



Benoît Malbranque

GUSTAVE DE MOLINARI

INSTITUT COPPET

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Paris, 2024
Institut Coppet

When Gustave de Molinari died in Belgium in 1912, the world was about to give a tremendous confirmation to his prophecies. Socialism and communism did rise to power and applied their ill-fated policies, with his anticipated results¹; the growth of militarism resulted in large-scale conflicts like the ones he foresaw, and eventually prompted failed attempts to build a community of nations and international rule of law, because indeed public opinion still needed in many countries to be won over²; finally, protectionism did survive, and even took the new forms he suggested, like the battle against immigration launched by the newly dominant electorate³.

Yet, de Molinari also believed that after at least a couple of centuries of socialism and protectionism of all sorts, a new order would prevail, solely based on liberty; and his fascinating prospect of this future society deserves great attention.

¹ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 136. — *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 240-241.

² *Esquisse de l'organisation politique et économique de la société future*, 1899, p. 200.

³ *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*, art. Émigration, 1854, vol. 1, p. 682. — *L'Économiste Belge*, 1857, issue 12, supp., p. 3 — *Au Canada et aux montagnes Rocheuses*, etc., 1886, p. 81. — *Les Bourses du travail*, 1893, p. 150.

The role and scope of government is the defining question of liberalism (sometimes referred to as *classical liberalism*), and the particular stance taken by Gustave de Molinari on this issue can only be explained with the assistance of his biography. For had he not been an outsider, a witty intellectual, and a late convert to liberty, he would probably not have promoted the private production of security, as he first did in 1849, amidst a skeptical if not entirely opposed group of Parisian economists.

He was born in Liège in 1819, in a prominent family; but these were troubled times. Ancestors of his father had left Spain for Lombardy in the 17th century, and then for a region of the Netherlands soon to become the independent Belgium. Both his grandfather, François-Joseph, and his father, Philippe, pursued military careers; whereas relatives of his mother, Lambertine Poswick, occupied public offices. After the Napoleonic wars and the fight for independence, Philippe de Molinari got stuck into very unfortunate affairs. First, his resignation request was overlooked and he got sentenced for desertion, which caused a public outrage and the end of his marriage¹. Later,

¹ De Molinari family archives. Notes about the history of the family, page 4.

having remained faithful to the anti-revolution party in Belgium, he got arrested and nearly received the death penalty¹. His son Gustave parted ways with him, and went to live with his mother, in Verviers, where he attended the Literary and industrial school, before working for some time in a wool manufactory². In this grim-looking town, he remained a joyful, playful and well-read fellow. But in Belgium aspiring literary young men had to overcome serious obstacles. Intellectual property was hardly recognized, and laws not enforced, and consequently the national market was overflowed with material obtained from France. Unable to compete, would-be writers usually fled to this neighboring country, and their works were then counterfeited in Belgium³. Yet, for Gustave de Molinari, the appeal of Paris was more than the attraction of a good pay. It was the great battlefield of ideas, where the case of the working class was debated with passionate words such as charity and fraternity. Upon his arrival in 1841, de Molinari submitted essays and articles to various newspapers, many of them with dubious programs;

¹ C. Buffin, *Mémoires et documents inédits sur la révolution belge, etc.*, 1912, p. 262-272.

² *La Réforme*, 9th June 1845. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 356. — Letter to the editor of *l'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, 28th August 1877; *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 331.

³ *La Patrie*, 4th November 1851. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 8, p. 582.

and in fact, he later struggled to justify his involvement with what has to be called the left and socialism¹. In the footsteps of poet and politician Alphonse de Lamartine, he promoted a third way, rejecting both the radical advocacy of liberty and the blind yearning for order². At this early time, he supported extending the suffrage, balancing the budget by cutting military expenses, promoting the construction of railways, and setting up institutions to lift up the working class³. Without affiliating with socialists—that he had not read much⁴—he recognized that some of their main ideas were valid, such as the association of workers to overcome the challenges of a free market of labor⁵. The defense of liberty by some economists and politicians was excessive, he then believed; private property, for example, was not an absolute right, but ought to be submitted to the interest of society as a whole⁶. He was also an outright protectionist, pushing for a continental market protected by heavy duties; otherwise, he claimed, cheap grains from Russia, on one hand, would ruin our agricul-

¹ *Pourquoi j'ai retiré ma candidature*, 1859, p. 6-7.

