

A Progressive Economic Editor¹

Erik Pontoppidan 1698 – 1764

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Abstract

Erik Ludvigsen Pontoppidan is known, as the great spokesman for the pietistic movement in Denmark-Norway in the 18th Century. The fact that he through his scientific work, economic writings and not at least through his editorial work, played an important role in the foundation of political economy as a science is almost unknown.

Pontoppidan made a remarkable career. He graduated from the University of Copenhagen with a degree in theology in 1718. After posts as house teacher in Norway, and travels and studies in the Netherlands and England he became a Vicar in 1726. In 1735, he was appointed Parson of the King's Court. Three years later he became professor extraordinary at the University, and in 1742 a member of the newly established and very prestigious Royal Academy of Sciences. He was appointed Bishop of Bergen in 1747. In 1755 he became full professor of theology and pro-chancellor of the University, a post he held until his death in 1764.

Pontoppidan's career as a writer started in 1726 when he published a small essay defending the pietistic views. From this year on he did research and published regularly in the fields of theology, languages (dialects), topography, history and finally political economy. In 1755 Pontoppidan became editor of the new journal *Danmark og Norges Oeconomiske Magasin* (The Dano-Norwegian Economic Magazine). This journal became under his editorship a progressive economic journal and is today a treasury for the understanding of the development of political economy as a science and the Dano-Norwegian Age of Enlightenment. The ideas and suggestions for the improvement of society expressed in this journal became very important in relation to the struggle for economic reforms, which began in several areas in the last quarter of the 18th century.

Leader of the Pietistic Movement

Erik Ludvigsen Pontoppidan was born 1698 in Aarhus, the second largest city in the dual monarchy Denmark-Norway. An early orphan he lived with different relatives. He became a student of theology at the University of Copenhagen in 1716 and graduated in 1718. During his theological studies Pontoppidan, had been strongly influenced by the German pietistic movement with its centre in Halle. According to the pietists the church should be based on the religious experience and fear of God of its individual members and that conversion and Christian life was more important than the teaching in its self.

Pontoppidan made after his university graduation a remarkable career. First, he was a house teacher in Christiania (Oslo), Norway from 1719-20. Thereafter he travelled for two years as a butler for a young aristocrat to England and Holland. During these travels, he also studied and during his stay in Utrecht he made personal contact with the reformed revival movement. After his return, he became a house teacher and a preacher to the court of Count Frederick Carl von Plön.

¹ Previous versions of this paper has been presented at the History of Economics Society (HES) 29th Annual Meeting July 5-8, 2002 at University of California Davis and at The 38th Meeting of the Norwegian Association of Economists. NTNU Trondheim 04-05.01.16

He became a vicar in 1726, and in 1734 he was appointed to the office of parson at the royal castle Fredriksborg by King Christian VI (1730-46), who himself was strongly attracted by the pietistic movement. This was quite a step upward, since it also gave him the opportunity to meet and become friendly with some of the most influential people in the realm, among them Count Moltke and Count Holstein.

In 1735, Pontoppidan was appointed parson of the king's court in Copenhagen and three years later, he was appointed professor extraordinary in theology at the University. He became a member of the newly established and very prestigious Royal Academy of Sciences in 1742. With these promotions, Pontoppidan became chief adviser in religious affairs to the king and the defacto leader of the Danish-Norwegian State pietism. This system had, according to Gilje and Rasmussen (2001), a paradoxical character. What should have grown from below through the Christian experience of individuals, organised in small groups within the church, was instead carried out as a reform in the king's name. Here a strengthening of religious knowledge through education was in the centre.

The pietistic movement could, according to Dyrvik (1978) be considered as "an enlightenment to the people" project. Obligatory elementary schooling, with religion as the main subject, was introduced in 1737 and confirmation in 1739. Pontoppidan was asked by King Christian VI to write an explanation to the catechism and a new hymnbook. For almost 150 years his textbook in religion "Sandhed til gudfryktighed" (Truth to Piety), which was published in 1737 and introduced against strong resistance, was the mostly used textbook in elementary schools and confirmation classes. Again, according to Gilje and Rasmussen (2001), conversion and Christian life was more important in Pontoppidan's "Truth to Piety" than the teaching but what was really taught was not conversion but the teaching about it.

