years ago is still valid nowadays, and possibly more so given the state of permanent crisis of globalised capitalism and its catastrophic consequences on so many levels. In this view, Ruskin's "social theory" is incompatible with the acceptance of capitalism and industrialism. The implication is that, in general, Ruskin's ideas have not been carried out in practice, and that "welfare" reforms and the subsequent welfare forms of capitalism are *not* descended from Ruskin's damaging critique of *any form* of capitalism or industrial organisation of society - as the four points of the preface as well as the radical critique of liberalism contained in *UTL* clearly show.

On the other hand, the more commonly held or at least publicly expressed view of Ruskin's social thought stands in stark contrast with that radical interpretation. This is perhaps only an apparent paradox, since this more consensual view proposes a version of Ruskin's ideas which is more readily acceptable by the general public as well as many Ruskin scholars. Perhaps fittingly, it behoved C. Wilmer, the former Master of the Guild of Saint George, to formulate (in 1984, long before he became Master) in his introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of Ruskin writings, what is probably the most widely circulated version of this orthodox thesis. Wilmer concludes that "Ruskin's influence is incalculable", in Britain (and beyond), through the permeation of his ideas into early twentieth-century Liberal "social reforms", post-war Labour social security

<sup>18</sup> Wilmer 1997, 18.

<sup>19</sup> In the sense that machines, according to Ruskin, should not in general replace human work or labour, but make them feasible, or their difficulty acceptable. Ruskin was against 'machinism' understood as the tendency to systematically replace work and labour by machine operations, which results in lower levels of qualification and less interesting work (for the majority of the workforce), and of course is motivated by the search for lower levels of "cost of labour". Ruskin's view is probably unique in articulating such a deep critique of the technological drive of modern societies at the time, and his voice remains remarkably isolated in the present context of almost complete domination of applied techno-science.

<sup>20</sup> For a brief presentation see for example <https://orgrad.wordpress.com/our-principles/>, and on Ruskin as precursor of contemporary environmental awareness <https://orgrad.wordpress.com/a-z-of-thinkers/john-ruskin/>.

<sup>21</sup> McCarragher 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; Michéa 2013.



and nationalisations and, later, consensus-politics well-farism.<sup>22</sup> To take up but one of these “examples”, the so-called social reforms of the Liberal governments, it is well-known, were directly inspired from very different quarters, namely Bismarck’s Germany, which Lloyd George visited for closer inspection before adopting and adapting for Britain several socio-economic adjustment measures, among which state pensions in 1908.

In terms of Ruskin’s own thought and action, this view is very debatable. For one thing, the “incalculable influence” thesis only takes into account one side of Ruskin’s ambivalence towards the problem of injustice, when in fact Ruskin represents “a rare embodiment of that contradiction between material improvement and root and branch opposition to the prevailing economic system”.<sup>23</sup> But more fundamentally because “[t]he ‘practical’ side of Ruskin is often banal and always ineffective”,<sup>24</sup> and is no match, or equal counterpart, for his ethical criticism. In deciding whether Ruskin’s more important legacy is that of a unique fundamental opponent of capitalist industrialism or that of a rather unimaginative benevolent reformer, his limited, often amateurish and more or less charitable endeavours, including those of the Guild of St George, cannot easily be considered to represent a valid counterargument to his sweeping epistemological and moral attack against political economy, especially as expressed in *UTL*. By contrast to the failure of Nineteenth century radical criticisms of the machinery issue to address the “social problems” as fundamentally economic in nature – “a failure which acted to protect

political economy from the criticisms of its methodology and its doctrines and industrialisation”, according to Maxine Berg –<sup>25</sup> “Ruskin goes beyond radical criticism of social questions by maintaining a most resolute intellectual criticism of political economy”.<sup>26</sup>

That the “revolutionary character” of Ruskin’s proposals was never incarnated in practical policy terms has not prevented the more benign view of Ruskin as a “social reformer” and central inspirator of today’s society to enjoy a considerable degree of success, at least ever since J.A. Hobson’s *John Ruskin. Social reformer* (1898). In wider terms, Ruskin’s influence is often confused with the influence that various interpretations of some of his ideas may conceivably have had. The National Health Service, the provision of free libraries and museums, a number of “socialist” policies, Philip Snowden or M.K. Gandhi might be said to have been influenced by Ruskin, but fundamentally these policies and people differed from Ruskin in intention. The ultimate target of Ruskin’s criticism of modern society is industrialism and capitalism because of what they did to human work, and that he wished undone.<sup>27</sup> Ruskin denounced and opposed the employment relationship of capitalism and the work practices of industrialism. There is of course formidable evidence that employment relationships have globally deteriorated and work practices become more tiring, stressful or de-humanising over the past period of so-called “neo-liberalism”. But writing before the early stages of the latest phase in the evolution of capitalism (“neo-liberalism”), P.D. Anthony already observed the

<sup>22</sup> Wilmer 1997, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony 1983, 123.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony 1983, 123.

<sup>25</sup> Berg 1980, 296.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony 1983, 123.

<sup>27</sup> For further developments on this aspect of Ruskin’s influence see for example Anthony 1977 and Anthony 1983.



documented failure of welfare capitalism to improve dramatically the condition of the working man:

Explanations of this fundamental failure range from attacks on the sectionalism and economism of the trade unions, on the corruption of the leaders of the Labour Party, on the bureaucratic tendencies of all labour institutions, on the overpowering hegemonic control of capitalism, on the influence of the communication media over the working class, on ‘consumerism’, on social conditioning of the proletariat, on socialisation. The most likely explanation for the failure of the proletarian apocalypse lies in none of these; it is that the condition of the working man’s life has, in many cases, not improved but has deteriorated, that its deterioration has been made acceptable to him by financial reward and by limitations of its duration, by the better provision of ‘fireside humanity’.