² *Le Courrier Français*, 23rd December 1844. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 276.

³ *Le Biographe universel*, 28th February 1842 and 30th June 1842. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 27 and 49.

⁴ *Le Commerce*, 9th July 1848. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 5, p. 410.

⁵ *Le Courrier Français*, 23rd December 1844. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 278.

⁶ *Le Courrier Français*, 26th December 1844 and 12th February 1845. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 283-284 and 289.

ture, and England's dominance in matters of industry would destroy our manufactures¹.

In forgotten articles and booklets, de Molinari went on to offer his proposals to lift up the poor. His plans involved emigration, colonization, and work placement. Pauperism, he believed, originates from an excessive accumulation of workers in places where work is scarce and badly paid². Refusing the cures of Malthusian economists³, he wanted the government to take action⁴—although later, he denied having suggested state-funded solutions⁵. Inside the country, the government should subsidize the use of railways by workers seeking a better job elsewhere, so that their transportation be free of charge⁶. Outside, state-run colonization and subsidized emigration would allow the glut of labor to disappear and domestic wages to rise⁷. Using tax-payer money and resorting to violence did not seem to trouble him; on the contrary, he then claimed that colonies were a source of glory, power and wealth⁸. Another policy that he suggested was the creation of

¹ *Le Biographe universel*, 30th September 1842. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 64.

² *Le Biographe universel*, 30th August 1842. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 57.

³ *Des moyens d'améliorer le sort des classes laborieuses*, February 1844. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 205.

⁴ *Le Biographe universel*, 30th August 1842. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 57.

⁵ *Les Bourses du travail*, 1893, p. 257.

⁶ *Des moyens d'améliorer le sort des classes laborieuses*, February 1844. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 210.

⁷ *Le Biographe universel*, 30th August 1842. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 58.

⁸ *Le Courrier Français*, 28th June 1845. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 391.

Labor Exchanges similar to institutions already operating for the money market as well as for commodities. By giving information to workers about the level of wages across the country and across the globe, such institutions would allow, he asserted, the law of offer and demand to finally operate to the benefit of both parties¹. This was of course at a time when socialists were fully occupied with the idea of the “organization of labor”; and de Molinari was participating in this effort. There was not much the government ought not to do, according to him, to support the working class; he did not even reject the idea of its intervention in wage setting². Unsurprisingly, such proposals were not so much noticed and appreciated by liberal economists, as they were by socialists³.

However, at this stage, Gustave de Molinari felt the need to develop his knowledge of political economy, for it was increasingly this field that he was covering. Reading Adam Smith, and later Jean-Baptiste Say, provided him with new concepts, and it certainly altered his faith in state solutions. With a natural sense of humor and a great audacity to create new words, de Molinari had long been infusing his writings with metaphors of his own: railways

¹ *Le Courrier Français*, 8th November 1844. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 237.

² *Le Courrier Français*, 24th June 1845. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 380.

³ *La Quotidienne*, June 1845. *L'Atelier*, March 1844. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 212-214.

were “steam-roads”, governments were like a private enterprise owned by a nation¹. Now, following J.-B. Say, who dared to talk about the “industry” of a doctor, a lawyer, a judge or a public servant², he analyzed the immaterial production of the Church or the effect of railways on the “production of speed”³. Soon he wondered whether police, or the “production of security”, could be subjected to economic reasoning; and he discovered that indeed it could.