When Christian VI died in 1746 and Frederick V (1746-66) became king, everyone knew there would be changes. The new king wanted to get rid of the pietists at the king's court. Pontoppidan was therefore offered an appointed as bishop of Bergen when this position became vacant in 1747. Given the political situation, he dared not reject the offer. By way of consolation, he was also on this occasion exempted from censorship.

As bishop, he took a keen interest in Norwegian affairs and continued his project of state pietism and reforms. The introduction of elementary schools for the children of common people is Pontoppidan's doing. This school system became under his supervision much more effective than in Denmark. He was also actively behind Seminarium Fredricianum, a teaching training college, established to furnish the new schools with qualified teachers.

Pontoppidan's career as a writer started in 1726 when he published a small essay (in German) where he defended the pietistic views. From this year, he did research and published regularly through his whole life in the German, Latin and Danish languages, in the fields of theology, languages (dialects), topography, history and finally economics.

During his stay in Bergen, he published a Norwegian dictionary "Clossarium Norvagicum" in 1749 and an important description of Norway. "Det første forsøg paa Norges naturlige Historie" (The first Attempt of a Natural History of Norway) was published in 1752-53. This two volume work is thoroughly research work, which also include elements of political economy. These volumes of 800 pages have more than 190 names in the reference list. It is in this work that Pontoppidan (1977 [1752]: 116) discusses the deposits in the North Sea where we can find running oil streams or "*streams of petroleum, naphtha, sulphur, anthracite deposits and other bituminous and oily saps*".

Pontoppidan as an Economist

Count Johan Ludvig Holstein (1694-1763), who was then president of the Danish chancery, wanted more stable conditions at the University. He wanted a person with authority

who could make himself respected among the professors. Corresponding to his own wish, Pontoppidan was therefore called back to Copenhagen in 1755.

To give him the necessary authority he was appointed both professor of theology and pro-chancellor of the University with special responsibility for finances and reforms. These positions he held until his death. His efforts to put some reforms through were; however, met with strong resistance from the university staff and professors, and his attempts to force the professors to put more time and energy into their lectures and seminars were not favourably received.

Pontoppidan had, during this time, greater success in his own research and authorship. Along with his theological studies, he continued his work with historical, geographical and finally economic issues.

In his book *"Eutropii Philadelphi Oeconomiske Balance"* from 1759, which is his major work in pure political economy, he tried to give a survey of the resources of the country so that they could be more efficiently utilised and the welfare of the country increased. In this book, the emphasis is laid on giving a description of economic conditions in general and the balance of payments in particular, and as such it was a pioneer work when it was published. It was also immediately translated and published in German.

This book, and his other sketchier writings on economic issues, makes it difficult to put Pontoppidan into a particular school of thought. On one hand, he expresses views that is clearly in the mercantile system but on the other hand he expresses thoughts that it is more in line with the view of the French physiocrats. He maintains that agriculture is the most important industry, but at the same time he claims that manufacturing industries and handicraft should be promoted so that money could remain in the realm. Bisgaard (1902), in his survey of Danish economics in the 18th Century, calls Pontoppidan a liberal economist. In his *History of Danish Literature* (1931), Professor Andersen asserts that his economic writings "are just as his writings on theology in that it hangs in the balance: Orthodox mercantilism and Physiocratic heresy". The historian Cedergren Bech in his *Danish History* (1970) claims that he "writes in the spirit of mercantilism, but is also influenced by the new economic trends".

Pontoppidan's contribution to the development of economics as a science can, however, not be evaluated only on the merit of his own writings. His very important contribution is linked to his work as the editor of, if not the first so one of, the first genuine economic journals in Europe.

