

Number

**3**

Mailing

# Overtures Toward Reconciliation In Ethics

FREDERICK NYMEYER



*Words are things, and a small drop of ink,  
Falling like dew upon a thought, produces  
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.*

**Social Action, Hundred Nineteen**  
Post Office Box 218 South Holland, Illinois 60473, USA

"How I Love Thy Law"  
Obedience 100  
Alms 10  
Proclamation 9+  
PSALM 119

We send you this with our compliments. We plan future mailings. If you are not interested, please inform us. Previous mailings: (1) A DIAGNOSIS  
(2) THE SOCIAL GOSPEL MALADY

---

**Overtures Toward Reconciliation in Ethics**  
(Number Three Mailing)

C o n t e n t s		Page
I	Preface	27
II	An Endeavor To Adopt Fruitful Approaches To Religious Problems Late In The Twentieth Century	28
III	Have You Ever "Systematically Analyzed Every Important Ethical Problem"?	29
IV	Cain Became No Great Ethical Lawgiver When He Asked, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?"	30
V	The Christian Religion Should Re-Examine The Premises Of Its Ethics, That Is, The Alternative Premises Of Altruism And Individualism	31
VI	There Are No Other Options: Men Must Choose Either For A Contract Society Or A Violent Society -- One Or The Other!	35
VII	The Relationship Between Religion And Economics	37
VIII	Selfishness May Be Sin, But Not Necessarily	44
IX	The Social Gospel And Religious Intellectuals	45
X	The Cart Before The Horse, Or The Use Of "Love" To Explain The Decalogue	48
XI	What Should LAW Be?	49
XII	What Saves?	51
XIII	Summary	52
	Appendix: Benefits From Broad Reading Habits	53

---

**LIBERTARIAN PRESS**

Post Office Box 218

South Holland, Illinois 60473, USA

Printed in United States of America  
Copyright © 1971

## I Preface

Differences will remain in regard to what constitutes good ethics. Such differences will be about what is just or unjust; honorable or dishonorable; mean or magnanimous; good manners or bad; kind or cruel; socially beneficial or harmful.

This mailing, which is the third, refers to methods which should contribute to mitigating differences in ethics, such methods as:

1. That there be an endeavor to be objective in "approach";
2. That there be a mood to be "systematically analytical";
3. That there be avoidance of beginning and ending a dispute with the use of mere clichés;
4. That there always be a probing for premises and exploring them rather than disputing the conclusions only;
5. That there be awareness that "halting between two opinions" is probably the result of intellectual confusion;
6. That related sciences can be helpful, and should be consulted;
7. That many propositions are dangerous because they are overstated, and that they become useful when they are appropriately qualified;
8. That "authorities" are not to be used by quoting their names, but are properly utilized only by the presentation of their demonstrations;
9. That popularizers of ideas may be most interesting and educational, but that they may not be the real experts;
10. That cause and effect should not be interchanged;
11. That everything remains confused as long as terms are not defined, and that many disagreements and disputes stem from the absence of definitions, or from unskillfulness in formulating definitions;
12. That there are no univocal terms in this world; that every term suffers from being more or less equivocal (except when definitions are abstract as in geometrical axioms);

13. That words as "brotherly love" are so ambiguous that they are practically useless;
14. That the "form" of ethical propositions affects their usefulness, and that ethical laws can better be negative than positive; that those laws are most helpful and just which are formulated, "Thou shalt not..."; and that laws which are positive as, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, soul and mind," or, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," are rhetorical and are hardly enforceable propositions.

In this mailing -- as an overture to seek a rapprochement or reconciliation of ethical views between men -- informal comments are made on procedural matters in order to abate ethical differences, and reduce the danger of loss of peace and incapability of cooperation.

## II An Endeavor To Adopt Fruitful Approaches To Religious Problems in the Twentieth Century

The prestige of church leaders and members in the latest quarter century has changed: (1) to irreligious people, the churches appear to have become less significant; (2) to superficially religious folk, the clergy appear to perform a useful function in regard to baptism, marriages and burials; and (3) to some devout men, the clergy appear to have become suspect of equivocation, of sometimes publicly preaching what is privately not sincerely held.

This change in the standing of church folk stems largely from church members themselves, some of whom have drifted into the acceptance:

1. Of revolutionary ethics, which are more arduous than ever before; they labor under the belief that those new ethics are superior and attainable; they are not. Ethics is a matter of relationships of men to men;
2. Of a new cosmology, which is not harmoniously related to what science has been able to learn in regard to how the world has been put together. The best to be learned from secular thought has not been fully utilized to interpret, better than the past did, what appears always to have been available in Scripture, but has through the centuries lain dormant, or at best has been interpreted in a now out-dated way. This phase of the cosmology problem is a matter of relationships of men to things; and

3. Of a different theology, based on something later than the long accepted "specifications" of the Trinity and other theological doctrines. These new ideas stem from a different "theory of (the origin of) knowledge" and a different doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. The theological problem is a phase of the problem of the relationships of men to God.

In regard to item number three, if the writers of Scripture were specifically inspired, that inspiration could hardly have consisted only in their explicit formulation of superior theological, ethical and cosmological ideas for their own times only, but must have consisted in part in their having formulated those ideas without, in many if not all ways, fully realizing what a later and a more advanced intellectual world would and could make out of it. The agents of revelation -- if alleged revelation was indeed Revelation -- must have said more than they understood fully themselves.

If twentieth century A.D. society is different from fourteenth century B.C. society (and it is), then the crucial question about the inspiration of Scripture is raised when the question is asked: Can it be demonstrated that what applied to the fourteenth century B.C. is still unalterably suitable for the late twentieth century A.D.? Are there unrecognized but powerful reasons why the laws of Moses in the Decalogue apply to our day and our situation as much or even more than in Moses's day?

This publication does not concentrate on old theological questions, but on current ethical questions:

What is my obligation to my fellow man?

Am I my brother's keeper?

If so, in what sense or senses am I my brother's keeper?

### III Have You Ever "Systematically Analyzed Every Important Ethical Problem"?

The following describes the "approach" of a famous social scientist:

"The author of the essays and addresses presented in this volume...is one of the foremost scientists of our age. Inspired in his early career by the [great] work of his teachers...he has in a series of scholarly investigations

- [1] systematically analyzed every important problem [in his field],
- [2] critically exploded inveterate errors, and
- [3] substituted sound ideas for discarded fallacies."

We believe that an identical approach should be made in "systematically analyzing every important problem" in ethics.

If there are any "inveterate errors" in currently accepted "Christian morals" or "Christian ethics," we believe those errors should be "critically exploded."