But that is not sufficient, says Ruskin. We cannot set out to atrophy human qualities in men’s working lives and expect them to flourish at night and at the week-ends.<sup>28</sup>

The view that Ruskin’s ideas have been carried out in practice was both extended and deepened in the past years by the *Financial Times* journalist and author Andrew Hill, who started referring to Ruskin in reasoned defence of top management pay levels in his column around the turn of the new millennium.<sup>29</sup> The 2013 Pallas Athene edition of *UTL* has a short introduction by Hill preceded by a shorter foreword by the Master of Guild – an interesting indication of a certain consensus. In it Hill bemoans the fact that, for too long, “the left annexed Ruskin’s ideas on social reform”, then quotes approvingly Wilmer’s verdict

from the Penguin Classics edition that “no political label quite fits Ruskin’s politics”, to reveal, with a great sense of continuity and relevance, his interpretation of *UTL*:

In fact, looked at as a kind of moral for capitalists, *Unto this Last* – which reflects Ruskin’s devotion to order and hierarchy in society, not to equality as such – offers much that the moderate right should appreciate.<sup>30</sup>

This idea made more progress in 2019 with Hill propagating the view, in a book appropriately published the year of Ruskin’s bicentenary, *Ruskinland*, that Ruskin’s legacy can be traced “almost everywhere” (the book is suggestively subtitled *How John Ruskin shapes our world*). If Ruskin’s shadow is everywhere in today’s society because he contributed so much to its shaping, he could not be too radically opposed to the general direction of its evolution: *quid est demonstrandum*. Given its sociological bases, the consensus across the centre of British political ideology between left-of-centre welfarism and the “moderate right” on the meaning of Ruskin’s contribution is a solid one. Conversely, the radical interpretation is fragilised by its marginality. Their opposition points to Ruskin’s own ambivalence, and, beyond, to the importance of Ruskin’s voice for the present day, and, perhaps, for the future.

Even though the rift between the radical and the reformist approaches is cardinal, interpretations of *UTL* are not always, or exclusively, determined by political ideology. What follows confirms the (obvious) assumption that each editor (sometimes also in the capacity of translator) of *UTL* in a foreign language is given an opportunity to appropriate the meaning of the book and,

<sup>28</sup> Anthony 1983, 57.

<sup>29</sup> Hill 2013, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Hill 2013, 12.

through it, the whole of Ruskin's "social theory", by bending and twisting the interpretation of that theory to fit particular goals. Various attempts at appropriation of

*UTL* have come from such improbable intellectual landscapes as a suspicious branch of yoga or the Vatican-approved "economic theory" of the Focolari, among others.

## 2 The Dutch Versions

### 2.1

I have found two translations of *UTL* in Dutch, only of them with an introduction. The first Dutch version [fig. 2], published in 1901, is entitled *Dezen Laatsten Ook* ("These Last Too"). The translator was Paul Horrix, a free-thinker, pacifist, internationalist and also a psychic. Horrix was the private assistant of a certain Dr Pieter Eijkman, a diagnostic radiographer, naturopath, hygienist, anthropologist, and, like Horrix, an internationalist pacifist. The pair became famous a few years after the translation of *UTL* came out, in 1905, when they proposed a plan to build the "World Capital of Internationalism" among deserted dunes near The Hague, with a view to propagating the idea of an international union of states in favour of world peace, in the wake of the 1899 Hague Peace Conference.

The very short (one page) introduction does not really help in determining what kind of Horrix's interpretation of *UTL* was, and why he might have wanted to propagate Ruskin's ideas. As verbose and vague as it is short, the introduction explains that Ruskin was "preoccupied" by "so-called socialism" (Horrix even uses the word "fear"). There is no way to know whether Horrix understood what Ruskin meant exactly by socialism (i.e. mainly skill- and category-based workers' mobilisation), or if he was in favour of a radical change of economic system, or indeed shared Ruskin's radical anti-capitalist outlook. There is the possibility, based on a gross misunderstanding, that Horrix wanted to be associated with Ruskin because of his apparent "anti-socialism".

### 2.2

The second Dutch version is purely a translation, without editorial apparatus. The translator was a certain Hugenholtz-Zeeven, who also translated William Morris's series of lectures *Art and Society* [fig. 3a]. It is entitled *De Laatstgekomenen* ("The Last Arrived" or 'The Last Come'), which is also close to the original and refers directly to the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Typically, it also dates from 1901, and belongs in the international wave of translations that appeared in the wake of Ruskin's death. Interestingly, it is the last issue in a collection called the "International Library" ('Internationale Bibliotheek'), which seemed to specialise in "socialist" (in the broad sense) authors such as Marx, Kautsky,

Bebel, Bellamy, Morris, Blatchford, the Barnetts, among others, but also in "progressive" authors like J.S. Mill or Henry George, or even Christian reformers as diverse as Tolstoy and William Booth [fig. 3b]. Given this background, it is all the more regrettable that the translator or editor did not write an introduction as they seemed to situate Ruskin within a group of radical critics of capitalism and sometimes "anti-systemic" thinkers.

There do not seem to be more recent versions of *UTL* in Dutch or Flemish but of course further research will be needed to ascertain that.