The Invitation

On King Frederik V's birthday May 31st 1755 an important announcement, appeal or invitation was made public in Copenhagen. The announcement invited interested writers, regardless of social class, education or position, to submit essays containing "any knowledge aiming at maintaining the welfare of the realm, diminishing expenses, multiplying income and generally assisting the people in their everyday needs to promote moderation, advantages and trade".

The conditions surrounding the invitation and the underlying causes that led to it are not fully known. However, some indications point to Count Adam Gottlob Moltke (1710-92), with the understanding and co-operation of the previous mention Count Holstein, as the driving force behind the invitation. It is also possible that the person, who became the editor, had actively participated in the planning.

Nor is it known exactly how the announcement was made public, however, it is clear that the intellectual part of the population was aware of it. Furthermore, it is also known that the invitation was commented upon and discussed in these circles. But most important the response was overwhelming; articles and essays poured in.

According to the invitation the essays should be sent free of charge to the attention of "His Excellency the High Count, member of The King Council and the Highest Court, Marshal

Moltke". He would then take the responsibility to "hand these to a man that will have the qualifications to evaluate them".

When the leading circles at the king's court with Moltke and Holstein at the head wanted an editor, to evaluate and publish the articles and essays that had been submitted, Pontoppidan was an obvious candidate. He had intimate knowledge of both countries in the dual kingdom, scientific qualifications and knowledge as few others and last but not least he could be regarded as loyal to the existing system of absolute monarchy, without being dogmatic. The fact that Pontoppidan had been granted freedom from censorship gave him increased prestige and was very useful. Erik Pontoppidan therefore became the editor of "Danmark og Norges Oeconomiske Magasin" (The Dano-Norwegian Economic Magazine), a task he took upon himself with both interest and ardour.

The Dano-Norwegian Economic Magazine

Pontoppidan edited all the articles and essays that was submitted as a consequence of the appeal, and published a selection of them in the first volume of the Economic Magazine, which appeared in 1757. The journal had, translated into English, the full title "The Dano-Norwegian Economic Magazine containing a medley of the submitted works of several friendly Patriots concerning the possible improvement of Agriculture and Gardening, Afforestation, Extraction of Minerals, Construction of Houses, Cattle breeding, Fisheries, Manufacturing etc. These for the service of promoting the general Welfare".

The Economic Magazine was thereafter published with one volume each year until Pontoppidan died in 1764. In addition to the submitted essays each volume contained a survey of other articles concerned with economic questions, and also announcements of prize essays. These prize essays, the so-called "Problemata", laid the foundation for the next volume of the journal.

The idea to announce prizes for written articles on given problems came from naval officer Frederick Lütken (1698-1748). He claimed in 1756, that such prizes had led to extensive economic growth in England: "Yes, it is these Rewards and Gratification's, Drawbacks and Calculations which in reality has made England what she is; they have made all Brains stir, all Hands move and contributes to the pouring in of such Wealth and Power which no Act of Parliament, no Prohibition, no Decree or no Victory will ever be capable to". The prize articles became a reality in the Economic Magazine, and resulted in both astonishing and unique works.

Today, the Economic Magazine provides a treasury for the understanding of the Dano-Norwegian Age of Enlightenment. The ideas and suggestions for the improvement of society, which were expressed, became very important in relation to the struggle for reforms which began in a number of areas during the reign of king Frederick Vth.

The Economic Magazine contained a series of contributions from many authors, both Norwegian and Danish. Naturally, most of them were clergymen. Agro-economical problems was, of course, a favourite topic with many of the contributors. However, anything from essays on central questions of principle, which were common subjects in foreign magazines and books, to down-to-earth articles on current financial and technical problems would occur. The financial and social position of the Danish farmer, the question of population and the question of establishing manufacturing industries and crafts are treated in several articles and contributions. However, the journal also contains contributions giving advice about how to improve the fisheries, mining and sheep farming. Even topics like improvements of ploughs, tiled stoves or threshing machines were not too minute to be treated in the journal.