The encounter with Frédéric Bastiat in September 1845 was also a decisive moment. Only then did Gustave de Molinari really bend down, burning what he had adored, and adoring what he had burned. On the issue of international trade, and then on every single issue, he adopted, not only liberalism, but radical liberalism. His eyes had been opened. Tariffs temporarily cause higher profits for capitalists and land-owners, but they are detrimental to workers; and therefore, free-trade is not just an economic issue, he recognized, but more importantly a social issue⁴. Although a new face in the movement, de Molinari rapidly

¹ *Le Biographe universel*, 1842. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 114.

² *Traité d'économie politique*, 1803, t. I, p. 362.

³ *Des compagnies religieuses et de la publicité de l'instruction publique*, 1844. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 1, p. 247. — *Journal des Économistes*, June 1847. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 4, p. 309.

⁴ *Le Courrier Français*, 20th August 1846. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 3, p. 278.

blamed fellow liberals for not embracing complete free-trade, blaming the timid message spread by his overly cautious colleagues¹. If the so-called protection is detrimental, he argued, it should be repealed fully, and replaced by “complete, unlimited and absolute freedom”². For freedom is the cure to all problems, and ought to be applied widely, including in the banking industry and for the production of money³, as well as in the construction of railways⁴. It is not difficult to imagine a time, he then says, when taxes will cease to exist, and all goods and services will be provided by private companies, on the basis of a free and voluntary exchange⁵.

Thus, it is not surprising that in 1849, having reached this radical understanding of liberalism, Gustave de Molinari dared to suggest the privatization of police. Much like his own father, who became a homeopathic physician in his later years and endured the mockery of the established medical intelligentsia⁶, he did not have any difficulty following his own path,

¹ *Le Courrier Français*, 26th February 1846. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 2, p. 440.

² *Annuaire de l'économie politique*, 1847. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 4, p. 216 and 221.

³ *Journal des Économistes*, June 1847. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 4, p. 314.

⁴ *Le Courrier Français*, 19th May 1846. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 3, p. 49.

⁵ *Études économiques*, 1846. *Histoire du tarif*, 1847. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 2, p. 245 and t. 4, p. 181.

⁶ *Journal des Économistes*, June 1856. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 12, p. 410.

for he was not a man to be restrained by conventional thinking.

Economic laws and principles, establishing the superiority of market forces over any form of government intervention, de Molinari argues, suffer no exception. Police is a service or an immaterial product which simply cannot be produced and distributed as effectively by governments than by private companies operating in a competitive market¹.

This publication caused a small outrage amid Parisian economists: after appearing in print in the *Journal des Économistes* with a warning statement by the general editor, it was discussed by members of the Société d'économie politique, including Charles Dunoyer and Frédéric Bastiat himself, who unequivocally condemned it, arguing that de Molinari had stepped out of line². Later that year, his new book, *Soirées de la rue Saint-Lazare*, maintaining and developing the same ideas, was criticized for the same reason³.

Gustave de Molinari remained isolated, but he persevered on this path nonetheless. He continued to fill his new articles and books with the most peculiar vocabulary. New mines discovered in Australia and California were

¹ *Journal des Économistes*, February 1849. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 6, p. 43.

² *Annales de la Société d'économie politique*, vol. 1, p. 83-85.

³ *Journal des Économistes*, November 1849, p. 369.

“gold manufacturers” causing the ruin of “small workshops” elsewhere in Europe, for example on the banks of the Rhine¹; lands were subsistence-making machines² and intellectual property and patents pertained to the industry of inventions³; in the “industry of religion” also, satisfying the higher needs of human souls, there was a sort of division of labor at play, and in modern establishments the various operations of preaching, gospel singing, or confession, were performed by different individuals, all with the assistance of capital goods, in the form of buildings, fabrics and tools, including incense and wine⁴. Many Parisian liberal economists did not appreciate such audacity. Examples such as the industry of executioners or prostitutes were inappropriate, Charles Dunoyer claimed, and should not be found in the book of a refined and polished economist⁵.