Further, we consider it a moral obligation not to criticize, explode or reject whatever is (exists), without being confident that there is a different idea which is surely better. We are not for "change," but for what is "better."

We reject proposed means to ends, however quickly effective those means may appear, but which are not conducive to the eventual end sought, namely, the universal welfare of all men with justice, freedom and self-respect. We reject what is illogical, self-defeating, self-deceiving, and in conflict with the nature of creation and the ancient revelation of God.

The immediate program is as follows: (1) systematically to analyze the Social Gospel (as its burgeoning was described in Mailing Number Two); (2) to explode its inveterate errors; and (3) to outline a better ethic than that of the Social Gospel.

#### **IV Cain Became No Great Ethical Lawgiver When He Asked, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?"**

After Cain had murdered Abel, when being questioned he evaded answering by asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

God did not indicate whether Cain was his brother's keeper or not; nor did He indicate then and there what was the proper definition of "brotherly love."

The only subject under discussion was whether Cain might rightfully murder Abel out of jealousy. Outright murder is certainly a subject different from the modern problem of "brotherly love."

The Cain version of his encounter with Abel, and anything that legitimately can be deduced from it, contributes nothing to answer the questions: Who is my "brother"? Am I his "keeper"? In what sense, if any, am I his "keeper"? And in what sense, if any, am I not his "keeper"?

What Cain did to Abel teaches nothing about stewardship or charity to a fellow man; or about equality or inequality in honors, income, authority, comfort, prestige or consumption. What is described in Genesis 4 is worthless in solving modern economic problems, and the relationship of the "haves" and the "have nots."

Men should be reluctant to use at any time the undefined term of Cain, namely, "my brother's keeper." In SOCIAL ACTION, HUNDRED NINETEEN Cain is not recognized in any way as a worthy lawgiver.

We take it that Cain is not put forward as an "authority" by any advocate of the Social Gospel. Who would declare that Cain made a notable contribution to the principles underlying the Social Gospel?

Cain's metaphorical term, "my brother's keeper" should not be used in serious discussions of the relationships of men to men, without there being the strictest definition of the term.

## V The Christian Religion Should Re-Examine the Premises of Its Ethics, That Is, the Alternative Premises of Altruism and Individualism

The issue in ethics dividing members of modern churches is the problem whether society should be founded on Altruism or Individualism. Those terms are not much used in discussions on ethics among religious folk.

Wishing not to favor or prejudice the case for either Altruism or Individualism, we begin with dictionary definitions:

altruism: devotion to the interest of others; disinterested benevolence; opposed to egoism.

individualism: ... (3) a tendency or attitude in religion, ethics or politics, favoring the liberty of the individual; opposed to socialism and to theoretic anarchism. (4) Excessive self-interest; selfishness.

egoism: (1) the doctrine that the supreme end of human conduct is the perfection and happiness of the ego, or self; and that all virtue consists in

the pursuit of self-interest. (2) In loose usage, the part of the theory of practice or conduct or duty that has reference to oneself, as distinguished from altruism.

These definitions are taken from Funk and Wagnalls College Standard Dictionary. These definitions are not so detailed as controversialists may wish on the issue, altruism versus individualism, but they state the general issue between altruism and egoism.

Egoism, as the antonym for altruism, has a parallel term, namely, individualism, which individualists prefer (probably) because egoism has a not-so-pleasant connotation. Individualism is in a sense a euphemistic term for egoism.

A serious study of altruism and individualism will require considerable refinement in definition, and of more exact description of altruism and of individualism.

A "comprehensive and universally valid solution" should be attempted of the unsettled issue of Altruism versus Individualism, which constitutes the essence of today's ethical confusion and error.

The Social Gospel is a champion of altruism, and condemns individualism as selfishness and as an unsound principle for social organization. But the issue cannot finally be decided on the basis of altruism (or the Social Gospel) versus individualism. Instead, the issue must be decided on what underlies the Social Gospel and what underlies individualism. The underlying principles or premises are different and are irreconcilable.

When a person endeavors to evaluate altruism and individualism, he must consider several propositions, or pairs of opposites, viz.:

<u>Altruism</u>	<u>Individualism</u>
1. Altruistic ethics	1. Individualistic ethics
2. Collective, tribal, socialist economics, central planning, etc.	2. Self-regarding economics, and maximum freedom
3. Unity (agreement and uniformity, which are not spontaneous among diverse people)	3. Harmony (differences without loss of cooperation, and with gains obtainable from diversity)

In few churches, and certainly in none of the creeds, has the great issue in modern society -- altruism versus individualism -- been answered definitively.

The problem has been treated as nonexistent; or as already solved; or as casually or easily to be resolved;



or as a problem to be resolved by the mere intention of honesty or of good will, and a laudable emotion; or by generalizations and approximations; or by compromise between altruism and individualism on a pragmatic basis -- each case to be decided on the basis of the "circumstances."

Creeds have concerned themselves with theologies; and a future life and salvation or damnation; or sacraments. But no creed has explicitly gone on record in regard to the relationships of men to men, in the form of their obligations to each other. Where indeed is there an explicit statement on what one man owes to others, and on what others owe to him? Where has any creed answered without equivocation whether any man is his brother's keeper? (Apologies are submitted for using Cain's infelicitous term!)

Cain talked evasively about that. But what man who came after him answered the question in detail? Did Moses? If so, what did he say? Joshua? Samuel? David? Solomon? Which prophet, and if he had an answer, what did he say? Or Job? Or Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, Timothy, Titus?

One answer, derived from casual and unorganized reading of Scripture, is that there should be some altruism and some individualism. If that is the answer, when should altruism be practiced and when individualism? And in what proportions? Under what circumstances?

If the general standard of living in "underdeveloped countries" and among the poorer in developed countries is today higher than the standards of living of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or Moses or Joshua, or of David and Solomon, or of Jesus Christ, or the Apostles -- then what did such authorities, when they are put forward as such, explicitly outline as a guide for social action in an economy of which they did not have knowledge? If the social standards of the men who have been mentioned were in fact not in conformity to present living conditions in Europe or North America, can those men speak with conviction and finality considering that they lacked relevant empirical knowledge of present-day society?

If, nevertheless, someone believes that Scripture specifically answers the question -- Which system of social organization is preferable? -- and that the answer is in conformity with altruism; and if he also declares that he believes that Karl Marx had the right answer(s) (Marx was an altruist of sorts), then such a person is in notorious disagreement with Marx. Marx detested Hebrew-Christian ethics and considered the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures to be immoral because they propounded an individualistic ethic. How could Marx be so dissatisfied with Hebrew-Christian ethics if the Hebrew-

Christian Scriptures were indeed altruistic? For a late twentieth-century man, or advocates of the Social Gospel, to come forward now and say that Christian altruism and Marxian altruism are related, is to make himself -- or Marx -- appear ludicrous. Marx considered the Hebrew-Christian religion to be immoral, just because he interpreted it to be undoubtedly individualistic, and not altruistic.