To Norwegians, the articles on freehold and the question of enclosure are of special interest. Other topics treated by Norwegian authors are topography, and economic issues concerned with the pioneering of new land and forestry.

The eight volumes of the Economic Magazine consist of more than 200 articles and essays. About half of them are answers to the announced prize topics, the rest are freely chosen subjects. Of the answers to the prize questions, more than half is tied to economic issues in agriculture. Among the chosen subjects, a little less than half deals with agricultural problems. Given the strong position of agriculture in the economy this is not unnatural.

Of those authors who contributed to the Magazine, there is no doubt that, when seen in retrospect, the Fyn vicar Otto Diedrich Lütken (1713-1788), was the most important. In the second volume of the Magazine an article entitled, in English translation, "An Inquiry into the Proposition: That the Number of People Is the Happiness of the Realm, or: The Greater the Number of Subjects, the More Flourishing the State" appeared. This article begins with the following statement: **"Since our globe has a certain circumference, which does not expand in accordance with the increasing number of its inhabitants and travel to other planets thought to be inhabitable has not yet been invented; since the earth's fertility has a certain point beyond which it cannot be extended; since man's nature will presumably remain the same, "**

This planet's resources are given. The fruits of the earth have therefore a quantity beyond which they cannot be extended. Since man requires a fixed portion of the earth's fruits to survive there is a limit to how many people the earth can feed. If the number of people goes beyond this limit, they will starve each other out. Accordingly, man's propagation cannot continue beyond all bounds. This does not only point to the theories on population which Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) presented 40 years later in his essay on the Principles of Population. According to Saether (1993), it went against the "populationist" attitude almost unanimously favoured by writers at the time. To these writers, according to Schumpeter (1954), a numerous and increasing population was not only "the most important symptom of wealth, it was the chief cause of wealth, it was wealth itself - the greatest asset for any nation to have".

Lütken first article was the start of a remarkable career as an economic writer. It is, however, outside the scope of this paper to give a survey of his production. There is no doubt that a closer analysis of his writing would place him as an important predecessor of Adam Smith. Bisgaard (1902), in a somewhat ecstatic statement, called one of the greatest economists before Adam Smith. However, Lütken wrote in Danish and, although several of his essays and books were translated into German, this restricted the spreading of his ideas.

A series of other authors also made considerable contributions to the magazine, and thus participated in creating the general economic atmosphere which came into being in the middle of the 18th Century. Here only two will be mentioned: Regimental clerk Niels Schelde (1701-62) and Bailiff Peder Mønster (-1775). In a contribution in volume five, "Liberal thoughts on the causes of low population in Denmark", Schelde makes a powerful attack on the social conditions in Danish agriculture. In an essay, also to be found in volume five, Mønster claims, in accordance with his teacher Otto Diderich Lütken, that food items have great consequence for the size of the population. In opposition to Lütken, however, Mønster recognises the logical consequence of this view, and becomes a fervent advocate for agricultural reforms.

The Editorship

The Economic Magazine became under Pontoppidan's editorship a progressive economic journal and is today a treasury for the understanding of the development of economics as a science and the Dano-Norwegian Age of Enlightenment. The ideas and suggestions for the improvement of society expressed in this journal became very important in relation to the struggle for economic reforms, which began in several areas in the last quarter of the 18th century.

To be able to understand the functioning of the editor a short note should be made on the functioning of the absolute monarchy and the limitations it set. From the middle of the 17th Century until the end of the 18th Century absolute monarchy was at the time, according to Supphellen (2002), considered to be the modern form of government in continental Europe. It was generally accepted that it could claim to be the most effective form of government. The absolute monarchy had been introduced in Denmark-Norway in 1661, not by force, but by an assembly of the classes of the people. The people had transferred the power from a wrangling aristocracy to the king. Although the king had absolute power he had to rely on his council and in a situation with strict censorship he had to find out what was stirring among at least the educated classes of his people. The spreading of new ideas based on the writings and teachings of the natural law and enlightenment philosophers Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694), John Locke (1632-1704), Montesquieu (1689-1755), Christian Wolf (1679-1754), and finally the Norwegian author of comedies, natural law philosopher, jurist, historian and economist Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) made this even more important. The Economic Magazine was of course also a tool for the establishment and it is in this context that we must see the work of the editor.

