Episode 957: The Frederic Bastiat You Never Knew: The Incredible Life and Extraordinary Work of a Great Classical Liberal

Guest: David M. Hart

WOODS: I think almost everybody loves Frederic Bastiat when they get to read him, but the shame is that a lot of people read *The Law*, which is a great little classic, and they're familiar with the analysis in "What Is Seen and What Is Not Seen," but I bet most people don't realize that you could fill potentially six volumes with the work of Frederic Bastiat. You would know very well, wouldn't you?

HART: I certainly do, yes. I've counted on my word processing file over a million words that he wrote in a very short space of time, which is quite remarkable. When I first discovered Bastiat, I was a teenager growing up in the suburbs of Sydney in Australia, and I'd come across the writings of Ayn Rand and Murray Rothbard. I read Mises, and of course then I read Bastiat. I remember buying his books from Laissez Faire Books. And I read the FEE editions, which is less than half of what he wrote in his lifetime. And I read him and I thought he was a very clever and funny journalist, but that's all. I sort of took the Hayek line that he was just a good journalist and nothing much of a theorist until Liberty Fund's project to translate his entire works came across my path and I reread Bastiat in the original, all one million words. And I thought, my God, this man is much, much more than a journalist.

WOODS: Right. Now, I think my friend Marc Thornton came to that position as well, that we think of him as having been a very skilled popularizer — nothing wrong with that. That's a wonderful service that we need. But when he was in fact much more than that, he deserves the full credit. Now, as you've gone through and read all this material, what would you say are the lost works of Bastiat that it's the biggest shame people don't know about?

HART: I think the way he was able to combine at least three or four sets of activities. He wasn't just a journalist and a popularizer. He went to Paris quite late in life. He was 44, and he discovered Richard Cobden and the Corn Wall League's activities in England, and he was passionate about setting up a free trade movement in France. And he started writing to Cobden and wrote a wonderful book about Cobden and the strategy that the Anti-Corn Law League was using to bring about free trade in England. That was his first book, and that's never been translated. And the first hundred pages of that book written by Bastiat is his strategizing about how to change France from a highly protectionist country to a free trade country. So that's interesting. He's a strategic thinker.

He then goes to Paris and he sets up this free trade movement. So he's an agitator, he's a public speaker, he goes to meetings, he lobbies the Parliament. So he's an activist. That's sort of like one of his lesser known activities. The Revolution of 1848 breaks out in February, and he then becomes a politician and he gets elected to represent the region of France he comes from, which was the South West part, Gascony. And he becomes a very successful politician. He's the Vice President of the Finance Committee of the Chamber. So I've come across a number of his speeches in the Parliament which have never been translated before, and they're hard-hitting and very interesting.

Then his third sort of activity was during the revolution, he was actually on the streets of Paris handing out little revolutionary magazine urging the working class not to be seduced by socialism. And he gets caught up in the crossfire between the troops who are suppressing the rioters and the rioters. So he's a sort of street fighting economist, which I'd never come across that before. And then he's also writing this whole series of anti-socialist pamphlets during 1848-49. I've counted about 12, and not all of them have been translated. And they're wonderful attacks on every aspect of socialism you could imagine.

And then sort of the final part of his life is as a theorist. While he's doing all these things, being constantly distracted by politics and revolution and so on, he's trying to write his treatise on economics, and he has — I would describe him as a proto-Austrian or perhaps also a proto-public choice theorist. And the tragedy of course is he never finishes that project and dies a very painful death far too young.

WOODS: Indeed, yeah, I think his dates are — just from memory, is it 1801 to 1850?

HART: Yeah, he's 49. And it's interesting that he — I'm trying to figure out why he left his quiet backwater in the South West of France at the age of 44 to start a whole new career. He was quite well off. He was a landowner. He earned enough money to pay taxes that would allow him to vote. That was only about 2% of the population that earned enough money to vote before 1848. So I don't know why he left that very comfortable life. It must have been a passion of some kind. He wanted to bring free trade to France. But anyway, he pulls up his roots and moves to Paris at his relatively advanced age — I mean, most people didn't live to be 50 — and has a whole new career. I think also possibly he knew he was dying. He had a throat condition, which I think was throat cancer, not tuberculosis, which is the common explanation for his death, and I think he knew that if he didn't do something — I think he knew he had a book in his head that he could write and if he didn't do something to get out of his little backwater, it would never get written.

