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David Todd, *Free Trade and Its Enemies in France, 1814-1851*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ix + 275 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 (hb). ISBN-13: 978-1107036932.

Response by David Todd, King's College, London

Needless to say, I am very honored that my book, *Free Trade and its Enemies in France, 1814-1851* should be the subject of a forum on H-France and am extremely grateful to the three reviewers for having read the book so carefully and engaging with it so thoughtfully. Since my response would be ludicrously long if I were to discuss all the points they made or all the concerns they raised, I shall confine myself to three significant issues that attracted their attention: the location and significance of these early nineteenth-century debates about international trade in modern French political and economic culture; the relationship between economic rhetoric and policies; and the question of scales of analysis (local, national, global) in the history of economic ideas.

The book claims that the years 1814-1851 constituted an important moment in the formation of modern ideologies about international trade, not that those debates owed nothing to previous discussions or that these ideologies became unchanging factors in French history until the end of the century or indeed until the present day. My intention was to correct what I perceive to be an excessive focus, in the economic as well as the political history of nineteenth-century France, on two periods, the revolutionary years, on the one hand, and the era of the Third Republic, on the other. The benefits of such a change of chronological focus have been demonstrated by Pierre Rosanvallon in *Le Moment Guizot* (1985) and his later works in the realm of political ideas: I do not think that my book is of equal significance, but I hope it will encourage other historians to reappraise further both the intensity of French concerns with the economy in this period and the place of France and French actors in global histories of the nineteenth century.

I am immensely grateful to Jeff Horn for pointing to what I hope are improvements on the earlier French version of the book, and he is right to suggest that one of the advantages of writing another version was to take into consideration the important remarks that he and other reviewers made about the previous one. Here again I am more than happy to recognize that it is possible to find elements of the nineteenth-century protectionist language in debates about the 1786 treaty of commerce (and, I would add, in debates about the prohibition of painted cotton textiles or the freedom of the grain trade between the 1750s and 1770s). But opposition to the 1786 treaty remained confined to a handful of northern chambers of commerce: it did not lead, as in the early nineteenth-century, to the formation of an Association pour la défense du travail national powerful enough to stall the very modest attempts at commercial reform of the Guizot government in the 1840s, or even, I would argue, to a consistent defense of national economic solidarity, if only because there was no unified national market before the abolition of internal customs and the incorporation of regions beyond the reach of customs officials (Alsace, Lorraine, etc.) by the Constituent Assembly in 1790. It is true that nineteenth-century protectionists themselves were prompt, after 1830, to draw a parallel between their protests and those of the Normandy Chamber of Commerce in 1787. But such claims are very loose evidence of ideological lineage and are better interpreted as attempts to taint – somewhat

anachronistically – free trade with the stigma of association with the *Ancien Régime*. Yet as always there is room for debate when assessing the novelty of arguments.

I am more doubtful about Horn's contention that the *question sociale* really emerged in the 1780s, which draws on his *The Path not Taken*, an important and stimulating work on the long-term consequences of the revolutionary years on French economic development. For Horn, it was the episodes of machine-breaking that accompanied the revolutionary upheaval in cotton-producing regions that explain the fundamental French reluctance to embark upon the British path of economic development, lest the development of large-scale manufacturing again overthrow the political and social order (I am simplifying a subtler argument). [1] But the shift of opinion in favor of protection I identified in the 1830s and 1840s suggests that international trade modified the politics of economic development after the revolutionary era. In the period I examined, hostility to the spread of machinery within France would be expected to translate into support for freer trade, not high tariffs, because competition with Britain would have encouraged specialization in agricultural and more traditional industrial activities. One frequently encounters such an agrarian argument in favor of the liberty of commerce until about 1830. What happened subsequently was a profound change in the nature of what Horn labels the "threat from below." It was less and less often the cotton workers who alarmed the French elites and *notables*, and increasingly the silk workers of Lyon, the winegrowers of the southwest and the producers of "articles de Paris" (a wide range of ornamental knick-knack, in which small French and especially Parisian firms excelled). All these demonstrated during the Revolution of 1830 and its aftermath a significant propensity for rebellion or even insurrection. What underpinned the growth of these three branches of the French economy, which together contributed about 50% of French exports until the 1870s, was less technological progress (none of them was capital intensive) than the intensification of the global division of labor from the 1820s onwards. The "threat from below" played a part in debates about French economic development, but the perception of this threat after 1830 owed more to an increasing consciousness of global economic transformations than memories of the revolutionary period.

