

Schonhardt-Bailey's FROM THE CORN LAWS TO FREE TRADE

ONE CASE TO RULE THEM ALL: THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS AND THE REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS

Robert Pahre

A review essay on Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey's *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade: Interests, Ideas, and Institutions in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006. 440 p. ISBN 9780262195430.

The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 provides one of the classic stories of political economy, found in several mythical tellings. In one, the rising middle class, strengthened by the political reforms of 1832, finally vanquished the aristocracy and ushered in modern Britain. In another, Repeal was the triumph of the classical political economists, the moment at which British politicians were convinced of the virtues of free trade. In yet another, Prime Minister Robert Peel bravely sacrificed his political career and his political party in the interests of . . . either free trade or Ireland. Or, perhaps, repeal of the Corn Laws simply reflected British hegemony, whose global interests would best be served by importing raw materials and exporting manufactures.

Political scientists and economists have taken these historical narratives for various purposes of their own. In some cases, they use modern economics and sophisticated methods to produce explanations that do not

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differ all that much from one of the earlier stories. In others, they engage in polemics against one explanation in support of another. Still others attempt a synthesis of the various explanations. Some treat Repeal as a unique event, while other political economists see it as one case among many.

In *From the Corn Laws to free trade*, Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey gives us a synthetic theoretical account of a unique historical event. She draws from each of the narratives earlier except the tale of British hegemony. She weighs the relative explanatory power of each story and draws them together into an account in which each is given a role, contingent on the others. Impressive data sets on voting behavior, aristocratic asset portfolios, the content of parliamentary debates, and the coverage of provincial newspapers provide strong support for the account.

Analytically, this synthesis makes use of the language of supply and demand in political markets, focusing on those social interests that demanded free trade and the politicians that supplied it. She structures these factors in terms of social interests, the institutions in which these interests interact, and the ideas that affect their interaction. In this, she joins a growing consensus among political economists that interests, ideas, and institutions provide central variables in any theory of political economy (compare, e.g., the title of Helen Milner's (1997) *Interests, institutions, and information*; see also Blyth, 2003).

Throughout, Schonhardt-Bailey treats Repeal as a historically unique event. Thus, while she draws from many theories, the particular synthesis of theories that she develops is unique to this case. This strategy constrains her to explain her case, even if it is anomalous, while allowing her substantial freedom in choosing which theories to include.

This research strategy raises significant questions about the project from a social-scientific standpoint: is a case-specific synthesis of generalizable theories an improvement on case-specific historiographies? Without a strong a priori theory, the observer has too many degrees of freedom. As a result, this kind of ad hoc synthesis risks being little different from ex post line-fitting in a statistical regression, in which the analyst adds and subtracts variables without reference to underlying theoretical principles.

To be more than redescription, Schonhardt-Bailey's content analyses and statistical regressions need a strong theory on which to rest. Unfortunately, a historically unique synthesis probably cannot provide a sufficiently strong theoretical foundation. Instead, such a synthesis constitutes a de novo theory that, by its very novelty, does not quite generalize and in fact loses some of the theoretical power of the generalizable theories from which it

draws. As a result, it cannot appeal to the power of covering-law explanations to strengthen its causal plausibility.

Moreover, a multidisciplinary synthesis such as *From the Corn Laws to free trade* faces the formidable challenge of addressing three different disciplinary audiences: economics, history, and political science. To make a credible claim of scientific advance, it needs to persuade *all three* audiences that it represents an advance over existing explanations of Repeal. Without unanimity, a multidisciplinary synthesis can be judged only in terms of a popularity contest. Down the path of such popularity contests lies a form of ontological relativism that Schonhardt-Bailey and all three of her audiences would surely reject.

Whatever one's position on these epistemological issues, Schonhardt-Bailey's *From the Corn Laws to free trade* represents, on its own terms, a definitive political account of the Repeal. In many ways, it provides a strong exemplar for the field of historical political economy and a model for graduate students on how to conduct rigorous research into historical topics. These achievements make the book all the more important as an example of the limitations of the kind of empiricism underlying the project. If, as I maintain, this successful and important book raises serious methodological and epistemological questions, these call into question the majority of modern work in the field of political economy. These methodological and epistemological issues also highlight serious problems with any project based on a strategy of theoretical synthesis, even one as exemplary as this book.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

Schonhardt-Bailey's goal is to explain the repeal of the Corn Laws. This case is of obvious substantive importance. Schonhardt-Bailey also identifies a good historical puzzle in the details of trying to explain legislative voting behavior on Repeal. First, politicians seemed to act against their personal economic and political interests when voting for it. Second, they also acted in a puzzling way when justifying their own behavior. Specifically, Schonhardt-Bailey shows that the politicians voted as delegates of their constituents. Intriguingly, these same politicians justified their votes in terms of a trustee theory of representation in which they acted on behalf of the nation in accordance with their personal best judgment. These votes, though not the justifications, would seem to violate the mandates on which many had been elected, since most had personal mandates and were not sent to the Commons as delegates.