In 1851, when Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, once the safeguard against socialism, transformed his republican presidency into autocratic rule, de Molinari refused to compromise. He left France and settled in Brussels, where he

¹ *Journal des Économistes*, May 1854. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 10, p. 342.

² *Conversations sur le commerce des grains*, 1855. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 11, p. 604.

³ *Journal des Économistes*, September 1855. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 12, p. 362.

⁴ *Cours d'économie politique*, vol. 1, 1855. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 11, p. 40.

⁵ *Journal des Économistes*, March 1856, p. 437.

would give lessons and launch a newspaper, *L'Économiste Belge*, before finally returning to Paris in 1867. Obviously, he remarked, very few people appreciate liberty fully and without exception: some promote free-trade, but worry that freedom in education would lead to Jesuits taking over the whole society; other agree with the privatization of railways, but maintain that government should subsidize cultural institutions; him was not willing to comply with their half-liberalism¹. Instead, *L'Économiste Belge* promoted a radical understanding of liberty, as well as comprehensive reforms—although given the conservative spirit of his readers de Molinari had to shy away from the most provocative statements². He had believed at first that a remote collaboration with the *Journal des Économistes* in Paris could be maintained, even given France's new political settings, but he rapidly became too embarrassing an author for the cautious directors of this publication. Why boast about the complete freedom of the press in Belgium³, or study arguments for freedom of speech laid down in pamphlets dating from pre-Revolutionary France⁴, when today's ruler has clearly inaugurated a new state of affairs?

¹ *L'Économiste Belge*, 1855, issue 14. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 11, p. 414.

² Letter to P. J. Proudhon, 14th February 1859. Fonds Proudhon, Besançon, Ms 2950. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 16, p. 6.

³ *Journal des Économistes*, June 1856. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 12, p. 401.

⁴ *Journal des Économistes*, April 1856. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 12, p. 399.

Thus, for some time, de Molinari could only sell his advanced liberalism to his native domestic market, so to speak. There, he was able to articulate a theory of liberty and a model of a future society, solely based on freedom, that remained fascinating and thought-provoking up to this day.

In the free society of tomorrow, he explains, roads and railways will be built, owned and managed by private companies. Some will do without resorting to compulsory expropriation, while some, needing this extraordinary mean, will have to compensate the public at large for breaching the rights of private property, and this extra cost will serve as a deterrent and a balancing factor¹. Similarly, lakes and rivers will be the property of individuals or most likely corporations, left in charge of their maintenance, with the responsibility to repay damages created by their property in the form of floodings².

On another front, money will no more be issued by governments, but in entirely new ways, both more convenient and more secure, by private banks and financial institutions³. Customers will freely enroll in the service of healthcare providers offering high comfort ins-

¹ *L'Économiste Belge*, 1856, issue 10. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 12, p. 162.

² *L'Économiste Belge*, 1856, issue 12. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 12, p. 187.
— *Lettres sur la Russie*, 1861, p. 207-208.

³ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 326.

tallation, trained medical specialists and every curative therapy possible, on payment of a monthly subscription¹. Companies with large resources will provide effective job placement to ensure that workers find well-paid occupations in safe and enjoyable workplaces, and that employers are provided with qualified and result-driven individuals². Apartment buildings will include in the rent the cost of street paving and lighting, electricity and water supply, as well as police, all provided by sub-contracted companies. ³ Finally, justice itself will be delivered by competing and independent companies⁴. There will be no more taxes, but only freely debated contributions.

To bring about this new order of things, major changes will need to take place, the main one being the replacement of war for international disputes, by agreements, arbitration and international courts⁵. Obviously, the emergence of a truly free society will require several centuries of continued economic progress, new technologies, wider markets, more responsible individuals⁶. No one can predict exactly what forms the production of today's public services

¹ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 321-322.