A person can, then, come to the conclusion that neither Cain, nor Moses, nor the prophets, nor any New Testament authority, nor any denomination, nor any creed, has defined explicitly how much altruism and how much individualism we should practice in late twentieth century society.

If the reader turns from the approach of the teachers of Christian morality to the approach of practitioners of the science of economics, he is equally in a confusing situation. There is so much difference of opinion among economists about a program for social action that somebody can be quoted either for unlimited altruism or for unlimited individualism, or for anything in between. It all depends from which economist you elect to quote.

Variety of views on altruism or individualism is not the only problem when a choice must be made among economists. Economists widely accept the idea that economics is really concerned with means to attain aims and ends, and not with the ends themselves.

Economists, as economists, therefore should exclude from their field of consideration preference or dispreference of specific social ends. When they have a specific objective in mind, they should admit that they speak as "laymen" about the merits of the objectives. The corollary to that is that the ends of economists will not be intrinsically better than the ends of others, but presumably an economist's ends are more readily attainable by the suitable means which he as an economist may advocate, depending of course on his capability as an economist.

That those who came before us (who never could have anticipated what today's exact problems are) did not predict the circumstances and prophetically prescribe the solutions, is no indictment of them. We all stand on their shoulders and should do better than they could do.

Nor shall we be able to solve the problems of the future. We do not know those problems. But we should become beglamored to cooperate to solve present problems without being too late.

## VI There Are No Other Options: Men Must Choose Either for a Contract Society or a Violent Society — One or the Other!

The term, contract society, is not in common use, and the first inquiry that will be made is: What is meant by the term, a contract society?

If A owns a car and B does not, but B wants a car badly, there are two ways for B to acquire A's car: (1) B can forcibly take A's car, and by forcibly may even be meant killing him; or by beating him into helplessness; or by threatening him; (B can also obtain the car by stealthy theft, or by fraud, neither of which is exactly violent but has a similar consequence, namely, A loses his car against his will). Or (2) else A and B can peaceably and fearlessly agree to exchange A's car on terms which they consider to be mutually beneficial.

A society which can be described as violent is one in which a man can be violent -- in order to get what he wants -- without significant danger that he will have to be responsible for his violence. A violent society is one where physical strength, or where a weapon which gives strength, is used. It is a favorable society for the strong, and a bad society for the weak. The widow and the orphan, the young and the old, the feeble and the sick, will not prosper or maybe even survive in a violent society.

A nonfree or coercive society is another name for a violent society, because coercion, even when legal in the sense that the laws permit it, has the same consequence as open violence or unrestrained threats.

A society can reject a violent society, and can outlaw it. If a society does that, it has only one option in order to accomplish a nonviolent society, and that option is to establish a contract society.

A contract society is one where the members deal with each other, by mutual agreement, without violence or coercion and without threats. If there is a car which is owned by one man and desired by others, the owner is safe in his possession unless and until one of the would-be buyers offers the car owner what is sufficient to induce him to sell. Then the ownership of the car is changed by contract -- and voluntarily -- rather than by violence, theft or fraud.

In a certain sense there is also "coercion" present in a contract society, namely, the collective strength

of that society is organized to restrain either the buyer of the car or the seller of the car from having recourse to violence, coercion or threats, or theft or fraud. In other words, in a contract society the non-obvious "coercion" that is operative is "the law," which removes strength, theft and fraud as considerations that determine whether the ownership of the car changes or not.

Therefore, a contract society requires laws of a certain kind:

1. They must forbid coercion and violence, theft and fraud, and have appropriate penalties (sanctions).
2. Instead of permitting reliance on strength and violence, theft and deception, the laws free the members of that society from those evils. The aim or the end of the law is maximum freedom to permit the exercise of individual preferences, and to be subject only to a minimum of constraint.
3. Everybody must be subject to such laws; there may not be any exceptions for favorably situated classes, such as the rich and educated; nor for aristocrats; nor for organized minorities who by their "organization" acquire special power and have a powerful clout and seek (and may get) laws favorable only to their own members -- as unions in regard to strikes, or farmers in regard to subsidies, or businessmen in regard to tariffs.
4. All public officials must themselves be under such laws; everybody must be equally under the law, and the law must not aim to bear down on one person more than another.

The greatest law for any "society" to acquire is the law against violence, and in favor of a contract society as a substitute for violence. Every other law falls into relative insignificance compared with that.

Laws promoting a contract society are common sense; ancient societies that were good were contract societies. Religious and nonreligious men should support that kind of social structure which bans violence and promotes contract.

Reflection will immediately tell a religious man on which of the Ten Commandments (Decalogue), espoused by both the Hebrew and Christian religions, a contract society is founded, namely, the commandment, Thou shalt not kill.

When the Decalogue forbids killing, it does not mean that one man can beat another to within an inch of death and then say, "I did not kill that fellow, and therefore I have not sinned; he is indeed pulp but he is still alive." The Decalogue becomes farcical if the Sixth Commandment condemns killing only, and not lesser violences, coercions, and threats.

The Social Gospel is not unqualifiedly committed to a contract society. Leading advocates of the Social Gospel finally opt for violence. Consider a well-known case, Reinhold Niebuhr, who favors the Social Gospel, who has as fine "mental furniture" as anyone, and who is an important theoretician for the National Council of Churches, has as the title of one of his books, Moral Man and Immoral Society. That title designates that society may engage in coercions, which would be immoral for individuals, in order to promote a structure which the Social Gospel seeks to establish. The theme of the book is that the immoralities of the Russian revolution were justified in order to establish a Social Gospel society in that country. (Niebuhr has been reported to have renounced all his previous publications, but there is no evidence that he has renounced the premises of the Social Gospel.)

Men separate into two categories: Those who favor a contract society and those who depart from it. If a man is for the Social Gospel, he will be disposed to be against a society organized on the basis of the Decalogue, although that may not be obvious to him or to those whom he influences.

## VII The Relationship Between Religion and Economics

Religion and reason can cover different fields, or look at different events from different viewpoints, but there must be some relationship -- a relationship of compatibility between them -- or else the uncomfortable alternative conclusion would seem to be that there is more relationship between religion and unreason (irrationality) than there is between religion and reason.