In both Schonhardt-Bailey's book and the wider literature, economic interests provide the basic force behind repeal. Manufacturers, particularly those in cotton textiles, had a clear interest in free trade. The aristocracy's objections to Repeal weakened as many began to diversify their portfolios to include stock holdings in railroads and other companies associated with trade. With the pro-Repeal groups growing in strength as opposing interests declined, Repeal was nearly inevitable.

The timing of Britain's move to free trade depended on political factors, however. Schonhardt-Bailey, like many others, emphasizes the role of political organization in making latent economic interests into politically effective forces. On the familiar account, free trade groups such as manufacturers, the middle classes, and the labor aristocracy may have been gaining in economic strength, but their political power remained limited by older institutions. The Reform Act of 1832 began to unleash this potential political power and led to demands for further democratic reform.

The strategies of the particular groups thus released also helped shape the outcome. In the 1830s and 1840s, with the growing national interests in free trade, the Anti-Corn Law League mobilized by "nationalizing the interest." In other words, the League fought for its own interest by casting it in terms that would appeal to a wider national interest – in this case, appealing to the general public for Repeal as part of a general move to democratic political reform. The League also appealed to economic liberalism and to some principles of Christian morality.

The combination of economic and political demands in Britain could have snowballed into revolution, as similar demands did in France in 1848. Explaining the British outcome rests most importantly on the political response of the anti-Repeal groups, especially the faction of the Conservative Party that ultimately voted with Robert Peel on the final division over Repeal. On this reading, Repeal of the Corn Laws is a decision to make economic concessions to hold off more damaging political reforms – at least until the reform acts of 1867, 1884, and 1885 and the Parliament Act of 1911.

The decision of the aristocracy to make economic sacrifices for the sake of holding on to political power hinges, in part, on ideas. Schonhardt-Bailey emphasizes two classes of beliefs. The first set consists of political economists' ideas about free trade and its effect on wages, rents, and other economic variables. The second set encompasses political beliefs about whether members of parliament should act as delegates of their constituencies or trustees of the nation. In the end, Peelites voted their constituents' economic interests but justified this in terms of the political interests of the nation.

As this brief summary should make clear, Schonhardt-Bailey has a nuanced overall account of Repeal. Like many others, she claims to bridge two approaches common in political science, rational-choice, and historical-institutionalism. As this book and others show, these approaches go quite well together (see Greif, 2006; Bates, Greif, Levi, Rosenthal, & Weingast, 1998; Shepsle, 1989); when synthesized, they also share much in common with sophisticated versions of Marxist historical materialism (see North, 1984). Also like both Marxism and Northism, the ideological superstructure plays an important role in politics, sitting atop both material interests and the political institutions in which the struggles among classes and groups work themselves out. Thanks to these elements, shared with various other scholars, this book will likely appeal to a diverse interdisciplinary community, though each community will see something different in it.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Recognizing these commonalities with existing approaches to historical political economy leads us to the obvious question: "What has this book told us that we did not already know?" (George Jones, a colleague at the LSE, cited in Schonhardt-Bailey, 2006, p. 283). Schonhardt-Bailey's answer to this question, developed throughout the conclusion, is disappointing. Essentially, she reviews each of the several extant explanations of Repeal and then argues that each one leaves out some variable included in the others. Thus, theories of economic interest address the question of who demanded free trade but leave out the supply-side question of which politicians supplied Repeal and why. Historians rightly address the role of ideas but, according to Schonhardt-Bailey, often neglect the interest-based motives behind them.

In other words, Schonhardt-Bailey can reasonably claim to make a contribution to each of a series of literatures. However, those contributions generally come from other literatures. As a result, there are really three claimed contributions, one for each literature, each filling a particular gap.

