

French Industrialization: A Reply*

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In recent years, a large and diverse body of scholarly research and writing has contributed to enriching our understanding and appreciation of the variety and diversity of the European experience in modern economic growth. A significant component of this historiographical refinement has been the relaxation of the dominating influence which the British case, the best-known and most thoroughly studied one, had long exerted upon the terms in which economic historians viewed the industrial revolution. That perspective had conditioned historians' concepts of the sequence and the components, their notions of the interconnections and the mechanisms, indeed, the very definition of the process of industrial revolution. Much of that monolithic conception has now yielded to a more sophisticated interpretation, admitting of a less homogeneous, more complex vision of European industrialization.

Within that earlier perspective, other national economic performances had been seen largely in terms of their relation to the British model. As seen from within this *Weltanschauung*, the French economy had been judged a relative failure. My article took issue with that condemnation, for I felt that it misjudged the matter. The larger concern, over and above the details and the specifics by which one nation's course to industrialization differed from another's, the really significant matter has to do with the consequences, the results of the transition and process. The end, what is to be attained by virtue of successfully negotiating an industrial revolution, is *not* just to be industrialized, but rather to attain a modern, "industrialized" standard of living for the society and its members. The fact and extent of this latter achievement we measure, albeit imperfectly, by means of certain national statistical aggregates, such as output or income per capita.¹ When measured by these standards,

* To Robert Locke's "French Industrialization: The Roehl Thesis Reconsidered." *Explorations in Economic History* 18, 000-000.

¹ See, e.g., Bert F. Hoselitz, "Economic Growth: Income or Welfare," in E. J. Hobsbawm *et al.*, eds., *Peasants in History. Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner* (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 283-295.

I pointed out, the French economy did not fail, was not retarded, did not stagnate.² That was the conclusion of my paper, and I offered arguments to suggest why it made sense. Little in Locke's paper recognizes this central concern, still less in his article addresses or engages that issue; nothing he writes inclines me to modify my arguments or conclusions.³

² The data that led to my conclusion on this point are not the concoction, "econometric" or otherwise, of the Institut de Science Economique Appliquée, nor are they the product of "changing the definition of industrialization to include proto-industrialization." Rather, they have long been available in Simon Kuznets, *Postwar Economic Growth. Four Lectures* (Cambridge. Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), Table 4.

³ Space limitations preclude a point-by-point debate.