WOODS: Now, Liberty Fund has done collected works of a lot of people, and indeed, people who died not even all that long ago. But in that case, it's a matter of collecting them, organizing them, introducing them, and publishing. But here it's also a massive translation project, so are you going to be bringing into the English-speaking world a lot of material we've never read before in English? Is that the idea?

HART: Oh yes, at least twice what FEE had translated. For example, Volume 1 of that collection is his correspondence, so that's never been translated before, and that's

fascinating because it shows us the personal side of Bastiat. And in my talk, I said he was the unseen radical, and it's in his correspondence where a lot of that comes out.

Just to step back a little bit, he had a curiosity that was almost insatiable. When he was a young man, he inherited property from his grandfather. He was only 25. And he and some neighbors set up sort of like a book club or a discussion group, and they met on a regular basis. And we know from his letters that he was reading economics and social theory and was a supporter of free trade. But what I didn't know until I read his correspondence carefully was that he read practically everything that had been written in economics in four different languages. He spoke obviously French, but he spoke English, Italian, and Spanish, and so he was sitting in his little backwater for 20 years reading nothing but economics. So when he comes to Paris at the age of 44, 45, it's ready to come pouring out. It's quite remarkable.

WOODS: That is — boy, you've given us so much to talk about here, I hardly know where to begin. When you said that he was trying to persuade the working class that it would be wrong to let themselves be seduced by socialism, I'm curious about some of the arguments he would make to them, because that's an argument a lot of people find it hard to make, because the socialists sound like they're making an argument for the working classes. Superficially, that's exactly what they're doing. How do you counter that and how did he counter that?

HART: Well, the famous essay that he wrote at the time was "The State," and the interesting thing was that that pamphlet that we know and love was originally written as a short article in one of his revolutionary street magazines. He started two during the revolution, one in February, which was a daily. And he and Molinari and a few other friends published this and handed it out on the streets of Paris, and they also made posters, which they would stick up all over the walls. Because censorship had collapsed, and so there was complete freedom of speech, and so all the socialists and all the radical groups and the democrats and republicans and liberals like Molinari and Bastiat were just sticking up posters all over the town, handing out leaflets on the streets and everything like that. He had a second one in June, which was called *Jacques Bonhomme* after one of his favorite fictional characters.

And it's in *Jacques Bonhomme* that he writes an early draft of "The State," which you can find in Volume 2 of our collection — a draft. And what he does is he lists all the things that the people are wanting the government to do for them, and he says, How is the government going to pay for this? It's going to tax you. It's going to regulate your life. It's going to take away economic opportunity. You are the ones who are going to pay for this. And eventually he comes up with this famous bet, you know, that he'll give 40,000 francs to whoever comes up with a good definition of the state, which he does in the extended version of this essay, which becomes the essay that we know as "The State," where he says the state is the great fiction where everyone tries to live at the expense of everyone else.

But his basic argument was that what you're asking the government to do is reduce economic opportunity, which will hurt you in the long run, and you will then end up paying most of the taxes, because they don't have an income tax. It's all indirect taxes. And he says it's the tax on salt, it's the tax on meat, it's the tax on

bread, it's the tax on wine, it's the tax on sending letters in the mail. He says it's the working class who pay all these taxes, and he said that's why you're being exploited.

WOODS: I'm also intrigued by Bastiat as a strategist, because that's also something that we struggle with today. We feel like we have a really compelling worldview, and we feel like we've got the right way to think about the economy, and yet it seems like we're a million miles from where we want to be. And it seems as if we would need an extremely educated populace even to have any hope of making any progress. So what did he think about this, about what we should be doing, or at least about what France should be doing?