She fails to make a convincing argument that her account contributes to the union of the sets of all literatures. Because three disciplines have dominant theories of the same events that differ from one another, we cannot say with confidence that adding missing variables to each discipline actually moves any of them closer to being "more true." Indeed, figuring out what claims are "more true" in a multidisciplinary setting raises thorny questions in the philosophy of science that I will explore more fully in a later

section. In some cases, a particular claim to scientific advance is contingent on the sequence of discovery in a given field, and therefore may not represent an advance in other disciplines with a different sequence of discovery.

Focusing narrowly on the historiography, Schonhardt-Bailey's more interesting contribution is not a theoretical synthesis, but instead a heuristic and a critique. Historians tend to develop particular themes, based of course on their readings of particular sources in the archives. Though historians are trained to be critical of the sources and the motives that politicians express, they find it difficult to analyze critically the motives that their sources do not express. As it turns out, Schonhardt-Bailey's empirical strategy is well-suited to address both aspects of the historiography – to think critically about the motives that historians identify and to evaluate the unsourced motives that historians tend to overlook.

Taking the expressed motives first, consider how Schonhardt-Bailey evaluates an important work such as Norman Gash's (1965) *Reaction and reconstruction in English politics, 1832–1852*. Gash's story of Repeal emphasizes the role of key leaders such as Peel in the Commons and Lord John Russell and the Duke of Wellington in the Lords. For Gash, these leaders' ability to persuade key groups ultimately led the Lords to accept Repeal.

Schonhardt-Bailey's approach to such claims is to test them with data. In this case, she chooses a content analysis of parliamentary debate using a software program called ALCESTE. This program examines texts to see which terms are associated with one another. For example, when people say "Wellington" in a parliamentary debate, what else are they talking about?

The surprising answer is that the Lords tended not to refer to Russell or Wellington much at all. From this, Schonhardt-Bailey infers that Russell's and Wellington's arguments were not influential. This inference might well be wrong, for individual Lords might have had decisive private conversations with Russell or Wellington without citing these leaders' arguments in public. Still, given the importance that Wellington gave to support of Her Majesty's Government, it is striking that ALCESTE does not commonly find associations such as "Like, Wellington, I am compelled to support the Queen and her government."

Schonhardt-Bailey also finds that Peel is not ignored in the way that Russell and Wellington were. The Lords apparently took his arguments quite seriously, linking Repeal to preservation of the territorial constitution. The Lords also looked closely at Peel's claims about the economic consequences of repeal for agricultural labor, wages, prices, rents, trade,

and Empire. Schonhardt-Bailey's finding that the debate in the Lords largely ignored Russell's and Wellington's arguments in favor of assessing Peel's claims is, to my knowledge, novel. This claim therefore represents a clear contribution to the historiography.

The structure of this contribution also suggests an interesting heuristic strategy for historians by using software to find patterns that they otherwise might miss. Historians approach texts in a context-rich way, reading them in sequence while giving great respect to the back-and-forth of a debate. Schonhardt-Bailey's content analysis shakes up the puzzle pieces in the box and looks for patterns that ignore the sequential aspects of context. Indeed, this redescription of the data treats sequence as a form of noise and tries to ignore it. When, as here, it obtains a result that seems both novel and plausible, such content analysis proves its worth. An historian might use such a pattern of associations to take a fresh look at the evidence. On this reading, content-analysis software such as ALCESTE is not useful as evidence but becomes very useful as heuristic, a guide to looking at familiar evidence in a novel way.

A final observation on this contribution will become important as we consider epistemological questions later on. This particular historiographical contribution depends on the *sequence of discovery*. Schonhardt-Bailey's reinterpretation of the roles of Peel, Russell, and Wellington gains in importance against the historiographical background, notably Norman Gash's interpretation of how Repeal carried in the Lords. Because Nash emphasized all three leaders, it is a contribution to find that the arguments of only one seem important. Yet, if Nash had never existed, Schonhardt-Bailey's finding would be less significant, a case-specific finding that a given prime minister was rhetorically important. One might even infer that the alleged importance of Peel's arguments was a statistical artifact and just as unimportant as the other two.

The fact that the sequence of discovery affects the nature of the scientific contribution reminds us that scientific literatures are social constructs that have histories. This observation need not lead us to reject the scientific project, nor should it cause us to become ontological relativists. However, our epistemological evaluation of a synthetic narrative such as *From the Corn Laws to free trade* needs to take the socially contingent nature of scientific truth claims into account. This need becomes especially important in the case of a multidisciplinary project that draws from the sequences of discovery in three distinct fields. Her findings about Russell and Wellington, for example, probably would not be recognized as a contribution in the political science or economic literature on Repeal, since they approach this

discourse question de novo, in much the way as my counterfactual historiography discussed in the previous paragraph.