² *Les lois naturelles de l'économie politique*, 1887, p. 312.

³ *Esquisse de l'organisation politique et économique de la société future*, 1899, p. 85.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 95.

will take in the future, when left in the hands of private companies; but what is certain is that the pressure of competition will drive prices down and allow for new inventions to be introduced in order to serve consumers better¹.

Such were the ideas of Gustave de Molinari: they were bold and unconventional, but he took much pride in them, presenting them with great passion to young economists and making sure that the precedent he set was noticed and understood².

Why liberty?

Liberty must prevail, because basic facts of human life make it a requirement for happiness and progress.

First of all, every individual is unique, in terms of physical traits and abilities, willpower, sensibility, due to a combination of internal, hereditary and environmental factors³. One is not free to like or dislike some foods, songs, ideas or habits, only to comply with the taste of the majority⁴. State solutions, therefore, will always be inferior.

¹ *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 132.

² *Revue bleue, politique et littéraire*, 1932, p. 329. — Letter to Arthur Mangin, 8th November 1885, private collection. — Letter to Yves Guyot, 7th May 1885. Archives de Paris, D21J 179.

³ *La Viriculture*, 1897, p. 109.

⁴ *Conversations sur le commerce des grains*, 1855. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 11, p. 665-667.

Secondly, the outcome of any action is a degree of pain or pleasure, and everyone avoids the former and seeks the latter¹. Fortunately, competing forces on the market allow for this sorting to be made. Determined by the law of offer and demand, the price of goods and services, as well as the level of wages, profits, and interests, naturally rise and fall to allocate resources where they are most deemed important². Working in this environment, each individual will enjoy the highest standard of living that his moral and physical capacities allow.

Government intervention, on the other hand, is both costly and ineffective³. Price signals are distorted, progress is discouraged, and the result is a low level of economic as well as social and cultural development.

Liberalism is primarily based on facts and a careful observation of reality. Gustave de Molinari himself was perhaps as much a traveler, a journalist and an historian, as he was a political philosopher.

In fact, apart from a handful of professional travelers, very few people knew so much about

¹ *Précis d'économie politique et de morale*, 1893, p. 37. — *La morale économique*, 1888, p. v. — *Questions économiques à l'ordre du jour*, 1906, p. 8.

² *Cours d'économie politique*, vol. 1, 1855. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 11, p. 70-71.

³ *L'Économiste Belge*, 1855, issue 1. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 11, p. 242.

the world as he did. Over the years, he made lengthy stays in Switzerland (1857), Russia (1860, 1882), Canada (1876, 1880, 1885), Ireland (1880), and the United States (1876, 1880, 1885). His journeys also made him discover England, Germany, Poland, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Turkey, as well as the Caribbean islands, Panama, Columbia, and Venezuela.

Travels were obviously, at that time, more perilous and adventurous than they are now. By sea, they were both uncomfortable and terribly long¹: crossing the Atlantic Ocean took de Molinari 12 days in 1876², 10 days in 1880³, and 11 days in 1885⁴. By land, locations could only be reached through hazardous peregrinations, with few information and scarce resources. Trains are missed⁵, personal bags are lost and found⁶; de Molinari has to sleep on the deck of a boat in the middle of the Black Sea, between Sebastopol and Istanbul⁷, or on a plain bench in rural Germany⁸. During his two-month stay in the Caribbean islands and South America, in the spring of 1886, he did not

¹ *À Panama. L'isthme de Panama, la Martinique, Haïti*, 1887, p. 6.

² *Lettres sur les États-Unis et le Canada*, 1876, p. 3.

³ *L'Irlande, le Canada, Jersey*, 1881, p. 149.

⁴ *Au Canada et aux montagnes Rocheuses, en Russie, en Corse, à l'Exposition universelle d'Anvers*, 1886, p. 7.

⁵ *L'Irlande, le Canada, Jersey*, 1881, p. 85.

