

Ideas Shaping the World: Using Text Analysis to Examine the Spread of Trade Theories in 19th Century Britain (Working Title)

Thomas Gerber*

May, 2021

Preliminary draft

Abstract

Text has always been a rich reservoir of social and cultural knowledge. Recent developments in various fields have created a new approach to how this knowledge is absorbed and processed. Computational methods used under the term *text analysis* and supported by many sophisticated algorithms have transformed words into numbers and text into data. This methodological direction seems promising for economists trying to expand economic reasoning by incorporating factors such as *narratives* or *ideas*. The increasing digitization of historical documents also allows such topics to be studied over a large period of time. In this paper, the dissemination and role of scientific economic theories will be examined. The focus here is on considerations in the field of trade theory by the classical economists of the early 19th century. In investigating the spread of (some of) their theories on political and public discourse over the course of the 19th century, the role of *professional narratives* and ideas is emphasized. A method extracting such concepts from large textual data is applied.

JEL Classifications: B10, Z10

Keywords: Text Analysis, Ideas, History of Economic Thought, Trade Theory

*Thomas Gerber, University of Basel, Faculty of Business and Economics,
email: thomas.gerber@unibas.ch