HART: Well, he was inspired by the Anti-Corn Law League in England. They had adopted some of the first examples of modern lobbying and popular protest that's ever occurred, things like mass meetings, collecting tens of thousands of signatures and dumping them on the steps of Parliament to put pressure on politicians, having public talks across the country and selling merchandise. I mean, I had no idea that Cobden did this. You could buy all sorts of merchandise like envelopes and letters and plates and little bust figures of Cobden, which they used to raise money. And Bastiat reads about all this and says, My God, we should do the same in France.

So it was partly much more sophisticated use of the technology of cheap printing. In England they were cutting the cost of sending letters. The penny stamp had just come in in the late 1830s, early 1840s, and the Corn Law League was an early adopter of this to send out their propaganda cheaply all across England. And Bastiat wanted to do exactly the same thing in France, and so he was one of the great lobbyists for cutting the cost of — obviously sending letters in France was a monopoly, and the government also taxed it at a very high rate, and he wanted, a) to smash the French monopoly on the sending of letters, but also to drastically cut the tax so that propaganda could be sent cheaply throughout the country.

He also was really impressed with the way in which the Anti-Corn Law League used professional itinerant speakers to go all across the country giving lectures on free trade to mass audiences. And also the use of women. Women played a very important part in the Anti-Corn Law League propaganda. They would be people manning the tables, or in this case, womanning the tables, handing out the literature and selling the merchandise, and Bastiat wanted the stodgy French to get over their conventional attitudes about women in politics and to make use of some of the women supporters of free trade ideas.

WOODS: Let me ask you about some of his ideas. I've devoted an episode to the ideas of Bastiat myself, but I want to ask about in particular in *The Law* his concept of legal plunder. And here it's actually a very radical idea, because he's saying that in our private lives, we all more or less understand there are certain standards of behaviors we all have to abide by, and that includes keep your hands to yourself, whether it's physical force or looting somebody. But then when it turns to the government, we say that's legitimate. For some reason, it becomes legitimate because the government is doing it. But if that's his argument, how can he justify any taxation at all? And since he was not an outright anarchist, he must have favored some level of taxation.

HART: Yeah, he did, and I think Molinari pointed out this contradiction to him, so he knew about it.

WOODS: Really? I didn't even know they knew each other.

HART: Well, they were contemporaries. I mean, Molinari was 20 years younger than Bastiat, but they were both in Paris at the same time. Molinari was a young journalist when Bastiat arrived, and they became very close friends. And so when the revolution breaks out in February, Molinari goes to Bastiat and says, We've got to do something. Let's start a magazine and hand it out on the streets. And the two of them collaborated both in February and then again in June, starting two different little magazines. And they were out there in the streets together. So they were very close. And Molinari had some very interesting things to say about Bastiat in his obituary, which he wrote just after in 1851, which we can talk about later.

But to go back to this idea of plunder, Bastiat had been developing this idea for a few years before *The Law* appeared, so 1847, '46, perhaps, when he starts writing what would become his *Economic Sophisms*. He says we've got to use the right language to describe what the government's doing to us, and he says we have to use harsh and plain language. And what the government is doing, it's stealing from us. And so he came up with all these different words to describe what the government did, like filching, plundering, stealing. And he came up with this idea of extralegal plunder, which is what common criminals do, the highwayman does. We all think it's bad. But he said what the government does is legal plunder, and he says we've got to be very clear and we've got to use these words.

But it's only plunder if the government doesn't provide you with a service in return for what it takes, so that's where he gets out of that anarchist problem. Not everything the government does is bad, because it sometimes does provide a useful service, in his view, like providing police and defense services. But Bastiat's idea of the ideal tax — his ideal tax was a flat and very low income tax on everybody. Before you could move to that, he says we have a system which is heavily weighted in favor of indirect taxes and tariffs. He wanted to abolish indirect taxes on food, for example — salt, alcohol — and replace that with a 5% tariff. He thought a 5% tariff was a revenue tariff. Anything more than 5% was a protectionist tariff, and he wanted to reduce those tariffs to no more than 5%.