### 3 The German Versions

It seems that there have been four or five versions of *UTL* in German so far. One of them, however, is a rare book which I have not been able to see at this time, entitled

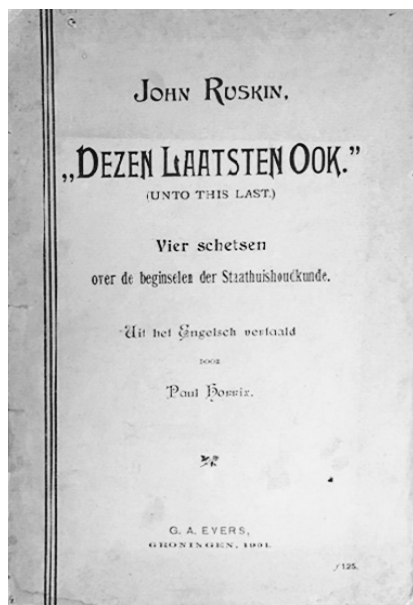
#### 3.1

*Diesem Letzten* (To This Last), with an introduction by Christine Ax, is the latest German version published to date (it came out in 2017). The text itself, however, is a reprint of the first translation of *UTL* ever published in German, the work of a certain Anna von Przychowski. This is the German version mentioned in the Library Edition's Bibliographical Note (BN). Typically, the Przychowski translation came out in 1902, in the wake of Ruskin's death. The Library Edition's Bibliographical Note indicates that "[a]n introduction by the editor (Wilhelm Schölermann) occupies pp. 5-8", and that it has "an index (not translated from Mr. Wedderburn's), pp. 182-196". This original edition is very difficult to find and I have not seen it. A special 2019 bicentenary edition (of the 2017 version) was produced with a different cover picture, and on page ii an Otto Eckmann *Jugendstil* frontispiece from the original 1902 front cover, an ornate box containing the word "Ruskin" in Eckmann's signature typeset. I have only been able to obtain a copy of the introduction by Wilhelm Schölermann ("Zur Einführung") on the internet, but have not been able to verify its authenticity as yet. The introduction asserts the importance of Ruskin's social and political thought (as expressed in *UTL*), and welcomes the publication of the first German translation in the fifth volume of Ruskin's selected works. Schölermann seems to think that Ruskin advocated the rediscovery of the personal dimension of social relations, and the necessary harmony of the latter - an approach which is supposed to proceed from Ruskin's knowledge of art, which gave him

Die Adern des Reichtums ("the Veins of Wealth" which is the title of the second essay in *UTL*). The other two are more easily available and better known.

a special insight into the laws of organisation. This is rather perceptive, but the resulting social and political interpretation falls far short of Ruskin's own ambition to change the organisation of society deeply and durably so as to make exploitation, injustice and dishonesty as residual as possible. Schölermann also salutes Ruskin's effort to redefine the 'real' meaning of value as the life-enhancing power of things and processes, as opposed to their prices as commodities.

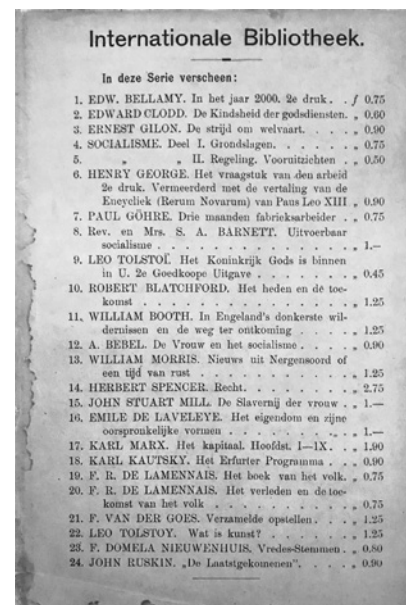
The 24-page introduction by C. Ax is entitled "Nur Leben ist Reichtum", literally "Only life is Wealth" - a paraphrase of "*There is no wealth but life*", one of the most famous sentences in *UTL*, from the fourth essay, "Ad Valorem", §77). The back cover tells us that Ax is an economist, philosopher, science teacher and author who researches and writes on questions of sustainable development with a particular emphasis on local economies, manual work and degrowth. She teaches and researches at the Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI) of Vienna, Austria. In 2013 she co-authored *Wachstums Wahn* ("Growth Madness") with F. Hinterberger, also from the SERI. According to Ax, Ruskin figures prominently amongst the so-called "precursors" of degrowth, and he was also an early champion of a "basic unconditional income", and a promoter of "social entrepreneurship" *avant la lettre*. In her view, environmentally aware economists, environment activists and critics of economic growth share Ruskin's fate of disparagement and defamation by the established authorities, especially when they are accused of being



**Figure 2** Horrix, Paul (ed. and transl.). John Ruskin, “Dezen Laatste Ook” (*Unto this Last*). Vier schetsen over de beginselen der Staathuishoudkunde. Groningen: G.A. Evers, 1901. Front cover. Free of rights



**Figures 3a-b** Hugenholtz-Zeeven, M. (transl.). John Ruskin, “De Laatstegekomenen” Vier lezingen over de eerste beginselen der Staathuishoudkunde. Amsterdam: S.L. van Looy, 1901. Front cover. Free of rights



“enemies of Progress”. In Ruskin she sees an early and powerful critic of what Lewis Mumford called the “Mega-machine” (Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine*, 1967-1970), the techno-scientist system that subjects individuals in advanced societies to the yoke of technology.

More generally, Ax seems to endorse Ruskin’s critique of the capitalist economy and of its theoretical justification, the doctrine of economic liberalism. However, the final paragraphs of Ax’s introduction expose an interesting interpretative twist, in total contradiction with Ruskin’s no-

tion of work: building on the link between Ruskin and his most famous follower, William Morris, Ax extrapolates that “neither was an enemy of machines”. While Morris was at best ambivalent in his attitude to machinery and the necessity and morality of the use of machines, Ruskin was in fact probably as close as it is possible to be to an anti-machinist, on several levels. As P.D. Anthony put it rather convincingly in his *John Ruskin’s Labour*, for Ruskin “[m]echanical work is to be avoided, because its performance entails the loss of control of the workman in his operation. If avoidance is impossible, the simplest forms of

machinery must be used first”.<sup>31</sup> Ax nevertheless contemplates the possibility that the increased computerisation of social relations, first and foremost of which work relations – so-called “digitalisation” – might succeed where the Arts & Crafts movement, the workers’ movements and Communism have failed, that is to say in the re-appropriation of work and leisure. Ruskin, of course, was a consistent enemy of (so-called) progress, a foremost opponent to capitalism and industrialism, and a radical critic

of the domination of the technological and scientist mentality and practice, not an occasional detractor of their “excesses”. “Progressive” thinkers of all hues who, unlike Ruskin, do not fundamentally question the existence and perpetuation of capitalism, might frequently find it difficult to reconcile their fundamental belief in “progress” (of the kind that can take place within “reasonable” capitalism) with what Anthony calls Ruskin’s “resolute intellectual criticism of political economy”.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.2