In SOCIAL ACTION, HUNDRED NINETEEN religion and reason are appraised as fitting well together with, however, the supplementary idea that religion covers some subjects and ideas on which reason itself and alone, by its definition, cannot speak. Christianity has been honest about that; where its teaching is not closely related to reason, Christianity admits its basis is a faith.

Economics concerns itself about the relationships of men to things or goods. The relationships of men to things and goods is antecedent to the relationships of men to men. Further, it is of acute importance to men what their complex relationships to things and goods are; and what they can do about it. A man alone in the world, without another human being around (and who therefore could have no ethical problems at all), can still have the gravest economic problems, resulting from the scarcities to him individually of things that have value, which require difficult and wearying efforts at production and conservation.

Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk (1851-1914), an Austrian economist, wrote in his essay, "The Austrian Economists," (Henrietta Leonard translation printed in THE ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January 1891, pp. 361-384; and reprinted by special permission in Shorter Classics of Böhm-Bawerk, Libertarian Press, South Holland, Illinois 60473, 1962):

"It is a fact, however, that the relation of men to goods is by no means so simple and uniform. The modern theory of final utility in its application to cost of production, complementary goods, etc., shows that the relation between our well-being and goods is capable of countless degrees, and all these degrees exert a force in our efforts to obtain goods by exchange with others. Here yawns the great and fatal chasm in the classical theory [of economics, of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and others]; it attempts to show how we pursue our interests in relation to goods in opposition to other men without thoroughly understanding the interest itself [of each person in goods]. Naturally the attempts at explanation are incoherent. The two processes of explanation must fit together like the two cogwheels of a machine. But as the classical economists had no idea what the shape and cogging of the first wheel [the relationships of men to goods] should be, of course they could not give to the second wheel [the relationships of men to men] a proper constitution. Thus, beyond a certain depth, all their explanations [of Smith, Ricardo and other classicists in economics] degenerate into a few general commonplaces, and these are fallacious in their generalization."

Master categories in the history of economic theory are these three:

First, the era in which what is known as Classical economics flourished (beginning c.1776); viz., the era of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and others.

Second, the era of altruist or socialist economics which reached its zenith in the time of Karl Marx (beginning c.1867) and his successors. The economics of the Social Gospel is founded on Socialist economics.

Third, the era of the Neoclassicists (c.1871) beginning with Menger, Jevons and Walras -- the men who refounded Classical economics, and who thoroughly discredited Socialist economics; the founders were followed by Böhm-Bawerk, Ludwig von Mises, and others. (SOCIAL ACTION, HUNDRED NINETEEN is Neoclassical.)

The Social Gospel, as a sort of attempt at "Christian" economics, in the form of a mixture of ethics (the relationships of men to men) with economics (the relationships of men to goods), has moved the specific subject of ethics further toward the terrain of the relationships of men to goods, and therefore in the direction of economics. But the doing of that requires that whatever economics correctly teaches in regard to the relationships of men to goods must first be considered thoroughly in the relationships of one man to goods before undertaking to speak definitively of the relationships of many men to goods, let alone the all men to all goods situation.

To be qualified as a teacher in ethics in this modern age, a professor should not be ignorant of the complex and nonobvious aspects of the relationships of men to things or goods, as Böhm-Bawerk wrote in what has been quoted, namely, that none should attempt "to show how we pursue our interests in relation to goods in opposition to other men without thoroughly understanding the [antecedent] interest itself [of men in goods]" (emphasis added).

On that premise, professors at a theological seminary, who are now teaching the Social Gospel (see Mailing Number Two), would be expected to have qualified themselves as economists (as well as theologians). Böhm-Bawerk alleges that that always is an arduous task.

The nature of the science of economics was described in a readily understood manner one hundred twenty years ago by a Frenchman named Frédéric Bastiat (1801-1850). Because his description is admirably simple, we shall quote him. The quotation is from Selected Essays on Political Economy, translation from the French by Seymour Cain, edited by George B. de Huezar, published by The Foundation For Economic Education, Inc., Irvington-on-Hudson, New York 10533, copyrighted in 1964 by William Volker Fund, Burlingame, California. This quotation may seem somewhat stilted to an American, but the ideas are fundamental and valuable:

## What Is Seen and What Is Not Seen<sup>1</sup>

In the economic sphere an act, a habit, an institution, a law produces not only one effect, but a series of effects. Of these effects, the first alone is immediate; it appears simultaneously with its cause; *it is seen*. The other effects emerge only subsequently; *they are not seen*; we are fortunate if we *foresee* them.

There is only one difference between a bad economist and a good one: the bad economist confines himself to the *visible* effect; the good economist takes into account both the effect that can be seen and those effects that must be *foreseen*.

Yet this difference is tremendous; for it almost always happens that when the immediate consequence is favorable, the later consequences are disastrous, and vice versa. Whence it follows that the bad economist pursues a small present good that will be followed by a great evil to come, while the good economist pursues a great good to come, at the risk of a small present evil.

The same thing, of course, is true of health and morals. Often, the sweeter the first fruit of a habit, the more bitter are its later fruits: for example, debauchery, sloth, prodigality. When a man is impressed by the effect *that is seen* and has not yet learned to discern the effects *that are not seen*, he indulges in deplorable habits, not only through natural inclination, but deliberately.

This explains man's necessarily painful education. Ignorance surrounds him at his cradle; therefore, he regulates his acts according to their first consequences, the only ones that, in his infancy, he can see. It is only after a long time that he learns to take account of the others.<sup>2</sup> Two very different masters teach him this lesson: experience and foresight. Experience teaches efficaciously but brutally. It instructs us in all the effects of an act by making us feel them, and we cannot fail to learn eventually, from having been burned ourselves, that fire burns. I should prefer, in so far

1. [This pamphlet, published in July, 1850, is the last that Bastiat wrote. It had been promised to the public for more than a year. Its publication had been delayed because the author had lost the manuscript when he moved his household from the rue de Choiseul to the rue d'Algen. After a long and fruitless search, he decided to rewrite his work entirely, and chose as the principal basis of his demonstrations some speeches recently delivered in the National Assembly. When this task was finished, he reproached himself with having been too serious, threw the second manuscript into the fire, and wrote the one which we reprint.—EDITOR.]

2. [See chap. 10 of *Economic Harmonies*.—EDITOR.]



as possible, to replace this rude teacher with one more gentle: foresight. For that reason I shall investigate the consequences of several economic phenomena, contrasting those *that are seen* with those *that are not seen*.

### 1. *The Broken Window*

Have you ever been witness to the fury of that solid citizen, James Goodfellow,\* when his incorrigible son has happened to break a pane of glass? If you have been present at this spectacle, certainly you must also have observed that the onlookers, even if there are as many as thirty of them, seem with one accord to offer the unfortunate owner the selfsame consolation: "It's an ill wind that blows nobody some good. Such accidents keep industry going. Everybody has to make a living. What would become of the glaziers if no one ever broke a window?"