So he did see — but he wanted — I call him an ultraminimalist, because the things he wanted the government to do were extremely limited. One of his most radical economic sophisms is called "The Utopian," which he wrote in early 1847, and it's a fantasy of the king comes to an politician, which is obviously Bastiat, and says, I'm giving you dictatorial powers to change France in whatever direction you want. And this utopian politician starts dreaming about how many government departments he would abolish, how many taxes he would cut. And he goes on and on with this great list of slashing the government right down to the bone.

WOODS: You know, as I think about it, I just realize now I think it might be a bit inside baseball for both of us to talk about Molinari, because not everybody has heard of Molinari. Can you take a minute to tell people who Gustave de Molinari was, what his significance was?

HART: Well, Gustave de Molinari, like Bastiat, came from the provinces to Paris to make fame and fortune. And he's one of a group of half a dozen or so young people like that who came to Paris with radical, radical, new ideas about how the economy should work. A French historian by the name of Gérard Minart calls them the four musketeers of French political economy, but I think in fact there are seven. And I'll just — Molinari and Bastiat and another guy called Coquelin are particularly interesting, because I think there's a sociological phenomenon going on here. These are outsiders coming to Paris. They don't have family there. They don't have a network of friends. And they just think differently. And Coquelin, for example, was an advocate of free banking, very radical free banking, in order to smash the monopoly central bank and to have private banks issuing competitively their own currencies.

Molinari is a young man who comes and wants to privatize everything. He writes a book in 1849, which I'm translating and editing and Liberty Fund will publish called *Les Soirées de la Rue Saint-Lazare*, *Evenings on Saint Lazarus Street*, which Molinari writes in 1849, so during the revolutionary period. And every chapter of that book is an explanation of how public goods could be provided competitively on the free market. And Soirée 11 is the famous one where he talks about the private provision of police and defense services by insurance companies. And this has a profound impact on Rothbard when Rothbard is reading Molinari in the 1950s and '60s and obviously builds upon that.

And then you have Bastiat, who's from the South West of France. Coquelin comes from the North of France. Molinari comes from Liège in what would become Belgium. Bastiat comes from Gascony. And Bastiat has these radical notions about plunder and the state, and I would say subject value theory, so he was an early Austrian. So these three guys are all working together in Paris. There's another guy, Guillaumin, who's an older man who's the publisher. He's a bit like the Liberty Fund. His publishing publishes all the book that these economists are producing. He prints their journals and he arranges financing for all their activities, so he's a very important figure.

But these guys all come together and are working in the 1840s and are involved in the revolution, and then this quite remarkable group of people — I call them the Seven Musketeers. One guy dies in the cholera epidemic of 1849. Bastiat dies from throat cancer in 1850. Coquelin dies from a heart attack in 1852. Gustave de Molinari decides to leave Paris because he refuses to live under Napoleon and moves to Brussels and goes into kind of voluntary exile. So this extraordinary group of radical libertarians is dispersed and broken up, which sets back the French classical liberal movement by many, many years. So it's an exciting time. If I could ever get control of a *Doctor Who* episode, I'd take the TARDIS back to Paris in 1848 so I could meet some of these guys.

WOODS: Well, as a matter of fact, you did write a screenplay about the life of Bastiat. What does that look like?

HART: Oh, it's languishing here on my desk, actually. I was phoned up by a guy who said he was a film producer from Florida about two and half years ago, and he said, "Can you write a screenplay about the life of Bastiat?" And he says, "I think that'd be really interesting." And I said, "Well, I don't know anything about writing screenplays."

And he said, "Well, that's okay. Most of the people who give me screenplays don't know how to write screenplays either."

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah.

HART: So I took two years to write it, and it was wonderful, interesting experience. I'm not sure it's going to go anywhere. I think it's an unfilmable film because it's in the middle of a revolution and it's full of ideas, and films about ideas don't do very well.