THEORETICAL CHOICES IN AN EMPIRICAL PROJECT

The contingent nature of scientific advance implies that we need to consider carefully Schonhardt-Bailey's theoretical choices. *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade* employs a largely empirical research strategy that draws from multiple theoretical sources. She avoids the trap that snares some scholars in the field of historical political economy, who propose a group of loosely connected hypotheses about tariffs, voting behavior, or some other topic of interest. These other studies derive these hypotheses in a seat-of-the-pants manner that is uninformed by either historiography or non-quantified analytical traditions. By using both the theoretical literature and the historiography, Schonhardt-Bailey comes up with much more useful hypotheses, grounded in well-defined theoretical literatures, that are well worth testing.

Before discussing her theoretical synthesis, I will note one sin of omission and one sin of commission. In her study of the domestic politics of Repeal, Schonhardt-Bailey neglects all international dimensions of Britain's move to free trade. This includes most notably the argument, found both among Marxists and Realists, concerning the effects of British hegemony in the international system (see Pahre, 1999). This omission means that she does not address possible lines by which international variables might affect British domestic politics, including most intriguingly the anticipated effects on the United States (see James & Lake, 1989). Such interactions between the domestic politics of two states are ubiquitous in the field of political economy (Pahre, 2005) and should have been rejected explicitly if that is Schonhardt-Bailey's position. Better still would have been to bring international factors into the domestic story, as I suggest later.

Schonhardt-Bailey's sins of commission concern her use of Mancur Olson's (1971) theory of collective action despite subsequent theoretical work undercutting its foundations. Following Olson, Schonhardt-Bailey begins with the presumption that increasing concentration of an interest group will lead to more effective lobbying, as larger firms in a group contribute more. As it turns out, the claim that larger members contribute more is true, but the conclusion is false: smaller members decrease their

contributions by exactly the same amount that larger members increase theirs (see Warr, 1983 for proof, which is robust against many changes in its assumptions).

Fortunately, Schonhardt-Bailey moves beyond this economic concentration model to look at the *geographic* concentration of the textile industry in Lancashire and the geographic *deconcentration* of export interests across England. She maintains that geographic concentration of the textile industry in Lancashire concentrated resources for the free trade campaign. This concentration allegedly motivated this core of industrialists to bear a disproportionate burden in supplying the public good. Unfortunately, this part of Schonhardt-Bailey's claim cannot be sustained theoretically in light of the post-Olson literature.

Her second geographic claim is more plausible. She shows empirically that increasing the number of exporting industries, and the resulting geographic deconcentration of export-oriented interests, enhanced the political leverage of the League by broadening its support base. Because geography rests on "imperfections" in the political market – district boundaries – this claim is not contradicted by the post-Olson literature on collective action.

Schonhardt-Bailey's empirical findings – that this geographic deconcentration is associated with growing influence of the free trade interest – would make the underlying theoretic logic worth exploring in greater detail. Unfortunately she does not do this, so it is hard to know what the theoretical import of this finding should be. Is the Anti-Corn Law League unusual in resting on an increasingly dispersed geographic base? Or is this pattern typical of successful political movements? Without a theoretical analysis that distinguishes geographic concentration from economic concentration, it is impossible to know. Her core method, using a theoretical synthesis to explain a unique event, cannot help us identify which parts of her story are generalizable.

Putting these theoretical issues together, my own judgment is that Schonhardt-Bailey has shown us that geographic deconcentration makes a political coalition easier, at least in a first-past-the-post system (compare, e.g., McGillivray, 2004; Pincus, 1975). Her claim that industrial concentration aided creation of the League is, in contrast, not consistent with theory and thus ought to be counted as anomalous. Having an anomaly of this sort is not a problem for a theoretical account, though it is a problem for a theoretical synthesis of the sort that Schonhardt-Bailey offers us. To explore this challenge further, the following section examines the epistemological status of a theoretical synthesis built to explain a single "case."

GENERALIZATIONS AND SYNTHESIS

From the Corn Laws to free trade does not engage in classical hypothesis testing. A classical test does not care whether any single observation is inconsistent with a given hypothesis. Instead, a classical test would look solely at whether the set of observations allows us to reject the null hypothesis (and thus, indirectly, to support the hypothesis being tested). Schonhardt-Bailey does not have the luxury of ignoring certain observations. To take one salient example, the behavior of the Anti-Corn Law League needs to be consistent with her ultimate theory of interest group behavior. If this particular pressure group were to exhibit anomalous behavior, then her overall project were to fail, no matter how many other pressure groups the theory might explain.