Now, this formula of condolence contains a whole theory that it is a good idea for us to expose, *flagrante delicto*, in this very simple case, since it is exactly the same as that which, unfortunately, underlies most of our economic institutions.

Suppose that it will cost six francs to repair the damage. If you mean that the accident gives six francs' worth of encouragement to the aforesaid industry, I agree. I do not contest it in any way; your reasoning is correct. The glazier will come, do his job, receive six francs, congratulate himself, and bless in his heart the careless child. *That is what is seen*.

But if, by way of deduction, you conclude, as happens only too often, that it is good to break windows, that it helps to circulate money, that it results in encouraging industry in general, I am obliged to cry out: That will never do! Your theory stops at *what is seen*. It does not take account of *what is not seen*.

*It is not seen* that, since our citizen has spent six francs for one thing, he will not be able to spend them for another. *It is not seen* that if he had not had a windowpane to replace, he would have replaced, for example, his worn-out shoes or added another book to his library. In brief, he would have put his six francs to some use or other for which he will not now have them.

Let us next consider industry *in general*. The window having been broken, the glass industry gets six francs' worth of encouragement; *that is what is seen*.

\* [In French, *Jacques Bonhomme*, used like "John Bull" in English to represent the practical, responsible, unassuming average man.—TRANSLATOR.]

If the window had not been broken, the shoe industry (or some other) would have received six francs' worth of encouragement; *that is what is not seen.*

And if we were to take into consideration *what is not seen*, because it is a negative factor, as well as *what is seen*, because it is a positive factor, we should understand that there is no benefit to industry *in general* or to *national employment* as a whole, whether windows are broken or not broken.

Now let us consider James Goodfellow.

On the first hypothesis, that of the broken window, he spends six francs and has, neither more nor less than before, the enjoyment of one window.

On the second, that in which the accident did not happen, he would have spent six francs for new shoes and would have had the enjoyment of a pair of shoes as well as of a window.

Now, if James Goodfellow is part of society, we must conclude that society, considering its labors and its enjoyments, has lost the value of the broken window.

From which, by generalizing, we arrive at this unexpected conclusion: "Society loses the value of objects unnecessarily destroyed," and at this aphorism, which will make the hair of the protectionists stand on end: "To break, to destroy, to dissipate is not to encourage national employment," or more briefly: "Destruction is not profitable."

What will the *Moniteur industriel* \* say to this, or the disciples of the estimable M. de Saint-Chamans, † who has calculated with such precision what industry would gain from the burning of Paris, because of the houses that would have to be rebuilt?

I am sorry to upset his ingenious calculations, especially since their spirit has passed into our legislation. But I beg him to begin them again, entering *what is not seen* in the ledger beside *what is seen.*

The reader must apply himself to observe that there are not only two people, but three, in the little drama that I have pre-

\* [Newspaper of the Committee for the Defense of Domestic Industry, a protectionist organization.—TRANSLATOR.]

† [Auguste, Vicomte de Saint-Chamans (1777-1861), Deputy and Councillor of State under the Restoration, protectionist and upholder of the balance of trade. His celebrated stand on the "obstacle" here quoted by Bastiat comes from his *Nouvel essai sur la richesse des nations*, 1824. This work was later (1852) incorporated in his *Traité d'économie politique*.—TRANSLATOR.]

sented. The one, James Goodfellow, represents the consumer, reduced by destruction to one enjoyment instead of two. The other, under the figure of the glazier, shows us the producer whose industry the accident encourages. The third is the shoemaker (or any other manufacturer) whose industry is correspondingly discouraged by the same cause. It is this third person who is always in the shadow, and who, personifying *what is not seen*, is an essential element of the problem. It is he who makes us understand how absurd it is to see a profit in destruction. It is he who will soon teach us that it is equally absurd to see a profit in trade restriction, which is, after all, nothing more nor less than partial destruction. So, if you get to the bottom of all the arguments advanced in favor of restrictionist measures, you will find only a paraphrase of that common cliché: "*What would become of the glaziers if no one ever broke any windows?*"

Bastiat, in what has been quoted, is explicit on what is the proper function of a good economist, namely, to see not only obvious effects of a deed, but the non-obvious and future effects. If that is the function of economists and the purpose of their science, should not economics be "drafted" by theologians to contribute importantly to the ethics of Christianity?

This is especially true when it is insisted that Christian ethics should be normative and authoritative in regard to the relationships of men to things. That is exactly what the Social Gospel proposes to do -- to legislate and be coercive regarding the relationships of men to things and goods.

The Social Gospel, in a sense, enlarges the field of ethics; it says: Because ethics pertains to the relationships of men to men, then we will enlarge the field to include the relationships of men to things, because the relationships of men to things admittedly complicate the relationships of men to men. And so economics must at least be considered to be a science supplementary to ethics.

We believe that Bastiat submits important ideas, to wit:

1. There are both good and bad economics.
2. The less-meritorious economics reasons rather much from first and obvious phenomena in the relationships of men to things and goods, and derivatively of the relationships of men to each other; the more-meritorious economics endeavors to take a longer view and seeks to foresee consequences which are hidden and delayed.

To those propositions, we add the idea that the long view of trustworthy economics ought naturally to agree with any ethics that lays claim to "divine" origin, because the Almighty must surely take all effects into consideration -- the delayed and nonobvious effects as well as early and obvious effects.

### VIII Selfishness May Be Sin, But Not Necessarily

Two men, one of them young, were finishing having coffee together.

The younger man was vigorously defending his regular emphasis in sermons and public prayers, that "selfishness is sin." He indicated that he had learned that principle in college and seminary and that he accepted it as truth; every man, he said, must undertake to be the keeper of all other men; such, he insisted, was the quintessence of "brotherly love," according to Hebrew-Christian ethics. In the modern world, he declared, the prevalence of selfishness was evidence of the absence of brotherly love.

The other man, irritated, answered: "Selfishness is not sin, whenever the pursuit of selfishness involves neither violence, nor fraud, nor theft. It is specifically only the disobedience to the Decalogue that is sin -- such as violence, coercion, deception, and alienation of wife and goods. You in effect think and say that the mere pursuit of what a person prefers more to what he prefers less makes selfishness bad.

"Where does Scripture declare that preferring something more compared with preferring something less is SIN? Nothing in Scripture declares such a 'pious' and necessarily unnatural (and eventually always hypocritical) proposition. To teach broadly that all selfishness is sin is to be so ridiculous that the Christian religion becomes legitimately an object of universal derision.