Anyway, so what it made me do is to go back and read Bastiat's correspondence with a different set of spectacles. I read it as a historian of ideas, but now I was reading it as someone who wanted to write a story, so I was looking for drama, for personal details, for possible conflicts or romantic interests or whatever, whatever might make a good movie. And that was a wonderful experience. We don't know anything about his love life, but it was interesting to speculate about possible flirtations, which is the movie — or my script, anyway. I think he has a flirtation with one of the wives of the wealthy benefactors who helped subsidize the liberal movement in Paris.

One of them was a wealthy manufacturer, and his wife, Hortense, which is a great name for a French lover, ran a salon in Paris, and Paris used to go to that salon, we know from the correspondence. And he was one of the stars. I mean, this is another radical side of Bastiat. Hortense runs this swanky salon where all the rich and famous and the political elite attend, and Bastiat is regaling them with stories. He had a prodigious memory for poetry and drama. He used to recite poetry and scenes from Molière during the soirées. And he would sing songs. He was very interested in political songs and would sing songs that were banned or a bit bawdy and shock the guests. He was a very keen cello player, and he would quite often just start playing the cello and singing, much to the amusement of the people attending the salons.

So he was very interesting, anyway, so I invented a kind of flirtatious affair between him and Hortense. Hortense is interesting because when Bastiat was being constantly distracted from finishing the *Economic Harmonies*, Hortense, her husband arranged for Bastiat to have the use of a hunting lodge in a forest just outside of Paris. It still exists today and it's sort of a historic site. Anyway, they arranged for Bastiat to spend the summer of 1849 in this lodge so he could be secluded and no distractions. And he wrote most of the first volume of *Economic Harmonies* in this Butard hunting lodge in Paris because of the intervention of Hortense Cheuvreux, which I thought was fascinating. And then after Bastiat's death, like 28 years after his death, she publishes a book of his letters to her. So I think there was possibly some romantic attachment between the two. You know, why would you do that? So we include those letters in our Volume 1, which I think is also very interesting.

WOODS: Very interesting indeed. Now switching gears for a minute, what can you tell us about Bastiat as a theorist as opposed to just a popularizer?

HART: Yes, well, that was one of the biggest revelations to me when I looked at Bastiat more closely. See, so much is going on with his political activity, the free trade movement and then as an elected politician and all this journalism and so on, that he's constantly being distracted. But what you can do is you can see sort of elements of original thinking — and I have a list of them I could go through if you're

interested. But as I read all this stuff, I kept thinking, Oh, that's a very interesting insight. It was just like a throwaway line where he'd be talking about subjective value theory. And this kept happening so many times, I said this can't be an accident. If it happened once or twice, he's just lucky. He stumbles across an idea. But it kept happening again and again and again, and so I began compiling a list of some of the original ideas that he was coming up with. And it's very impressive, and they keep recurring. So I know he thought deeply about this.

In Volume 4, which I've just handed the final draft of the manuscript to our in-house editor, there is an essay that he wrote in early 1845. He writes a letter to the poet and politician Lamartine, where Lamartine seems to be advocating a socialist idea about workers having a right to a job. And Bastiat attacks him, which is quite a courageous thing to do, because Lamartine was considered to be a liberal hero at the time. And in this essay, which will be in our Volume 4, he comes up with about a dozen of these key original insights, all in the one essay. So it's my view that these ideas were in his head before he came to Paris. He'd been thinking about them for 20 years, and as I said before, it all came pouring out.

Let me just give you — I'll see if I can find my list here. I had it earlier. Just some of the insights that just are scattered in so many of his writings, but when you put them all together, it's very impressive. And of course that's what he was trying to do in writing the *Economic Harmonies*, but he just couldn't finish it. I mean, one of the most important things is the idea of opportunity cost, the whole thing about the seen and the unseen. Tony de Jasay thinks that Bastiat invented that and that's one of his greatest claims to fame. I came across his use of the term *caeteris paribus*, "all things being equal," "other things being equal." He uses that many, many times in his writings, and most economic historians think that John Stuart Mill was the first person to use it consistently in the early 1840s, but here's Bastiat in the mid-1840s not apparently having read John Stuart Mill but using the same idea.