The second recent German version of *UTL* bears the same title as the first, *Diesem Letzten*, and actually first came out in 2011, before the version just reviewed. There was a second edition the same year, and a third in 2015, perhaps a sign of commercial success. The translator and editor is Uwe David, who wrote an introduction as well as an afterword. David relied heavily on the Przychoski translation but modernised or adapted some of the vocabulary “for today’s readership”, that is often into more casual language. The editorial production is of rather elaborate and well-researched, complete with original footnotes and the translator’s own footnotes (with their own reference endnotes in the last pages).

As for the interpretation suggested by the introduction and afterword, this is a very surprising version of *UTL*. On the one hand, the reading of Ruskin’s *UTL* suggested by David in his introduction is not very original in itself, and in fact rather benign. Unsurprisingly, David posits the relevance of Ruskin’s critical mes-

sage to “the problems of our time”,<sup>33</sup> but Ruskin in his view was neither pro-capitalist, nor communist, but a critic of contemporary society with a message of personal moral reform. On the other hand, readers might promptly suspect that the aim of David’s enterprise in publishing a new German version of *UTL* was not essentially about expressing Ruskin’s “message” in more contemporary German than Anna von Przychowski’s translation. The longer afterword (14 pages) is where readers really find out about David’s real motivations, even though the second page of the book is an early giveaway: it displays a portrait of “Shri Mataji Nirmla Devi” (1923-2011), who is thanked “for her inspiration and her support”. Shri Mataji was the founder of a new form of “yoga” after she experienced (in 1970) a “spiritual awakening”, during which she felt that she had found the way to bring about “*en-masse* Realisation” (through “Sahaja Yoga” or “spontaneous yoga”), which could then enable mankind to “formulate collective and sustainable answers to the challenges of our

<sup>31</sup> Anthony 1983, 157.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony 1983, 123.

<sup>33</sup> David 2015, 8.

times”,<sup>34</sup> a change called for and “announced by all the Great Scriptures”. According to David, Ruskin was obviously a “Great Awakened”, and the sacrifice of his for-

mer comfortable life of fame and success for the pursuit of a moral mission is evidence for David that Ruskin was himself nothing less than a “Guru”.

#### 4 The Italian Versions

Probably because of Ruskin’s prolonged and intense relation with the country, Italy has produced many versions of *UTL*, probably the most of any single country. They are examined here (more or less) by order of appearance. Guido Guerzoni in his study of “The Italian reception of Ruskin’s economic and social criticism 1850-1950” remarks in his opening words that his contribution might with reason have been entitled “The very partial and tardy Italian reception of John Ruskin’s economic and social thought”.<sup>35</sup> The conclusion of partiality of reception is of course universally valid, given the polemical nature of Ruskin’s ideas, while that of tardiness is probably true for most countries outside the UK, where Ruskin’s social ideas were known as soon as they were published. Guerzoni further notes that in spite of extensive research he was not able to

find “any significant trace in any form whatsoever of his economic and social thought during the period between Italian Unity [1870] and the date of his death”.<sup>36</sup> Again, the finding applies as a general rule to all the countries reviewed here. Guerzoni mentions<sup>37</sup> “the text presented as the first Italian edition of *UTL*”, *I diritti del lavoro*, published by Luigi Mongini in Rome in 1900. Mongini (like the second Dutch translation reviewed above) placed Ruskin in the same catalogue as eminent socialists (Marx, Engels, Lassalle etc.), but his *UTL* was in fact a translation of Thomas Barclay’s *The Rights of Labour according to John Ruskin*, by Ernestina D’Errico. It does in effect present a version of *UTL*, but the 24-page editing work, as far as I can gather, is Barclay’s, not Mongini’s (the cover indicates “riassunti da Tommaso Barclay”, “summarised by Thomas Barclay”).

##### 4.1

The first truly Italian version of *UTL* is probably the 1902 one mentioned in the Library Edition’s Bibliographical Note, with two translators, Francesco and Giacinto Chimenti. This version is very difficult to find and I have not seen it, but I have read the introduction to what is

probably a reprint of the same translation, from 1936, but which mentions only Francesco Chimenti as translator.<sup>38</sup> This one has a one-page foreword about Ruskin, in which Chimenti notes that Ruskin “introduced the moral element of justice” in his study of “social sciences and

<sup>34</sup> Translated from the site French Sahaja Yoga website: <https://sahajayoga.fr/>.

<sup>35</sup> Guerzoni 2006, 136.

<sup>36</sup> Guerzoni 2006, 143.

<sup>37</sup> Guerzoni 2006, 147.

<sup>38</sup> I am very grateful to Jeanne Clegg for providing me with a copy of this text, which is not easily available.



political economy". In the same vein, he comments that in *UTL* Ruskin "proclaims human dignity in society and condemns any principle or action that considers Man as a subpart of a machine".

The short introduction is followed by a longer "Note out of place, as a reminder of how much England owes us", three

#### 4.2

The second Italian version dates from 1908 and is entitled *Le fonti della ricchezza* (literally "The Sources of Wealth", close to the title of the second essay in *UTL*) and is the work of the famous anti-Fascist politician Giovanni Amendola.<sup>40</sup> This is another example of an early-twentieth century translation, and it is typical of the "liberal" interpretation which prevailed at the time. Amendola (1882-1926) was initially a journalist and professor of philosophy at the University of Pisa, and later in politics was a member of the Radical Party for two decades and later for a few years of the Democratic Liberal Party. He was always a determined opponent of the great Liberal leader and several times Prime Minister Giolitti, whose parliamentary opportunism ("transformism"), clientelism and corrupt practises he did not condone.