"But an individual's pursuit of objectives which is implemented by violation of the Second Table of the Law -- that is indeed SIN. Your position, sir, is immeasurably broader than that, namely, for you selfishness itself is sin, rather than the wrong way to pursue self-regarding and self-evaluated interests."

The two men got up to leave. The speaker repeated himself: "Selfishness is sin when and only when you implement your selfishness by disobedience to the Decalogue of Moses; no pursuit of what you prefer more to

what you prefer less is intrinsically sin. All selfishness is, I well know, sin for a socialist as you are; whereas only some selfishness is sin for a Calvinist as I am."

## IX The Social Gospel and Religious Intellectuals

The prosperity of the Social Gospel has shown that there are open spots in the defenses of the Gospel. Spokesmen for the Gospel, if they were not in the rut of Traditionalism, would have cracked down on the Social Gospel with power and conviction.

That some denominations have an experience with the Social Gospel at this late date and in a virulent form is evidence that they have been living a sheltered or an isolated life; or a life that has been patently in the rear of intellectual change. It will be helpful to understand how the Social Gospel is currently overwhelming one staid denomination.

1. There are the masses of mankind, of which most men, including this writer, are members.

2. There are, secondly, the original thinkers, the real experts, the few individuals who make a genuine contribution to new knowledge. Often, these men are solitary researchers and thinkers who make sacrifices of material rewards in their search for truth and knowledge. Their chances of fame are greater after their lifetime than during it.

3. There is also an important third category, above the masses, but disparate from the original thinkers. Men in this category have been known in the past as intelligentsia, but presently they are known as intellectuals. They are the people who really influence, by their extraordinary communication skills, what the masses think; and also what the original thinkers think outside the field of their own specialty.

The intellectuals are dealers in secondhand ideas; they do not think the new ideas or do the research themselves; but they are so intelligent that they can understand what the original thinkers are saying, and they popularize those new ideas or findings. In a sense, they are "junk dealers" in ideas, because their material is secondhand, or if you wish to change the figure of speech, they are wholesalers or retailers of ideas "manufactured" by somebody else; or in still another metaphor, they are advertising agents for the ideas of original thinkers.

The future of every church is determined, not in a short span of time by its greatest men, but by its intellectuals, the men who sort out new ideas and who promote some among them.

A seminary may have some original thinker with a powerful mind. He may not be a good lecturer or popular with the students; but his eventual fame is likely to last long. In the same seminary other faculty members may be intellectuals, perhaps the best lecturers and most highly honored members in the denomination.

The Social Gospel is already three-quarters of a century old. The Social Gospel, coming now in the 1970s into a denomination, will therefore be coming in this instance via intellectuals and not through original thinkers.

Social Gospel intellectuals, as intellectuals have been defined, have certain characteristics:

1. They seek popularity; they aim to participate in the "wave of the future." They have a liking for ideas which in the current environment can readily be promoted. The Social Gospel has parallel trends in the secular world, and religious intellectuals seek to combine the trends into a strong combination of strands.

2. What intellectuals know about the subjects they promote may not be extensive. Key items in the Social Gospel now being taught in a seminary (see Mailing Number Two, pages 4 and following) are: "racial discrimination, juvenile delinquency and rising crime rate," which are all subjects on which theologians have at best secondhand knowledge; "air pollution, water pollution, erosion, deforestation," on which theological professors will ordinarily know even less; and then there are "racism, old versus young, progressive versus conservative, those who favor change versus those who favor the status quo," regarding which theological knowledge will hardly be helpful; and "problems involving sex and the family: the sexual revolution, the rising divorce rate, abortion and illegitimacy" -- now in a theological faculty, who would be the real experts, the original thinkers on these subjects? And then the "use of drugs, problems involved in national and international affairs: civil rights, gun control, political corruption, war, the draft, conscientious objectors, disarmament, overpopulation and famine." It is somewhat improbable that the theologians would be "original thinkers" on these subjects.

3. It is not necessary for an intellectual to be a real expert in ideas in order to perform his function

in society excellently. The qualifications of an intellectual consist principally in his mastery of rhetoric, or his speaking and writing capability, and the wide range of subjects on which he can talk or write facily. He does not need to be a man who is even relatively early in finding new and popular ideas; he can be late, as is true in the situation cited in Mailing Number Two.

4. A successful intellectual avoids currently unpopular ideas. He espouses what is "in the air," and what is "fashionable." SOCIAL ACTION, HUNDRED NINETEEN is itself, by definition, a dealer in secondhand ideas -- we have no original thoughts -- but this publication does not qualify as an intellectual in the sponsorship of popular ideas; it is sponsoring unpopular ideas.

5. Intellectuals are temperamentally fickle. When conservatives are in control, they out-do the conservatives. Soon, thereafter, when liberal ideas seem to be acceptable, it is amazing what an about-face intellectuals make.

6. A typical intellectual will be sentimental. He will be generous and magnanimous; discipline he will suspect of being unloving.

7. Intellectuals are instinctively dissatisfied with what is. They want something better, a noteworthy merit on their part; the world does need improvement. But their means of improvement may be means not effective for the ends they have in mind; on this they may not be accurate.

8. Intellectuals are the natural teachers of the young. The young are idealistic; they listen better to the critics of whatever exists than to the defenders of the status quo. The young prefer the visionaries, whether it be on pollution, gun control, or abortion.

9. Intellectuals tend to close ranks in defense of radicals. The radicals may involve the intellectuals in trouble, but the radicals constitute a shelter for the intellectuals; a more moderate stance of an intellectual is more easily defended when some radical has taken an even stronger stand. The most steadfast support radicals receive will come from intellectuals.

10. It is the intellectuals who lead the world from one extreme to the next. They are not cautious thinkers. Many changes in history, professedly good, have been brought on by powerful dictators or by clever intellectuals, but what they have built has decayed because it was overdone.

One intellectual is more influential than a thousand of the masses (the grass roots folk) in the struggle between ideas.

## X The Cart Before the Horse, or the Use of "Love" to Explain the Decalogue

Does love explain the Decalogue; or does the Decalogue explain love? (The love referred to is the scriptural notion of brotherly or neighborly love -- to "love the neighbor as yourself"; not sexual attraction.)

This problem was already clearly stated in Old Testament times. In the time of Jesus Christ the problem had a new vogue, and Scribes and Pharisees asked Christ what "brotherly love" was. Christ answered by quoting the Law, which he then summarized (not as an explanation) by saying (Matthew 22:37-40):

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

SOCIAL ACTION, HUNDRED NINETEEN holds that the law explains love; it believes that the "explanation" cannot be the other way around. (See the next mailing.)