Another important innovative idea, I think, was sort of like a reverse Keynesian notion of the multiplier effect. You might call it a sort of divider effect. Whereas the Keynesians think that government has a multiplying effect of goodness, benefits to the economy, Bastiat came up with this idea that when governments intervene with a tariff or a subsidy or something, there's a multiplying effect but it's all negative. It causes increasing negative ripples to go through the economy to the disadvantage of so many ordinary consumers. So there are just a few ideas that I think are very important, and they're just general economic ideas, nothing particularly Austrian or public choice about them.

And then there's the whole list of I think Austrian insights that he comes up with. The most well-known I think is the one about subjective value theory. He's a very precocious early advocate of this notion. But again, something that I hadn't realized until I went into in more detail is I think he is an early Austrian because of his understanding in a really abstract way of the theory of human action. He uses the term "human action" or "individuals as actors" or "acting individuals" repeatedly in his writings.

And you can see this in some of his *Economic Sophisms*, when he starts using the idea of Robinson Crusoe, about the economic choices that Robinson Crusoe faces just to

feed himself, how does he make a hook so he can improve the productivity of his fishing. I mean, he's got to put aside some savings in the form of food so he can devote time to making a hook to improve his productivity as a fisherman. And I think he invented Crusoe economics, this way of trying to abstract the sort of economic choices people face, even just one person on a desert island. And when I was looking at Rothbard's *Man, Economy, and State* again recently, if you look at the first three chapters where he's talking about exchange, he uses as a foundation for his own understanding of Austrian theory of human action, Robinson Crusoe stories. If you look in the footnotes, where does Rothbard get this idea from? They're all from Bastiat. So I mean, I think Rothbard saw very early how radically Austrian Bastiat was.

And I could go through another list of things. His idea of spontaneous order, the role of entrepreneurs, how individuals evaluate and judge things in a very unique and personal way. His understanding of the knowledge problem of central planning — how do you feed a city the size of Paris? How can a central planner do that? Interdependence or interconnectedness of all economic activity. He has an early version of Leonard Read's "I, Pencil" story. He talks about a carpenter, a simple village carpenter and how that carpenter uses things from all over the world that he didn't create himself.

And then there are public choice insights: self-interest of bureaucrats and politicians, the whole notion of rent seeking. And you could go on and on. But there's just a sampling of some of the important ideas that Bastiat had that he's not recognized for.

WOODS: What can you tell me about the circumstances of Bastiat's death? And then I'm also interested in Molinari's obituary for him, which I've never seen before.

HART: That's because it hasn't been translated —

WOODS: Oh, that would explain it.

HART: That would explain it, yeah. See, Molinari was a very long-lived person. He was born in 1819, so 18 years after Bastiat, but he died in 1912. So he was in his nineties. And he lived long enough to see practically every important 19th century French classical liberal die, and he wrote their obituaries, just because he lived longer than anyone else — which is rather sad.

But everyone thought that Bastiat must have died of tuberculosis, because he complains about coughing in his correspondence. But when you read more carefully, he also complains about a lump in his throat and how he couldn't swallow, and that suggested to me cancer of some kind. And we know it was extremely painful and that it took him several years to die, often in extremely difficult, painful circumstances. So that's one of the things that I learned to admire about Bastiat, is the courage he had in the face of death. He just kept working and working and working, writing books and pamphlets and doing his research, even though he knew he was dying, which is I think admirable. I'm not sure how I would cope if I knew I was dying and doing so in such a painful way.

WOODS: Yeah.

HART: So the last of his life, when he writes *The Law* and "What Is Seen and What Is Not Seen," two of his most famous works, he does that over the summer of 1850, when he only had months to live and he would have been in excruciating pain. It's quite extraordinary.

WOODS: Yeah, it is. It is.