In the short but dense introduction (8 pages) to his 1908 translation, Amendola makes it clear that he sees Ruskin as a sort of "primitive Christian", an "economic apos-

#### 4.3

Amendola's translation has been republished without his introduction in recent years (between 2003 and 2014)

pages of rambling remarks on the greatness of Roman, and therefore Italian, civilisation, as well as an attack on Eden in the wake of the Abyssinia crisis. As Jeanne Clegg observed, "this preface [...] is neither the first nor the last of the Fascist uses of Ruskin, which were in fact not limited to Italy only" (here a note refers to the founder of the "Ruskin Societies" J.H. Whitehouse).<sup>39</sup>

Although Amendola had been a Socialist Party member as an adolescent and belonged to the left wing of the Liberal movement, he was no socialist, and a Marxist even less. In this introduction he wished Ruskin's positive influence might have extended to the Italian socialists, whom he saw, along with the economic liberals, as proponents of "the same economic exaggerations against which Ruskin fought his battle".

Amendola's version of Ruskin's *UTL* and of Ruskin himself set the tone and the vision that would dominate after him, perhaps to this day still, in Italy. His political fame and his tragic end at the hands of the Fascists have certainly contributed to add respectability to his interpretation of Ruskin as a Liberal Christian "social reformer". This situation has done nothing, conversely, to clarify Ruskin's attitude to capitalism in general and his singular notion of (non-Marxist) Communism - two aspects of Ruskin's thought that Amendola did not see, or did not want to discuss.

by the publishing house Marco Valerio under two different titles: *Fino all'ultimo* ("Until this last", not a very

<sup>39</sup> Clegg 2006, 101.

<sup>40</sup> Jeanne Clegg also kindly sent me a copy of the introduction of Amendola's version, which I did not have at the time of writing the first drafts of this article.





**Figure 4** Villani, Felice (ed. and transl.). *I diritti del lavoro (Unto this Last)*. Bari: Laterza e Figli, 1946. Front cover. Free of rights

good translation since the employer of the workers in the vineyard wanted to pay the last workers first...), and *A quest'ultimo* ("Unto this Last"), both with the erroneous subtitle "Four Essays in Christian Socialism" (the original subtitle being "Four essays on the first principles of political economy"...). These recent reprints have no

#### 4.4

The next Italian version is *I Diritti del lavoro* (1946) by Felice Villani, translator and editor [fig. 4]. The title, which translates as "The Rights of Labour" was probably borrowed from the Mongini edition mentioned earlier, and so indirectly from Thomas Barclay's pamphlet. Interestingly, Villani's book is dedicated "to the memory

editorial apparatus, only a few words on the back cover simply stating that "Ruskin's warning [...] portended the values of the anti-globalisation movement and the factors behind the crisis of the world economy with tragic lucidity". The overall impression is one of opportunistic substandard publishing work.

of Giovanni Amendola, who in Italy first understood and divulged this work of Ruskin's".<sup>41</sup>

Villani wrote a long "Introductory Study" ("Studio introduttivo") – 82 pages in all – which is very dense, as well very erudite and well written, and makes for one of the

<sup>41</sup> Villani 1946, VII.

most interesting introductory pieces for *UTL*. In it Villani competently places Ruskin's work and its evolution in its historical context of British liberalism and its discontents. For Villani, Ruskin the art critic and the avuncular moralist is "*the minor Ruskin*", or "*not the best Ruskin*". The "*best Ruskin*" for Villani is the Ruskin of the so-called "economic writings", *UTL* and *Munera Pulveris*, because they still speak to us today of problems and issues of our contemporary world.<sup>42</sup>

Villani places Ruskin's thought between individualism (the necessity of individual moral reform) and socialism (a moral economic life for a democratic and just community). Villani, very much like Amendola, belonged to the liberal democratic Christian left. Both believed that the evangelical message should serve as the underlying moral doctrine of that democratic liberal left-wing, hence the attraction of some of Ruskin's Gospel-inspired views. Villani offers thus a very articulate interpretation of *UTL*, and in a way it is probably the classic middle-of-

the-road, consensual, "liberal" view of Ruskin's politics, which still dominates to this day. Villani comes back to the definition of the balance between liberalism and socialism several times, and offers a good summary of this view: for him the ideal economy would be "*a social economy, not a socialist economy; a liberal economy, not a laissez-faire economy*" ("*Economia sociale, non socialista; economia liberale, non liberistica*").<sup>43</sup> That this approach can be viewed by some as "left-wing" or "socialist" in any way is perhaps an indication of the state of contemporary political ideology rather than a faithful representation of Ruskin's own ideas. According to Guerzoni, however, Villani "placed Ruskin's economic and social criticism in its true historical context, withdrawing it, who knows for how long, from the rapacious hands of all those who wanted to appropriate its spoils and brandish them like a banner".<sup>44</sup> That is well said, but Villani cannot escape the simple fact and common rule that an interpretation is an interpretation.

#### 4.5

*Cominciando dagli ultimi* is the most recent translation of *UTL* into Italian, published by Edizioni San Paolo in a collection called "Classics of Christian Thought". The translation was the work of Riccardo Ferrigato and is introduced by Luigino Bruni, an economist working in the Christian social tradition inherited from the social doctrine of the Church, who is currently involved in the "Economy of Communion project", which seeks to promote internationally the community-based business model initially put in place by Silvia "Chiara" Lubich in the "Focolari" movement (officially the "Work of Mary").