As previously stated the Magazine was formally exempted from censorship. However, the editor guaranteed that this relative liberal position was not abused. It was therefore clear that an exemption from censorship did not imply that there was full freedom to criticise the established political order. This was probably understood not only by the editor but also by the contributors. In conclusion, there existed both self-censorship and censorship from editor. But, from Pontoppidan's introductory notes to several of the contributions, it is equally obvious that the contributors are outspoken and that the whip of censorship was not used harshly.

From his comments, he tries to soften any possible controversy that might arise from the contents by stressing the "patriotic disposition" of the author. In other respects, we know very little about to what degree articles were rewritten, on recommendation from the editor, or excluded from the Magazine. But that articles were rejected, the editor himself informs us: "Other essays, however, one has found so extremely immature and unfit for publication, that it might be taken as a lack of respect for the reader's eyes and brain to offer him what one knew in advance would not be acceptable to his taste".

An analysis of the editorial comments from the first until the last volume reveals a growing daring and less servility towards the established authorities. The need for reforms particularly in agriculture are pushed forward with increasing support from the editor.

Although no correspondence has so far been found between the editor and his authors it is clear that Pontoppidan must have encouraged authors who he believed had important ideas, which should be brought forward. One of these authors who should be deeply indebted to Pontoppidan was Otto Diedrich Lütken, who as mentioned, contributed with several articles. He also had three articles accepted for publication but which were lost when the Magazine closed due to Pontoppidan's death. It is also clear that Pontoppidan was an open-minded editor who did not abuse his position and only accepted contributions which coincided with his own views.

There is no doubt that Pontoppidan took his work as the editor as a great challenge. That he also took great pride in the Magazine is clear from his book "Den Danske Atlas I-II" (The Danish Atlas I-II) 1763-64, where he speaks highly of the Magazine. Formally the editor was anonymous.

Pontoppidan's death in 1764 was the end of the Economic Magazine. Although he had finished the editing of volume 9 before his death it did not see the light of day. That nobody took over the publishing was probably partly due to the administrative and financial chaos, which characterised the last years of the reign of Fredrik V. Many manuscripts were lost when the magazine so suddenly ceased to exist.

The Influence of Pontoppidan and the Economic Magazine

With Pontoppidan as the editor, the Economic Magazine became, according to Bisgaard (1902), the great sluice "through which the subjects' need to speak could break its way". During its eight years of existence it was a sanctuary and a workshop for very many of those who concerned themselves with economic questions in the middle of the 18th Century.

The journal became the literary battlefield between the advocates for reforms, particularly in agriculture, and the supporters of the existing order in society. In many ways, we find here a clear parallel to the controversy between the Mercantilists and the Physiocrats' in France during the same period. Even if the Physiocrats' never gained any real support in Denmark-Norway, many of the contributions in the Magazine partly anticipated and partly were influenced by the Physiocrats'. At this point one may add that the mercantilism practised in Denmark-Norway was far more liberal and social than the mercantilism practised elsewhere in Europe.

The Economic Magazine was not the only journal published in Copenhagen at this time, which claimed to deal with economic issues. For a shorter period, two other journals appeared on the scene. One was the "Oeconomisk Journal" (Economic Journal), a monthly periodical, which was published in the period 1757-58 and issued in 3 volumes. The editor and main contributor was Ole Stockfleth Pihl (1729-1765), who later in 1762 became the first titular "Professor Oeconomic" at the University of Copenhagen. The Economic Journal mainly contained translations of articles from other countries, but now and then there also appeared original contributions on fiscal questions. In size and quality, however, it was no match for the Economic Magazine.