Though she cannot ignore certain facts, she can ignore theories at will. Because the project is driven by the case of Repeal, Schonhardt-Bailey has no flexibility in choosing observations but can choose from an indefinitely large set of possible hypotheses and theories.

As a result, *From the Corn Laws to free trade* offers more of a research heuristic than a theory of political economy. Without presenting a general theory, the book cannot claim to provide an *explanation*, at least in the classical sense of a covering law explanation of an event. There is no general law "covering" these events, that is, there is no generalization for which the Repeal of the Corn Laws is but an observation. Schonhardt-Bailey's theoretical synthesis does not try to generate claims that one could apply to other instances of trade policy such as Germany's 1879 marriage of iron and steel. By implication, each event would require its own synthesis.

Though Schonhardt-Bailey does not describe it that way, this approach to explaining history represents a kind of methodological project. Interests, institutions, and ideas provide a guide to research. As a heuristic, the book succeeds very well. Having identified the relevant interests, institutions, and ideas, she investigates exactly how, when, and why they came to play a part in Repeal. The heuristic points naturally toward a synthetic account.

As generalizable theory, however, this synthesis is more problematic, in part because of its novelty. Like many others, Schonhardt-Bailey's approach runs up against the Duhem-Quine thesis that theories are underdetermined by the evidence. Specifically, any particular observation or set of data would be consistent with an indefinitely large set of different theories. Evidence, taken by itself, cannot help us distinguish among these rival theories since any evidence is consistent with all of them.

Constructivists see the Duhem-Quine thesis as leading us necessarily to relativism – these theoretical constructs must be "equally true" and are chosen only because of non-scientific criteria such as social status or political power (see Knorr-Cetina & Mulkay, 1983). Such ontological relativism is undesirable, since it undermines the entire scientific project by denying the possibility of "true" statements. From a more pragmatic perspective, clearly some theories are true enough to be useful. Pasteur's germ theory of disease proved critically important for both pasteurization and inoculation, two major public health benefits that would not have followed from most of the other imaginable theories that were equally consistent with the evidence from Pasteur's laboratory work.

How might one evaluate contending theories pragmatically? One might, as Schonhardt-Bailey does, produce a theoretical synthesis consistent with the evidence. Unfortunately, the Duhem-Quine thesis counsels considerable caution against this strategy. After all, an indefinitely large set of theoretical syntheses would be consistent with the evidence that she provides. In the face of such theoretical multiplicity, we cannot really have any confidence that *this particular synthesis* is better than any other theoretical synthesis. Indeed, the absence of other theoretical syntheses of comparable scope and empirical content means that we cannot even compare Schonhardt-Bailey's theory to a rival theory. No matter how nuanced the analytical synthesis, no matter how careful the empiricism – and Schonhardt-Bailey's synthesis is both of these – it remains merely a single synthesis in a set of many other equally plausible alternatives.

What, then, should we do? Setting aside the constructivists and relativists, practicing social scientists with a concern for epistemology have tended to rely heavily on Imre Lakatos' (1970) methodology of scientific research programs. For our purposes, the key elements of this methodology are Lakatos' insistence on testing research programs against one another, evaluating each research program against its own history, comparing the histories of rival programs against one another, and looking at the ability of a research program to predict "new facts," whatever that is.

I will have more to say about this comparative and historical elements of these standards soon enough. Before tackling that, however, I wish to note that Lakatos' program does not contain within itself an explanation of its own success. Why had philosophers not proposed such an epistemology before Lakatos? How can we explain its success – or, for that matter, its success among social scientists, invisibility among physical scientists, and controversial status among philosophers themselves?

Provisionally, I suggest taking an evolutionary approach to epistemology to answer these questions. Developing this approach fully would take us even more astray, but a quick sketch should make clear the kinds of standards to which we should hold a book such as *From the Corn Laws to free trade*. Evolutionary epistemologies provide a form of naturalist philosophy of science that seek a plausible explanation of how scientific beliefs might more closely approximate the reality that they seek to understand (see Giere, 1985). Such epistemologies can in principle account not only for scientific progress but also the evolution of epistemologies themselves. According to evolutionary epistemology, processes of natural selection and evolutionary adaptation should help “better” scientific claims win out against weaker scientific claims in a marketplace of competition. For review, see Campbell & Paller, 1989).