Bruni sees Ruskin as a critic of Nineteenth-century capitalism and its "theory", but adds that Ruskin "today would be even more critical of our capitalism and our economic theory, which have exacerbated the vices which Ruskin identified and stigmatised in his generation". Bruni places Ruskin "on the side of the utopian socialists (he attempted, as is known, to build, like Robert Owen, an ideal community of labourers), of Karl Marx, of John Hobson, and, in Italy, of Arturo Labriola, Achille Loria, Ugo Rabbeno, so many theoreticians of cooperation and many social Christians". In this long

<sup>42</sup> Villani 1946, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Villani 1946, 61.

<sup>44</sup> Guerzoni 2006, 150-1.

list of comrades and companions, Ruskin stands out, however, because of certain “remarkable notes of modernity and originality” which are especially visible in *UTL* according to Bruni, who reviews two of these points in more detail.<sup>45</sup>

The first one is that Ruskin refutes and refuses the view that self-interest is the first and only motivation of all economic behaviours, of work in particular, and Bruni put a special emphasis on the importance of what Ruskin called “social affections”. The second point underlined by Bruni is Ruskin’s singular definition of wealth. Bruni does not mention or comment on Ruskin’s fundamental definition of wealth, which is anything and everything that contributes towards the maintenance and increase of life, a conception expressed in his famous aphorism “*There is no Wealth but Life*” (“*Ad Valorem*”, § 77). Bruni understands, perhaps hastily, that Ruskin viewed economic inequality (whether of income or wealth is not clear) as necessary to the maintenance of the motivation to work in a “market economy”, because in the absence of a “wealth incentive”, workers would tend not to want to work. Besides the fact, known to most economists, that income is not the same thing as wealth (in many respects), Ruskin probably thought otherwise, since his emphasis, as remarked earlier, is principally on moral motivations and “social affec-

tions”. More generally, Ruskin’s economic thought is set against an ideal horizon which is not “the market economy”, or even less capitalism, but some form of social organisation radically different from, and in many ways opposed, to both.

In his introduction Bruni refers readers to Giuseppe Toniolo and “a large number of the Catholic economists from the Nineteenth century to the present day”. Toniolo (a Catholic Saint since 2011) is an interesting figure of the right-wing Italian Catholic Movement. He founded the Catholic Union for Social Studies in 1889, and in 1894 elaborated the “Programme of Catholics Against Socialism” (also known as the “Milan Programme”, after the 1894 Milan congress of the Union), in the wake of *Rerum Novarum*. It is possible to consider that the ideas once propagated by Saint Toniolo live on in various forms, in particular in the so-called “Economy of Communion” (EoC). Like Toniolo’s own views, the EoC is an economically liberal, business-oriented model, and the evil of capitalism is seen to reside mainly in finance. This kind of ‘criticism’ of capitalism (capitalism produces poverty and exclusion...) might make recruiting Ruskin (“reddest of red”!) into a charismatic Catholic social reform movement either very difficult, or simply counter-productive, if anyone with a notion of what Ruskin was about is watching.

## 5 The French Versions

There are two French versions, typically published more than a century apart. They seem to be some of the most radical of all interpretations, even including the Brit-

ish ones. But even today Ruskin in France remains little known, or only superficially as a “reactionary” or “Christian socialist”. In an article devoted to Ruskin’s influence

<sup>45</sup> Bruni 2014, 6.

in France, Bénédicte Coste<sup>46</sup> noted that the first translations of Ruskin into French, in the early 1890s, were in fact fragments dealing with moral and social themes, not aesthetics (this was the work of “social” Catholics in bulletins of their society *L’union pour l’action morale*), but also that the near-exclusivity of the reception of Ruskin as an art critic in France, in particular in the wake of R. de la Sizeranne’s *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté* (1897), has resulted historically in the almost total oblit-

eration of the other aspect of Ruskin’s thought. The scarcity of French translations of *UTL*, or indeed of any of Ruskin’s economic and social writings to the present day (a situation which Coste calls “the strange case of John Ruskin, or how French translations have ‘forgotten’ his political and social thought”) is both a sign and a consequence of this blinkered reception which began even before Ruskin’s death.

## 5.1

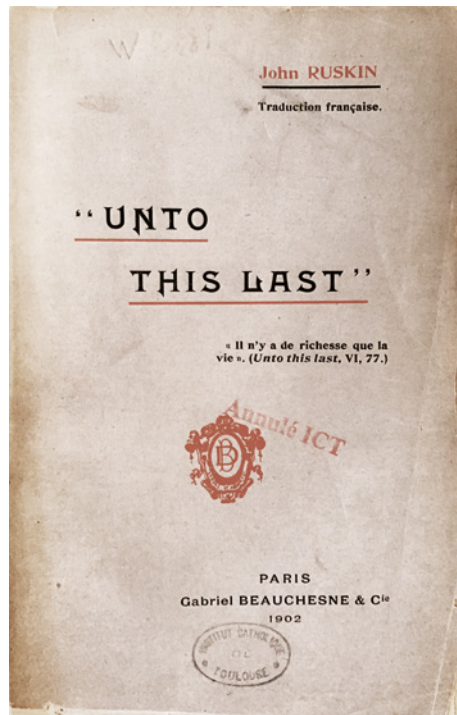
The first French version of *UTL* came out in 1902 under its English title, with the subtitle “*Il n’y a de richesse que la vie*” (“There is no wealth but life”) [figs. 5-6]. The title page repeats the English “*Unto this Last*” and has, in brackets, a translation of the phrase: “*Même à ce dernier...*” (“Even to this last...”). The translation itself was the work of Emile Peltier, a Catholic abbot as well as a fervent internationalist Esperantist, and socially involved on the “social” side of French Catholicism.