HART: Because "What Is Seen and What Is Not Seen" is regarded as one of his greatest works. And I read in the original French editor's comment about how "What Is Seen and What Is Not Seen" was produced. He said that Bastiat wrote — what we have is his third version of it. He wrote it once and then lost it in a move. He wrote it a second time from memory and wasn't happy with it and threw it in the fire. And then he wrote it a third time. It's quite — while he was dying of throat cancer.

WOODS: Wow. Wow, geez. He was a dedicated man.

HART: Dedicated man, yes. But you know, I think perhaps dedicated sometimes — too many things on his plate. I just wish he'd spent more time working on *Economic Harmonies* and getting that into good shape, because I think that was meant to be the first part of a three- or four-volume work on social theory. And had he — I've tried to reconstruct that, and if you go to an essay I've written about this on the Online Library of Liberty website, if you just key into your favorite search engine "OLL" — which stands for Online Library of Liberty — "OLL Bastiat project," you'll get the page where all this stuff is listed.

But I think he wanted — he originally called the book *Social Harmonies*. He wanted to write a book about how humans can organize all aspects of their life — social, legal, religious, personal, economic — in a harmonious way, in which they can all pretty much pursue their own ends and have those ends satisfied without causing too much harm to each other. And then he realized that was too big a project and that he really should concentrate on the economics, just one aspect of a much broader picture.

And then I think he also had in mind another book he was going to wrote on disharmonies, and this was to be a history of plunder about how both private individuals, but more importantly in his time, organized states could disrupt and destroy the harmony of society, the harmony of the economy through plunderous policies like taxation and intervention and tariffs and subsidies and so on. And he sketches some of this out in the first two chapters of the second series of the *Economic Harmonies*, "The Physiology of Plunder," where he goes into sort of in a very sketchy way, sort of a historical process whereby plunder changes over time.

So I think he probably had three books that he was planning to write and then only had time to finish the first half of his *Economic Harmonies*. When he died, he left all his papers. The first edition of *Economic Harmonies* came out with only ten chapters, and then the version that we know today was completed by his friends and published in 1851, and that has 25 chapters, but most of that is just sketches and drafts cobbled together. We don't know what Bastiat's final thoughts on some of these matters were.

WOODS: That's such a shame. It just goes to show what an amazing guy he was.

HART: As I said before, I kept telling myself I wish he would stop writing all these damn pamphlets and just go back to work on his book on theory.

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So again, I did not know about the connection with Molinari. I know about what people thought, but I don't know anything about who knew whom and who was writing to whom and who was working with whom. I know none of that stuff, so it's interesting that Molinari wrote this obituary for Bastiat. Is he cherishing him as a friend? Is he putting him in intellectual context? What's his goal in that?

HART: Well, it's interesting, because amongst the political economists in Paris at the time, Bastiat and Molinari were the most radical and innovative thinkers. But they didn't agree with each other. They were radical in different ways. And neither of them really appreciated how radical and innovative the other one was, but they were good friends. I mean, personally and sort of socially, they were radicals, as well as radical thinkers.

Anyway, so Molinari didn't really approve of Bastiat's ideas about subjective value theory. He thought that was going too far. Bastiat was an ardent critic of Malthus. He said that Malthus just doesn't understand how productive the economy could be that we could grow enough food to feed however many people there are, that people are human capital and human capital is good. The more people there are, the better off economies would be, the better the division of labor, and so on and so on. Molinari was a staunch Malthusian, so he disagreed with Bastiat on that. Bastiat was, as I said, an ultraminimalist government supporter and didn't agree with Molinari's anarchism. So the two of them were sort of pushing the liberal movement in different directions but not agreeing with each other, but being sort of close together because everyone else rejected them as well. So they're sort of radical companions —

WOODS: Right, sure.

HART: — forced together that didn't necessarily agree with each other. So Molinari's reminiscences of Bastiat are very interesting, because he talks about when he first met Bastiat. Molinari was working as a journalist, and Molinari, he was covering a court case that was underway where some carpenters who tried to start a trade union in Paris, and this was banned under French law, and these carpenters were being prosecuted. And Molinari was covering this court case for the magazine, and he was in favor of the right of workers to form trade unions, as was Bastiat. He had a great speech in the chamber about the right of anyone to form an association, and a union was just one kind of association.

