1. **General Comment**

French court physician; political economist; intellectual leader of the School of French *les Économistes* or the Physiocrats.

2. **Chronology**

1694  
Birth:  
Born on June 4. Came from a family of modest means. By one account he was the eighth of thirteen children. Apparently received no systematic education as a child. He developed an interest in medicine early on. Beyond this little is known; see Beer statement in notes, 4A.

1711-1749  
Education and medical career:  

1711-1717  
In Paris for formal training in medicine and surgery. Completed a five-year apprenticeship in engraving during this time as well.

1717-1749  
Pursued his medical career in Mantes (near Paris). "Made his reputation as a surgeon, particularly with respect to bleeding techniques." [NPDE, p. 22.] Wrote papers on medicine during this period.

1744  
Received formal medical degree.

1717  
Marriage (at age 23):  
Married Jeanne-Catherine Dauphin; had four children, two survived.

1749-1774  
Career in medicine and writing on economics:  

1749-1774  
Resided at Versailles. Physician to Madame de Pompadour and King Louis XV.

1751  
Admitted to the French Academie des Sciences and to the Royal Society of London.

1756-1768  
Writing on economics (at age 62); leader of *les Économistes*, the Physiocrats.

Spent his last few years studying mathematics, geometry in particular.

1774  
Death:  
Died on December 16 at Grand-Commun (near Versailles).
3. Of Interest

1. In Quesnay's time there existed a tension in France between the community of physicians and that of surgeons. The occupation of surgeon was formally associated with that of barber (since 1656) both considered craftsmen; physicians, on other hand, "enjoyed the monopoly of prescription, treatment of disease, and the use of Latin. . . . physicians cured disease and passed as intellectuals." [Fox-Genovese, p.72.] Quesnay sided for the proper certification of surgeons. "Finally in 1743 a royal declaration divorced the corporation of surgeons from that of barbers." [Fox-Genovese, p. 72.] This dispute between surgeons and physicians in France may be the subject of Moliere's satire, The Doctor in Spite of Himself (1666).

2. In 1752 Quesnay saved the Dauphin (heir apparent) from smallpox; in gratitude the King (Louis XV) awarded Quesnay a title of nobility and a sum of money.

3. Quesnay was the leader of the School of French Économistes who took on the name Physiocrats after 1767 (Physiocracy meaning "the rule of nature"). Other notables affiliated with this School included the Marquis de Mirabeau (1715-1789), Mercier de la Riviere (1719-1792), Pierre S. Dupont de Nemours (1739-1817), Abbe Nicolas Baudeau (1730-1792), and G. F. Le Trosne (1728-1780). Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727-1781) was a somewhat distant affiliate of the School. [Beer, pp. 13, 183-187.]

4. Physiocracy was a reaction to the French mercantilism. The Physiocrats were rather famous in their day. Mirabeau claimed that there had been three great discoveries since the beginning of time -- writing, money, and the Tableau Economique. At the same time Voltaire (1694-1778), L'Homme aux quarante écus (1768) was a criticism of the economic theories of the Physiocrats. (Incidentally, this Voltaire work "was condemned and ordered to be burned by the Paris Parliament [on 24 September 1768], who also sentenced two booksellers to three days in the pillory and subsequent dispatch to the galleys for having had the audacity to purvey it. The Vatican authorities finally placed it on their Index of forbidden works on 29 November 1771.) [Pearson, p. 20.]
4. **Selected Works**


(Most of his economic writings were not published under his name.)

5. **Sources**