The substantial introduction (33 pages) is signed “H.-J. Brunhes”. This is not one name, but two names in one: the introduction was the result of a collaboration between Henriette and Jean Brunhes, a couple of prominent “social Catholics”. Not surprisingly, the introduction extols Ruskin’s vigorous indictment of the “pseudo-science of political economy”, and insists that it reflected Ruskin’s “religious beliefs”, and accorded with the new social doctrine of the Church. Peltier and the Brunheses were sympathisers of the same social movement, that of the progressive Catholic bourgeoisie who criticised the global role of science “in the service of gold”, “to give and confirm to the voracious appetites of the rich their titles of legitimacy”.<sup>47</sup>

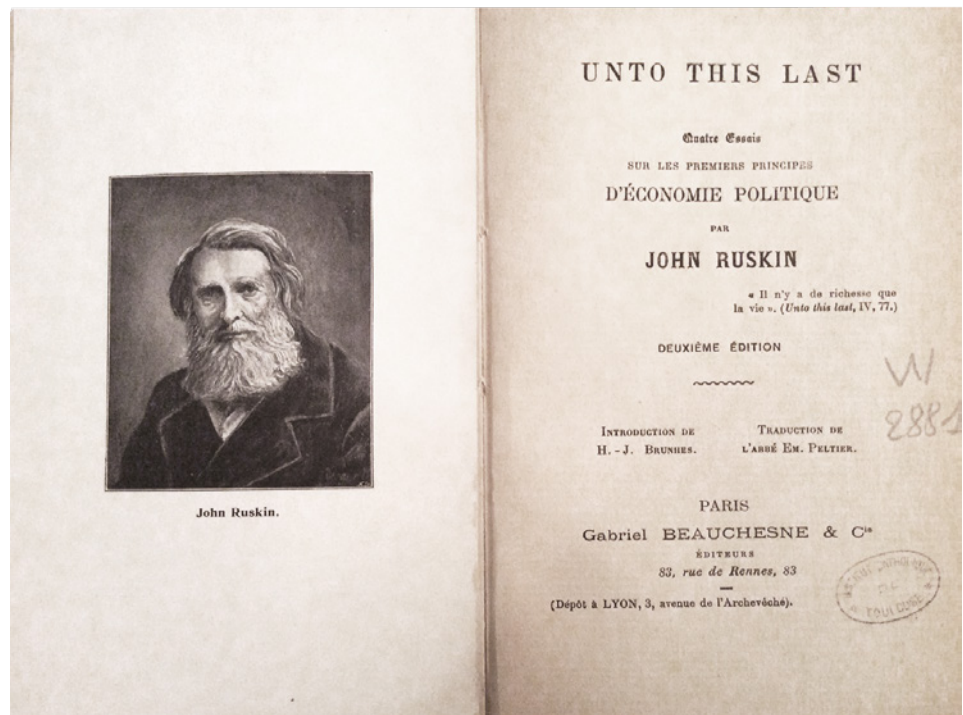
Jean Brunhes (1869-1930), born to an educated Catholic middle-class family, was an eminent geographer, one of the founders of modern human geography. Politically he was on the left-wing of social Catholicism in France and an early-days member of Marc Sangnier’s movement “*Le Sillon*”. Jean Brunhes’s wife, Henriette (1872-1914), was also a devoted Social Catholic, and was one of the founders of the “*Ligue sociale des acheteurs*”, a consumers’ cooperative on the model of what was being done in the USA at the time. This was not their first encounter with Ruskin, since together they had already published *Ruskin et la Bible, pour servir à l’histoire d’une pensée* (“Ruskin and the Bible, towards an intellectual history”) in 1901. They were no political revolutionaries, socialists, communists or anarchists, and they seemed to hope for a form of capitalism civilised by the application of interpretations of the Gospel such as Ruskin’s own, but they placed Ruskin among their favourite protesters “against the new tyranny of our modern societies”, together with Carlyle, between the German archbishop Ketteler and the “very first theorists of socialism and anarchism”. Their

<sup>46</sup> Coste 2013.

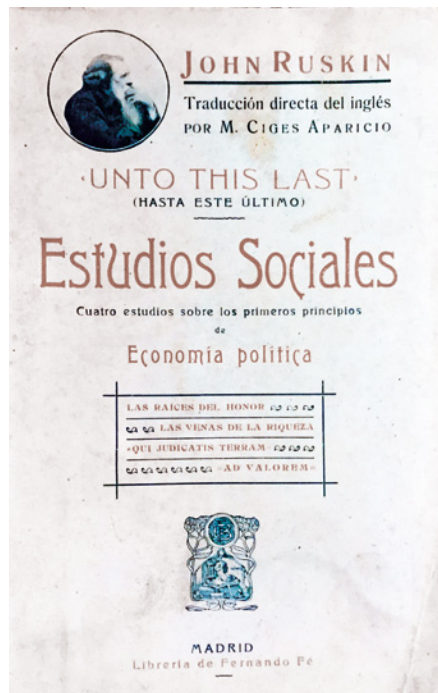
<sup>47</sup> Brunhes, Brunhes 1902, “Introduction”, VI.