The word, love, must be explained somehow; as a sound it is a mere air vibration coming out between a person's teeth; it "tells" nothing explicitly. But if the Decalogue is what counts, then "love" can acquire definitive meaning.

As a man defines "love," so he will be a proponent of the Social Gospel, or an opponent. It should be shown that the definition of "love" in the Social Gospel is inconsistent with Old Testament or New Testament definitions of love.

Whoever will not carefully define "brotherly love" according to both Old and New Testaments will have difficulty to escape the morass of the Social Gospel.



## XI What Should LAW Be?

In a historical novel, The Gamester by Rafael Sabatini, about John Law, adventurer and economist, a high French official is made to say:

"There are no laws to permit anything. Laws are made only to prohibit. As a lawyer, Monsieur le President, you should know that." [Emphasis added.]

That fundamental idea has for centuries and in all kinds of circumstances been more or less clearly "sensed," if not genuinely understood.

Good laws prohibit what is experienced to be evil. The rest is or should be left free. A man should be permitted to be free regarding how good he will be. No good society can be lax or fail to enforce any law forbidding evil, as laws against violence, theft and fraud; but no good society can specify how much an individual man should be compelled to engage in "doing good."

The denomination of which the writer is a member declares that discipline is one of the hallmarks of a true church. Historically, this denomination has disciplined violence, adultery, theft, falsehood -- overt deeds against the Decalogue.

But this denomination does not discipline a member for not doing enough "good."

The church has a quota system for various denominational causes. But the Synod (General Assembly) has repeatedly decided that it should not endeavor to enforce those quotas against Classes (a Classis is a regional assembly). Nor may a Classis enforce the quota against a specific congregation. Nor may a congregation enforce the quota against an individual member. In short, in this denomination a member may properly be disciplined for doing specified evils, but he is not disciplined for not being "good enough." To enforce "to be good enough" is to toy with tyranny. The denomination has been too wise to attempt it.

Similarly, the denomination has avoided sumptuary laws. It has no enforceable discipline against card-playing, theater attendance, and dancing. The denomination has warned strongly and even stridently against those practices, but is most reluctant to undertake discipline.

These policies are founded on a fundamental distinction already indicated in the foregoing quotation from The Gamester, to wit: To permit something is not a

proper subject for legislation; laws should be made only to prohibit; everything else should be left alone to be voluntary and "free."

One distinction between the Historic Gospel and the Social Gospel is that the Historic Gospel restricts itself to prohibitions, but that the Social Gospel extends its ethical teachings to making the doing of various kinds of positive good compulsory.

Scripture forbids the doing of evil, and urges -- but does no more than urge -- the doing of positive good. The Apostle Paul made that distinction in his Epistle to the Galatians, in Chapter 5. He urges the "positive" virtues. He writes in verses 19 through 23 (quoted from the New English Bible):

"Anyone can see the kind of behavior that belongs to the lower nature: fornication, impurity, and indecency; idolatry and sorcery; quarrels, a contentious temper, envy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, party intrigues and jealousies; drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who behave in such ways will never inherit the kingdom of God. [They will be disciplined out of it by God Himself.]

"But the harvest of the spirit is [the positive virtues of] love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control."

And then Paul adds the significant words:

"There is no law dealing with [compelling ?] such things as these." [Emphasis added.]

That is to say: You cannot require (i.e., exercise discipline to constrain people to) "love, peace, etc." by law. We are admonished to do good; we are chastened by the Lord to do more good; we are taught to do well; but we are not forced in the Christian religion to "do positive good." Deeds in the "positive good" category are ornaments to Christians; but how much positive good to do is a matter of Christian liberty.

The Social Gospel shifts the emphasis; it proposes to make the doing of a positive good obligatory and disciplinary. The Historic Gospel has the contrary emphasis: You must be born again; you must have a new will to obey the commandments of God; as for "positive good" it urges that upon you in season and out of season, but it authorizes no other man or institution to specify how much of a positive good you must do.

That distinction may not appear to be fundamental or even significant, but it will be shown in later issues that it is crucial to the maintenance of Biblical ethics and a sound social system.

That requiring the doing of positive good may appear to be meritorious is not disputed; the rebuttal in SOCIAL ACTION, HUNDRED NINETEEN will be that it is sanctimonious, tyrannical, feckless and contrary-to-purpose. The use of such a means, namely, compelling the doing of positive good, is not suited to the aim -- the end -- of having a "good society."

## XII What Saves?

The Christian church has been much preoccupied about people "being saved."

Here are three answers given:

1. Men are to be saved by their individual "good works"; or,
2. Men are to be saved by the "grace" of God; or,
3. Men are to be saved by being provided with a better environment.

There may be some overlapping, but these are three different religions.

If you believe in a religion of "works," you look to yourself for improvement.

If you believe in a religion of "grace," you look to a miracle of God to rescue you.

If you believe in the Social Gospel, you rely on others to save you

- (1) collectively, by laws which compel others to work for you; or
- (2) individually, by charity that is voluntary.

This better environment way may be viewed as the ideal; it is here and now; and you do not need to discipline or exert yourself; others are to do that; nor do you need "grace."

It may be possible to pair "good works" and "grace" in some manner; but the "better environment" way is too different to be synthetically usable.

The premises -- works, grace, environment -- on which hopes are built for a better society, and an eventual good future, are of real importance.

### XIII Summary

In the foregoing, what is it that has been recommended as effective methods for modernizing the approach to solutions of religious problems in the late twentieth century?

The answers (merely illustrative or indicative) have been:

1. First, it is a question of "approach," and attitude of mind. Whoever has not (in a figure of speech) backed away from what he was taught as a child, in order to get it in broad perspective and have a critical approach, will have the wrong attitude. He must aim to be both objective and critical.
2. Second, vague ideas should be summarily dismissed, such as the vague statement, Am I my brother's keeper? The method of "vagueness" will yield nothing of value.
3. The analysis must shift from challenges of conclusions to probing of premises, especially in order to seek out nonobvious premises. Discussions on ethics should not neglect explicit statements regarding what the premises are.
4. It is an error to "halt" between two opinions, to straddle conflicting ideas, and to be afraid of bold conclusions; society is necessarily a contract society or a violent society. A half-way acceptance of a contract society is indefensible, and unBiblical.
5. Revelation cannot survive without "reason"; that is, Revelation needs a common-sense interpretation; in other words, an interpretation of Scripture should be based on logic (rather than illogic). (Some matters in Christianity are extra-logical or supra-logical, that is, matters of faith.)
6. Cosmological questions on the relationships of men to things are antecedent to ethical questions on the relationships of men to each other. Economics deals with the relationships of men to things. Ethics without economics will therefore be rather rootless, especially as Scripture indicates that the "origin of sin" lies in the relationships of men to things.
7. A "science" that can be helpful to a rational interpretation of Scripture is economics. Sociology has a methodology that makes it of little help as an aid to ethics.