The other journal to appear was in English translation the "Copenhagen Royal Privileged Address-Office Juridical, Medical and Financial Times" from 1767-71. This journal was a weekly, but it contained very few contributions concerned with economic questions.

If not the first, the Magazine was at least one of the very first genuine economic periodicals in Europe. The French periodical "Journal Oeconomique" started its publication in 1751 but most of its articles were not concerned with economic issues. Here it may be noted that the word "economics" was a word of fashion in many European countries at that time. Many publications therefore used this word as an ornament even if they did not deal with economic questions at all.

Furthermore, it is very likely that the Magazine was distributed to foreign universities and libraries. The British Museum Library has for example a complete collection of all volumes. These were among the original collection of books from when the library was established in the second half of the 1760's.

Many of the contributions and essays were immediately translated to German, and published in the journal "Oeconomischen Gedanken zu weiterem Nachdenken", which either was published separately or as a supplement to the "Kopenhagener Magazin von Oeconomischen, Cameral, Policien, Handlungs, Manufactur, Mechanischen und Bergwerkgezetzen, Schriften, und kleinen Abhandlungen welche die Königlich-Danischen Reiche und Lander betreffen". These periodicals were published both in Copenhagen and Hamburg, which probably must be a result of the fact that German more or less was used as the official language in Denmark-Norway until Ove Hoegh-Guldberg (1731-1808) started his fight against foreign influence about 1780.

European economic thinking was familiar to those who were occupied with economic problems in Denmark-Norway in the 18th Century. Latin, French and German were well-known languages among the university-educated elite. In addition, quite a number of articles and books were translated, so that important works of foreign origin would be translated and published in Copenhagen not long after they first were published in their original language.

The relevant question is to what degree this also happened the other way round - from Denmark-Norway to other countries in Europe. This is, of course, extremely difficult to answer. We know that the comedies of Holberg were read and translated in other countries in Europe,

likewise a lot of theological works published in the then international language of latin must have had their audience outside Denmark-Norway. But, as for economic thinking, the question remains unanswered. The Magazine might, however, have been important as an intermediary of information about economic ideas in Denmark-Norway to the rest of Europe.

European economic thinking had a great deal of influence in Denmark-Norway. The question is to what degree this also happened the other way round - from Denmark-Norway to other countries in Europe? This is, of course, extremely difficult to answer. The Magazine might have been important as an intermediary of information about economic ideas in Denmark-Norway to the rest of Europe. If not the first, the Oeconomiske Magazin was at least one of the very first genuine economic periodicals in Europe. It is very likely that the Magazin was distributed to foreign universities and libraries. We know that the British Museum Library has a complete collection of all the eight volumes. These volumes were also among the original collection of books when the library was established around 1760-70.

In Denmark-Norway, the influence of the Economic Magazine, with Erik Pontoppidan as the editor, was considerable. The people connected with this periodical and Sorø Academy gained a lot of influence on the social development in the last part of the 18th and far into the 19th Century. Sorø Academy had due to a bequest by Ludvig Holberg been re-established as a centre of higher education in 1747. In the next 30-40 years, it became a university level institution specialising in the education of public servants and emphasising the teaching of modern languages, mathematics and economics.

When Andreas Peter Bernstorff (1735-97) was able to carry through his reforms towards the end of the century, this was partly due to the influence of the Magazine. The journal was well known both in Denmark and Norway. In Norway, it was also known among the important families involved in trade and industry. There are good reasons to believe that the journal contributed to the growing interest in economic questions in the last part of the 18th Century. This among other things led to the fact that Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations" was translated to Danish in 1778 at the initiative of Norwegian tradesmen.

Considering the influence of the Economic Magazine, with Erik Pontoppidan as the editor, it is surprising that Gilje and Rasmussen (2001) in their essay concerned with Thoughts in the Lutheran State 1537-1814 does not mention with one word neither the Economic Magazine nor Pontoppidan's contribution as an economist and editor.

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