Anyway, so Bastiat goes to the office of where Molinari's working to talk to him about a review that they had done of his book which was very favorable, and Molinari talks about the first time that Bastiat walks into the office. And it's very funny, because Bastiat was a provincial landowner. He spoke with a very heavy Gascon accent, which the Parisians thought was hilarious. You know, it's like a Texan going to Washington, D.C. or New York. Bastiat wore a funny hat, a country hat, and he carried a big umbrella, which was not fashionable in Paris at the time. He wore a green woolen jacket, which no one wore green in Paris. Everyone wore black and fashionable

hats. He had a sort of poufy white shirt with cuffs on it, and everyone just thought that was crazy.

Anyway, so Molinari has this wonderful description about how weird Bastiat looked and sounded when he walked into the office. And Bastiat then starts talking about economics, and Molinari says, "As soon as he started talking about economics, we stopped laughing. This man was sprouting diamonds. He nuggets of knowledge were like diamonds." And he says, "From that moment on, we realized we were in the presence of a very deep thinker."

WOODS: Wow.

HART: And Molinari also tells us that Bastiat refused to change his wardrobe. Economists said, "Oh, I can recommend this particular tailor. Go and get a decent jacket and a proper hat." And Bastiat refused. He says, "No, I like being a Gascon country gentleman. I'm going to keep wearing these clothes and I'm going to keep talking the way I talk. I'm not going to change my accent." Because he was very proud of being a Southerner, which is I thought quite touching and interesting.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, indeed.

HART: And he also had — Molinari comments about Bastiat's wit. He says he had sparkling eyes. He said when you look into Bastiat's eyes, you can see a genius there, but it's also a witty genius. He described Bastiat's wit as being Rabelaisian. And if you know Rabelais, the great French writer, was also very bawdy. And so this is a suggestion, I think, that Bastiat had a particular kind of humor, perhaps with a lot of sexual innuendo and other things, which he's peppered his speech with — which is something that made him popular in the salons that he attended a couple of years later. So I mean, these little interesting insights —

But Bastiat, his originality wasn't fully appreciated by Molinari, so when Molinari sums up Bastiat's life, he says, "He wasn't an original thinker like Jean-Baptiste Say," he says, "but he was our Benjamin Franklin," that he saw Bastiat's main contribution as being a popularizer of economic ideas rather than an originator. So that's unfortunate about Molinari, what he said of Bastiat. I think Molinari was wrong on that.

WOODS: Well, tell me how people can find out more about what Liberty Fund is doing in this project, if you can link to it, to the progress you've made so far. And also your own personal website so they can find out about what you're doing in general.

HART: Sure. I run the Online Library of Liberty, which is one of the projects that Liberty Fund sponsors. So you can go to OLL.LibertyFund.org, and in the top left-hand corner, there is a link to the Bastiat project with a summary of what we're doing at the moment. It's a six-volume project. Volume 3 came out in March of this year. Volume 3 was the complete works — *The Collected Economic Sophisms*. FEE only translated two-thirds of them back in the '60s. There's another third series, which are just as interesting and amusing and clever as the other two. Volume 4 is his *Miscellaneous Economic Writings*, and as I said, I've just finished the manuscript for that. Volume 5 is going to be I hope *The Definitive Edition of Economic Harmonies*,

and that's sort of halfway done. Volume 6 is a collection of his writings for the French free trade movement, which he largely headed up and led. So that's the million words, the six volumes.

WOODS: Wow, okay, so we're going to make sure and link to this —

HART: As I said — yeah, that would be really helpful. As I said, if you just keyword in your favorite search engine, "OLL Bastiat project," you'll get that page to come up.

WOODS: Okay, and it'll also be at TomWoods.com/957. We'll have that stuff linked there. Well, great project. Very important. Very interesting too. I learned an awful lot about Bastiat from this conversation, so thanks so much, David.

HART: Oh, my pleasure. Thanks, Tom.