8. One touchstone on whether a man holds to the Social Gospel is simply: Does he declare that Selfishness is Sin? If that is his premise of what is wrong with society -- Selfishness! -- then he holds to the Social Gospel, and is a woeful reasoner.

9. Present-day advocates of the Social Gospel are intellectuals, that is, they are not "original thinkers," but dealers in ideas that to them are secondhand. Therefore, it is necessary to bypass the intellectuals and go to prime thinkers and to Revelation.

10. Terms must be developed (defined) in order to evaluate the Social Gospel. Some advocates of the Social Gospel are men who now do not go beyond nomenclature, that is, mere words; sounds without meaning; words without definitions. The Social Gospel by declaring that "love is the real explanation" of the Decalogue (rather than a metaphorical statement) gets the cart before the horse, because brotherly love was defined by Christ as keeping the Second Table of the Law.

In Mailing Number One we outlined a program.

In Mailing Number Two we stated a problem and illustrated it.

In Mailing Number Three we have referred to centuries-old methods of approach.

Beginning with the next issue, it is proposed to deal with the substance of the problem.

### **Appendix: Benefits From Broad Reading Habits**

There is a process by which men move apart, and after some time find themselves to be so different that they look upon each other with amazement and ill will, and develop despair about the capability of future cooperation.

The consequence of that is that men either separate themselves without revealing their profound sense of alienation, and then go their separate ways; or else they dispute with each other with mounting anger and become avowed ideological enemies. A by-product is that they have contempt for each other. No friendship can survive mutual contempt.

The fact is that members of the same religious denomination can become almost irreconcilably alienated by differing on ethical ideas.

The socialist (collectivist) members of such a denomination will berate the individualist (anti-collectivist) members as being "unbrotherly" and gross sinners. The individualist members, those who hold that they are not their "brother's keeper" in a socialist sense, will react indignantly; many of them will not know what their defense against that charge should be; instead, they will have recourse to tight-lipped dissent and will be deeply irritated; whenever they partake together in a joint communion service, they will have had such a subtraction from their good will to their collectivist "brethren" that the communion will not be two things, (1) something done in remembrance of Christ, and (2) a re-cementing of fraternal ties with the other communicants; instead, communion will be at most number one only -- in memory of Christ; but a firming of the bond of brotherly fellowship will not be furthered.

When a clergyman preaches either altruism or individualism, he talks only to one of two classes in his audience; never to both; what he gains among some, he loses among others. If there continues to be talk of brotherly love, it will at best be generalities and platitudes; there will be little reality or morality in the words used to gloss over differences which are irreconcilable.

Neither a denomination nor a congregation can survive a disagreement as basic as altruism versus individualism. Either the individualists must be converted to altruism and then altruism will be accepted in order to establish a new kind of unity; or else the altruists must be converted to individualism and then individualism will be accepted in order to establish that kind of harmony.

Intellectually self-conscious altruism and similar individualism have not been able to live together.

Then the question arises, how and why have the individualists and the altruists drifted so far apart?

The answers are several; only one will be considered here, namely, selection of reading material.

Many individualists have passed through several stages in their intellectual history. (1) They grew up in a religious environment which had never really felt the impact of Marx and socialism, and which consequently was ambiguous on the issue between individualism and altruism, but which leaned toward individualism in the tradition of the historic church. (2) Then they went off to school and imbibed altruism from professors discontented with the individualistic structure of society. In denominational schools the original ambiguity continued,

but emphases lately have been strongly away from individualism toward altruism. (Altruism now is dominant in many religious schools.) (3) But the wheel of change kept turning. Out in the world of reality (buffeted by individualistic competition, while developing their independence of judgment, and becoming aware that it must be either individualism or altruism because they are opposites, and that it is illogical to halt between the two), these men have veered back to individualism, because they consider altruism to be a logical absurdity -- a fine emotion but without other merit.

The writer has himself experienced that sequence, namely, from ambiguity, to altruism, to individualism; he learned of the strengths of altruism from his college education; and of its weaknesses from his later experiences.

But what may be observed on all sides? That men hold altruist ideas because they are ignorant for what individualism stands, and for what it does not stand.

An important factor in determining whether a man is an altruist or an individualist is: What does he read?

If a man reads or hears only altruist historians, essayists, news commentators, teachers and preachers, he naturally is an altruist, and uninformed of and unfavorable to individualism.

Therefore, in order deliberately to counterbalance that, individualist authors will be quoted in SOCIAL ACTION, HUNDRED NINETEEN.

In this issue we have quoted Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, concerning whom Dean Lipton in the October 1967 issue of The Freeman wrote under the title, "The Man Who Answered Marx" (see offer next page):

"In a major sense, ... Böhm-Bawerk was the man who answered Marx."

Böhm-Bawerk is one of the great men in the history of economics. He was twice Minister of Finance for the Austro-Hungarian empire, and served with illustrious distinction. He had a powerful and subtle mind.

We have also quoted from Frédéric Bastiat, whose family largely obtained its livelihood in the port city of Bayonne, France. The Bastiats prospered or suffered depending on the amount of international trade going through Bayonne in and out of France; and so Frédéric became a Free Trader. But he saw not only the advantages of international free trade, but the inestimable advantage of freedom in general, which has the greatest of all merits according to individualist thinking.

If a reader has skipped the quoted material on pages 40 to 43, he is implored to turn back and read it now. Bastiat was not the greatest economist the world has produced, but Frederick A. von Hayek has written of him (from Introduction to Selected Essays of Political Economy by Frédéric Bastiat, The Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York 10533):

"Even those who may question the eminence of Frédéric Bastiat as an economic theorist will grant that he was a publicist of genius. Joseph Schumpeter calls him 'the most brilliant economic journalist who ever lived.'"

If a man undertakes to read as much individualist material as altruist material, his eventual position can be forecast, namely, he will be an individualist; because the description of reality and the reasoning in individualism are better than in altruism.

In future issues other great individualist writers interested in peace among men, in prosperity, in freedom, and in sound universal principles in ethics, will regularly be quoted.

The moral is simple: What men read and hear has a big effect on what they think.

(A reprint of "The Man Who Answered Marx" by Dean Lipton, referred to on page 55, is available free to readers who request it.)

---

## **Social Action, Hundred Nineteen**

**Post Office Box 218**

**South Holland, Illinois 60473, USA**

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