Many thanks to Jeremy Jennings who, in addition to offering a generous appraisal of the book's claims, underscored the resemblance between these early nineteenth-century debates and today's contrast between British and French attitudes towards globalization or the European Union. It is noteworthy that while anti-European right-wing populism in Britain (for instance the United Kingdom Independence Party) sees the European Union as a protectionist machine and praises free trade with Victorian enthusiasm, anti-European right-wing populism in France (for instance the Front National) lambasts with equal fervor Brussels' *libre-échange* and is avowedly *protectionniste*. In the book's conclusion, I consider the persisting appeal of protectionist ideas in France beyond 1850. But my suggestions that the rhetoric and practice of protectionism played an important role in the political stabilization achieved by the Third Republic after 1870 or that the gradual and tacit renunciation of protection under the Fifth Republic has contributed to its malaise since the 1980s are purely speculative. Rather than pronouncements, they should be understood as an encouragement to examine further the impact of global economic exchanges on modern French politics. I did not mean to claim that France became profoundly and permanently protectionist. Indeed, the fervor for free trade in nineteenth-century Britain did not prevent many Britons from espousing more protectionist ideas and policies between the 1930s and 1970s: the best known case is John Maynard Keynes' conversion to "self-sufficiency" after 1930. But it would be equally naive to discount the effect of previous ideological debates – in this instance the very debates that gave birth to the words *libre-échange* and *protectionnisme*, in the 1840s – on later debates. Keynes' own adhesion to

protection in the 1930s was apologetic and melancholy.[2] To borrow a phrase from the idiom of economists, it might be possible to speak of ideological path dependency.

This leads me to the concern expressed both by Horn and Alessandro Stanziani that my analysis (“over-intellectualized” and taking discourse “too seriously”) pays too much attention to economic rhetoric and not enough to economic realities. For a book published in a series in intellectual history, my fear was rather that reviewers would frown upon my cavalier handling of discourse, so I find reassurance in their criticisms. This is certainly not the place for a fruitful debate on the virtues and limits of intellectual history – or, conversely, of the systematic contrast drawn by some social historians between practice and representation. It is true that *Free Trade and its Enemies* was also intended to draw a bridge between a genre of intellectual history mainly concerned with the discursive context and histories of the practical aspects of economic life. Horn’s and Stanziani’s judgments suggest my attempt at describing the interaction between ideas and other such factors has not been entirely successful. But what the most relevant contexts are for understanding economic ideas remains open to question. Instead of the social and institutional contexts, which are – as I am happy to concede and as Horn and Stanziani’s own work demonstrates – essential, I have favored the local, national and transnational political contexts, and the global economic context. I can only hope that other historians with different priorities will perceive that my analysis is grounded in more than a concern with discourse.

Our focus on different aspects of economic reality explains in part, I think, Stanziani’s contention that we disagree over the legacy of Jean-Baptiste Say’s ideas. In reality, I subscribe to his view that Say’s heirs were multiple and diverse. By highlighting the variety of motives for supporting higher or lower tariffs and by stressing the changing stances of numerous contributors to these debates, the book says much the same thing from another angle. I defined free trade or protectionism as slogans rather than doctrines precisely to underscore their ideological heterogeneity and much of the book is concerned with exploring these internal and shifting divisions. I only disagree with Stanziani’s apparent assumption that the views of Say himself represented a coherent and stable starting point: on the contrary, they underwent considerable change on international trade – and empire and Britain – after 1820, and there’s no more authentic Say than there were authentic disciples of Say.

On what Stanziani says about the merely rhetorical nature of French protectionism, we are more seriously at odds. Stanziani faults me for not paying due attention to the fact that French tariffs, “when correctly evaluated,” were not very high and possibly lower than British tariffs. The problem with this judgment is that there is no universally agreed upon or indeed satisfactory method for assessing the overall intensity of protection for a national economy. How does one convert, for instance, France’s outright bans on imports of cotton yarns and textiles (from 1816 until 1860) and grain (from 1821 until 1861), two of the most largely traded commodities on the contemporary world market, into weighted and deflated figures? A weighted and deflated infinity (or 0) is still an infinity (or a 0). Of the works cited by Stanziani, John V. Nye’s is probably the most thorough attempt at overcoming such problems. But Nye’s heroic assumption that revenue considerations played no part in the setting of customs duties defies common sense as well as the historical evidence.[3] Comparisons of the level of protection are only possible per sector and such an approach would confirm, I think, that France became more protectionist than Britain after 1840. More important, the very impossibility of providing a rigorous definition of the intensity of protection should warn us against the temptation of equating either free trade or protectionism with an economic policy and

encourage us to see both primarily as sets of ideas or languages, which contemporaries then used to promote concrete policies.

Another of Stanziani's criticisms is that I do not allow for the variety of producers' interests within certain sectors: he takes the example of the Bordelais winegrowers, which he claims were more divided on commercial policy than I make them appear. In support of his contention, he gives a reference to a classmark from the Archives Nationales, "F12 7452." According to the *Etat général des fonds*, this classmark corresponds with "Fraudes commerciales, 1838-1884," a timeframe which does not overlap much with the period I studied. Stanziani's own book, *Rules of Exchange*, cites the same source to make a similar point about the Bordelais winegrowers, but with greater chronological precision: "several files, years 1874-1882." The text of the book goes on to state that such divisions became apparent "between 1884 and 1914."<sup>[4]</sup> It therefore seems likely that Stanziani marshaled evidence from the 1880s to dispute my analysis of the 1830s. Such a retrospective use of evidence overlooks the unprecedented global commercial boom that took place between 1830 and 1880 – French foreign trade, for instance, grew sixfold in value – and seems to me revealing of a broader teleological bias in a literature that continues to focus on the last decades of a century-long process. In this instance, Stanziani is right that labeling, norms and standards became major concerns in the late nineteenth century, but the evidence I have consulted suggests that it was not yet the case until at least 1850.