Multiple challenges present themselves in thinking about Schonhardt-Bailey’s project in this way. Each of the theories from which she draws has succeeded in a different habitat – some are found in historiography, some in economics, and others in political science. Each theory is presumably well adapted to that environment. For example, endogenous tariff theory (ETT) provides a successful research agenda in economics, well-suited to compete with other data-intensive models of trade policy (for review, see Pahre, 2007, chapter 2). These attributes make ETT only moderately successful in political science, where ideational accounts that neglect both formal theory and large-n evidence can also compete. These same ideational accounts, when well supported by primary source documents, thrive in historiography, habitats that would be deadly to almost all examples of ETT.

Schonhardt-Bailey offers us a hybrid species, the product of a kind of intellectual genetic engineering, with DNA from theories in each of these three disciplines. Her ideational claim, that politicians voted as delegates while claiming to be trustees, probably cannot thrive in the disciplinary environment found in economics. There, by assumption, politicians vote for their constituents’ interests, and any justifications they offer are mere obfuscations. The delegate–trustee puzzle is no puzzle here, so a solution to this puzzle does not contribute to economics. Analogous problems of “fit” can be found between Schonhardt-Bailey’s theoretical synthesis and each of her target disciplines.

Given the specific adaptations of any theory for its disciplinary environment, it is far from obvious that a synthetic theory can succeed across all three habitats. Unfortunately, we can only be sure that this hybrid improves on the original genetic stock, that is, we can only say that it advances scientific knowledge, if it succeeds in all three fields. If it were to

survive in two disciplines but not the third, then we can only claim that it marks an advance by reference to a kind of scientific popularity contest, a sort of appeal that philosophers of science find very unattractive (see, e.g., critiques of Kuhn, 1969).

For a multidisciplinary synthesis, any theoretical errors and omissions become decisive. If the theoretical synthesis draws on a theory of concentrated interests that economists rejected two decades ago, and if it excludes international variables and the domestic representation of those variables that other scholars have identified as important, then we cannot say that Schonhardt-Bailey’s synthesis represents an unambiguous advance on the fields from which it draws. It certainly cannot claim to be a synthesis of those variables that it excludes.

Contrast the situation we would see if Schonhardt-Bailey had chosen to work within a given research program. In this counterfactual world, we could certainly see a theory’s advance on its predecessors within that program, without needing to appeal to popularity contests. Moreover, the battle between any two paradigms would, at least in principle, be amenable to resolution: her advance could be compared to the successes or failures of a rival program.

For these reasons, for all its admitted strengths, *From the Corn Laws to free trade* also illustrates some of the epistemological pitfalls of a multidisciplinary theoretical synthesis. On the contrary, the book’s methods should travel well across disciplines. As discussed earlier, the ALCESTE computer program has demonstrated advantages as a heuristic for historians. Schonhardt-Bailey’s analysis of political rhetoric also opens up a good line of research that economic historians could explore more fully – this rhetoric, no less than material interests or political interests, helps explain the endogenous choice of economic policy. *From the Corn Laws to free trade* provides a methodological heuristic along with a rich and nuanced narrative that any scholar interested in nineteenth-century Britain, regardless of discipline, will need to consider.

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Gordon's POSTMODERNISM AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

META-NARRATIVES, ENLIGHTENMENT AND PARADOX

Willie Henderson

A review essay on Daniel Gordon's (Ed.) *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment: New Perspectives in Eighteenth Century French Intellectual History*. London: Routledge, 2001. 227 pp. ISBN 041592796X.

It was with a certain amount of surprise mixed in roughly equal proportions with curiosity that I recently accepted the task of writing a review of a work, published in 2001, on the encounter between the Enlightenment (meaning the French Enlightenment) and postmodernism. Reading in the Scottish Enlightenment suggests a need to know something about the wider European context though the exclusivity of France as the Enlightenment or as *the* home of Enlightenment is no longer a sustainable proposition. The Scots, in their energetic Universities, were as much involved with applying Newton and developing Locke or extending Shaftesbury or countermanding Mandeville as they were with the continental *philosophies*. The proposition put to me, to persuade me to the task, was the work was likely to contain ideas that intellectual historians of economics might profit from. A reflection on the significance of two potentially conflicting sets of ideas ought to have significance for the study of 18th-century economics developed within the cultural context of wider Enlightenment thought.

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