**Figure 5** Brunhes, Henriette and Jean (éds); Peltier, Emile (transl.). *Unto this Last. Il n'y a de richesse que la vie*. Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et Cie éditeurs, 1902. Front cover. Free of rights



**Figure 6** Brunhes, Henriette and Jean (éds); Peltier, Emile (transl.). *Unto this Last. Il n'y a de richesse que la vie*. Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et Cie éditeurs, 1902. Title page. Free of rights



**Figure 7** Ciges Aparicio, M. (ed.). *Unto this Last (Hasta este último)*. Librería de Fernando Fé, Madrid, c. 1910. Free of rights



interpretation of Ruskin's ideas in *UTL* extends beyond political economy, and like Ruskin himself, they criticise Western civilisation for erring and losing itself into capitalist and industrial barbarity.<sup>48</sup> For them, *UTL* is proof that Ruskin was a precursor of their struggle for more justice and, above all, more dignity:

*“UTL* was a **manifesto** and it remains a **document**: in this double capacity, it belongs not only in the history of literature, but in the history of ideas; it deserves, in truth, to take its rightful place in the history of economic doctrines”.<sup>49</sup>

## 5.2

The most recent French version (2012) is by Pierre Thiesset and Quentin Thomasset, both editors and translators, and is entitled *Il n'y a de richesse que la vie* (“There is no Wealth but Life”). Thiesset and Thomasset are two former students of journalism at odds with the current media world and its race for fast news, e-mail alerts and news flashes, the instantaneousness of the social media, and so on. Its legal status is that of a not-for-profit voluntary sector organisation. There is a short “editor’s note” (4 pages) with significant references: William Morris (for socialism and sobriety), Gandhi (frugality and austerity) and Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (for degrowth) are seen as heirs to Ruskin’s ideas. There is no mention of the Brunheses’ interpretation, even if the notes from their edition have been kept for

The Brunheses’ interpretation of *UTL*, though not squarely anti-capitalist, managed to capture some of the radicalism of Ruskin’s critique of capitalist social relations, which is more than can be said of many other versions. Theirs remains a deeply religious interpretation of Ruskin’s social ideas and they believe that *“the Old and New Testaments not only are omnipresent in Ruskin thought, but they are also the deep cause of its progress”*,<sup>50</sup> a view not necessarily shared by all readers of Ruskin nowadays.

this text. The editor’s note states a critique of capitalist productivism, industrialism, consumerism collectively described as an “impasse”.<sup>51</sup> The suggested reading however is clearly pro-degrowth – both translators-editors are members of the French “décroissance” movement. Thiesset is a regular contributor to the monthly review *La décroissance* and wrote a section on Ruskin in a book devoted to fifty presumed “precursors of degrowth”,<sup>52</sup> where Ruskin is described as “a major author against industrial civilisation, who struggled to defend a world infused with beauty, faith, honour and harmony and not based on the relentless development of productive forces”.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Brunhes, Brunhes 1902, III.

<sup>49</sup> Brunhes, Brunhes 1902, XXXVI; emphasis in the original.

<sup>50</sup> Brunhes, Brunhes 1902, XVIII.

<sup>51</sup> Thiesset, Thomasset 2012, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Biagini, Murray, Thiesset 2017, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Biagini, Murray, Thiesset 2017, 269.

## 6 The Spanish Versions

A Spanish version entitled *Unto this last (Hasta este último)*, a “direct translation from the English by Mr Ciges Aparicio”, came out around 1908-10 [fig. 7]. It does not have an introduction (but has its own index). Another version was published under the title *A este último* in 2002. The text was translated by Dolores Mármol and Paulino Fajardo, and the latter is the author of a long introductory study (86 pages), a text adapted from his doctoral thesis research entitled “Business management and social justice”. Fajardo is a lawyer and partner at the international consultancy Davies Arnold Cooper and a specialist of civil liability. On *UTL*,

his outlook is clearly that of the “benevolent” strand of human resources management which has flourished in recent years, with a rather benign indictment of the excesses of globalised capitalism and a call for more “solidarity”, but all within a gentler form of capitalism including more of the celebrated “corporate social responsibility”. Fajardo’s interpretation of Ruskin, a combination of “the use of affection by the employer as a management tool” and “making economic growth, progress and wealth compatible with his parameters of social justice”, regrettably extends misunderstanding into nonsense.

## 7 Conclusion

In spite of their diversity, the different versions of Ruskin in foreign translations reviewed here all share a common feature: none of them refer to the politically radical implications of the four points presented by Ruskin in his preface. Ruskin placed them at the beginning of *UTL*, because there were, as it were, its conclusions, the practical consequences of the ideas contained in the four essays. Somehow the various commentators managed to overlook them, along with a few others of Ruskin’s central beliefs.

Only a few of the foreign versions take up Ruskin’s critique of machinism and industrialism (including urbanism), either as dehumanising for workers or simply as a cultural and practical impasse (mostly the French versions and Ax’s German version, but ambiguously so, and Chimenti in a few words). Similarly, Ruskin is rarely portrayed as an enemy of Progress. Nor can Ruskin’s original critique of political economy easily be digested by contemporary political ideologies based on the liberal views of justice, equality and progress, because Rus-

kin refused them altogether. Among the few versions reviewed here, only the recent French interpretation does justice to Ruskin’s multiple criticisms of capitalist social relations by noting that globally they amount to a wholesale rejection of that mode of accumulation and its attendant modes of life.

Most versions import their own religious, political, ideological or personal agendas with varying degrees of relevance into the discussion of *UTL*, and of Ruskin’s general character as a “social reformer”. Indeed the assumption serving as an ideological centre of gravity for all these versions is that Ruskin’s message, being supposedly essentially moral, is primarily a capital-compatible reformist vision, if not a programme. Any serial and serious reading of Ruskin’s deliberately “social” writings – but the rest will serve too – will show how far wrong that interpretation obviously is.

Unsurprisingly, this view reflects the one prevailing today, in Ruskin’s own country, that his ideas are compatible with the left-and-right-of-centre “social demo-



cratic” consensus, or now perhaps a post-neo-liberal consensus, with Wilmer in the moderate left position and Hill on the other side of a centre that is, in effect, not a dividing line but a common political and ideological ground. The famous *mot* of uncertain attribution which says that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” certainly applies to most of the editors of foreign versions of *UTL*, even though Ruskin

certainly tried his best to give imagination more power. If the treatment of this work after his death is any indication of the incomprehension Ruskin had to face in his lifetime concerning “the most serviceable things [he had] ever written”, little wonder then that, pursuing this effort and meeting with more of the same reception, he felt increasingly disheartened about the prospect of social change without violence.

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