I am grateful to Stanziani for acknowledging the novelty of my efforts to offer an account of economic policies and ideologies that does not exclusively rely on a national framework of analysis, although of course I'm sorry he found these efforts wanting. Here, again, he sometimes sees disagreement where there is none: contrary to what his review suggests, the book stresses the interaction between the issues of international trade and centralization: many early free traders, especially outside Paris, condemned national protection as an infringement on local liberties. On my alleged neglect of empire, I am inclined to agree with Horn that "imperial aspirations and commitments assume an important place" in the book. Indeed, the book identifies hostility to colonial ventures – old, as in the Antilles, or new, as in Algeria – as one of the main features of the new protectionism that emerged after 1830, by contrast with traditional mercantilist support for plantation colonies.

Whether one should or shouldn't use the label "global" to discuss transnational and transcontinental connections does not seem to me an interesting debate. I mostly used the phrase "nineteenth-century globalization" in reference to a specific literature in economic history, and because it seemed more elegant than the "the intercontinental convergence of commodity prices for bulky goods during the nineteenth century." I do not understand Stanziani's claim that "globalization" concerned only "the North Atlantic," especially during the mid-nineteenth century. One of his supportive references on this point actually stresses the impact of global flows of commodities, under the form of massive deindustrialization, in Asia during this period.<sup>[5]</sup> In reality, the nineteenth century witnessed a profound de-Atlanticization of France's foreign trade, which began with the Haitian Revolution and Napoleon's Continental Blockade. This trend was not confined to France's formal colonies, with for instance the share of French exports destined to the United States declining, despite the rapid growth of the American market, from 15% in the 1830s to 8% in the 1880s. A more legitimate contention would be that French trade became "Europeanized" in the nineteenth century. Yet even this would be, at least in part, a statistical illusion, due to the growing share of "Britain" in French exports, from 15% in the 1830s to 35% in the 1860s, while a large proportion of these were then re-exported to the extra-European world.<sup>[6]</sup>

*Free Trade and its Enemies* is concerned with the early stage of this rebalancing of French commerce from the Americas towards Europe, Africa and Asia, making it legitimate in my view to employ the word “global.” It is true that contemporaries preferred to stress the intercontinental connection that concerned them directly: linen weavers in Normandy feared that they would meet the same fate as cotton weavers in “Hindoostan”; Bordelais and Burgundy winegrowers decried the new competition of wine producers in South Africa and the Crimea; beet sugar producers from the Nord and Pas-de-Calais lambasted the barbaric methods of American slave plantations; and northern grain producers insisted that they could not compete with Russian serfs and Egyptian fellahin. But taken together, these references can be interpreted as manifesting an increasing consciousness of the global scale of economic interactions. It is telling, although of course not decisive, that the main biographer of Michel Chevalier, Say’s successor as professor of political economy at the Collège de France from 1840, felt the need, in the 1970s, to forge the neologism *planétarisation* to describe Chevalier’s understanding of international economic relations.[7]

In conclusion, let me reiterate my thanks to the organizers of this forum and the reviewers. Our exchange of views and even our disagreements only strengthen my sense that the economic aspects of French history since the eighteenth century constitute a rejuvenated and vibrant field.

David Todd  
King’s College, London  
david.todd@kcl.ac.uk

#### NOTES

[1] Jeff Horn, *The Path Not Taken: French Industrialization in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1830* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006).

[2] John Maynard Keynes, “National Self-Sufficiency,” *Yale Review*, 22, no. 4 (1933).

[3] David Todd, Review of, John V. C. Nye *War, Wine, and Taxes: the Political economy of Anglo-French Trade*, *H-France Review*, 9 (2009), 422-5, at <http://www.h-france.net/vol9reviews/vol9no99todd.pdf>; see also Douglas A. Irwin, “Free Trade and Protection in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France Revisited: A Comment on Nye,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 53, no. 1 (1993), 146-52.

[4] Alessandro Stanziani, *Rules of Exchange: French Capitalism in Comparative Perspective, Eighteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 206-7.

[5] Ronald Findlay and Kevin O’Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 414-28.

[6] My calculations, based on *Tableau général du commerce de la France avec ses colonies et les puissances étrangères*, 7 vols (Paris, 1827-1896).

[7] Jean Walch, *Michel Chevalier, économiste saint-simonien* (Paris, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1975), 101.

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