

BOOK REVIEW

LIRE BASTIAT: SCIENCE SOCIALE ET LIBÉRALISME

ROBERT LEROUX
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In the wake of the bicentenary of his birth, Frédéric Bastiat (1801–1850), his achievements, and his legacy have been reconsidered by scholars all over the western world. At the same time, his works and the secondary literature have become widely accessible through the Internet. Robert Leroux exploits these new sources and tools with great dexterity in his *Lire Bastiat (Reading Bastiat)*. He has written a comprehensive introduction to Bastiat's life and works, presenting the main themes of his contributions and referring to the relevant sources (English and French) in a great number of meticulous footnotes.

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The book is organized into eight chapters, covering Bastiat's biographical background (chap. I, 30 pp.), his correspondence with Cobden and others (chap. II, 20 pp.), the Anglo-Saxon inspiration of his thought (chap. III, 20 pp.), the central role of economic science (chap. IV, 24 pp.), his historical scholarship (chap. V, 20 pp.), debates on free trade, free press, socialism, and banking (chap. VI, 28 pp.), the state and legal exploitation (chap. VII, 16 pp.), and social harmonies and economic harmonies (chap. VIII, 30 pp.). The book also features a 21-page bibliography and a 5-page name index.

Whereas English translations of Bastiat's works had been in print, and attracted a readership in the United States nearly all through the 20th century (a translation of his collected works appeared in March 2011 from Liberty Fund under the editorship of Jacques de Guenin), French intellectuals have neglected and often despised their famous countryman, to the point that he had fallen into almost complete oblivion after World War II. It is therefore remarkable that a work as the present one now appears in the French language and with a prestigious academic publisher. This is not only a testimony to the quality of Leroux's book, but also to work of Florin Aftalion, Pascal Salin, Jacques Garelli, Jacques de Guenin, Georges Lane, and other economists and philosophers from Bastiat's native France, who in the past 25 years have prepared the ground.

Leroux is right on target in emphasizing the affinity between Bastiat's writings and the works of the Austrian School, quoting Mises, Hayek, as well as contemporary authors such as Mark Thornton and Thomas DiLorenzo to make his case. He is less successful in his stress on the unity of thought connecting Bastiat's advocacy of particular policies with his more scholarly work. It is not quite clear why this point has to be stressed at all. Even Bastiat's detractors do not deny such unity; typically they merely call his scholarship unoriginal or shallow. Unfortunately, Leroux has nothing to offer in response to this point. The book cover states he would stress Bastiat's scientific contributions, but in the book itself Leroux only insinuates that such contributions exist. As a matter of fact, he does not even try to argue for his contention, which would have drawn him into a much wider

project, critically reviewing classical economics and the writing of Bastiat's contemporaries in particular.

Despite this slight shortcoming and a few misstatements (for example, on p. 201, he writes that Cairnes had "stressed the importance" of Bastiat's works, whereas the article he quotes is an all-out attack on the scientific merit of Bastiat's policy views) Leroux's book is excellent as an introduction to Bastiat's thought and to the literature on this topic. All readers will benefit from his scholarship.