⁶ *Lettres sur la Russie*, 1861, p. 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁸ *Au Canada et aux montagnes Rocheuses, en Russie, en Corse, à l'Exposition universelle d'Anvers*, 1886, p. 151.

receive any letter from Europe¹. And not all countries are equally hospitable: during the day, temperature reaches 35 degrees Celsius in Panama², and at night it is still 28 degrees in Corsica³.

The first encounter with foreign countries is at the customs office, with its exhausting and useless formalities. Only in Switzerland did de Molinari, after having prepared his passport and luggage for inspection, rejoiced at the manners of a truly free country, where only suspicious cases are examined⁴.

All around the world, he was equally curious and eager to learn: in Canada, he was introduced to a reserve of indigenous people⁵; in New York, he visited Chinese as well as Black districts, with their unsanitary dormitories⁶; in Jersey, he attended the execution of a convicted murderer⁷. He was not very keen on visiting monuments, and in fact he rarely did⁸; but on November 2nd, 1880, he crossed the United States-Canada border to witness the results of the presidential election⁹.

¹ *À Panama. L'isthme de Panama, la Martinique, Haïti*, 1887, p. 264.

² *Ibid.*, p. 59

³ *Au Canada et aux montagnes Rocheuses, en Russie, en Corse, à l'Exposition universelle d'Anvers*, 1886, p. 269.

⁴ *Le Nord*, 10th September 1857. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 14, p. 324.

⁵ *L'Irlande, le Canada, Jersey*, 1881, p. 260

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 289

⁸ *Lettres sur la Russie*, 1861, p. 37 and 70.

⁹ *L'Irlande, le Canada, Jersey*, 1881, p. 206-208.

The careful study of institutions, behaviors and ideas, in different parts of the world, allows for a deeper understanding of liberty. In certain respects, it can serve as a confirmation of core tenets of liberalism. Free-trade in Jersey has resulted in food, housing, and other necessities, being more affordable than on the continent, by around a third¹. On the contrary, in Canada and in the United States, tariffs have raised the cost of living by a third, always compared to mainland Europe². Just visiting restaurants, one finds confirmation for the evil effect produced upon quality and progress by protectionism, with American knives, made of domestic steel, cutting very poorly³.

Anti-immigration policies as well as anti-semitism are also nothing but a new form of protectionism, by which some social groups aim at eliminating the bothersome competition of hardworking men and women. Polish people despise German workers, like American hate Chinese immigrants, not for their falsely described vices, but for their qualities⁴.

Some reforms are justified by direct observation: in North America, the separation of

¹ *L'Irlande, le Canada, Jersey*, 1881, p. 304.

² *Au Canada et aux montagnes Rocheuses, en Russie, en Corse, à l'Exposition universelle d'Anvers*, 1886, p. 25.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165-166.

Church and State gives excellent results¹; in Southampton (England), local taxes are directly funding public utilities, in a transparent and foreseeable manner, as it should²; on another front, banning child labor seems entirely appropriate, considering the nature of parental duties and the detrimental effect of extended working hours at the age of 8 or 10³. But other policies are clearly failing. Establishing nationalities on race, language or history, is a dangerous scheme, for example: Corsicans have much in common with Italians, but they reject absolutely the idea of joining this neighboring country, and the same goes for Alsatians and Germany⁴; in Poland, the effort made by Russian authorities to destroy any national sentiment has back-fired⁵. In Panama, people from every corner of the world live peacefully and collaborate on an historic project. “A perfect harmony reigns between this mixed population of white, yellow, brown and black people”, Gustave de Molinari writes. “There are no fights, hardly any altercations. Everyone is focusing on his work and peacefully earning his

¹ *Au Canada et aux montagnes Rocheuses, en Russie, en Corse, à l'Exposition universelle d'Anvers*, 1886, p. 120.

² *À Panama. L'isthme de Panama, la Martinique, Haïti*, 1887, p. 4.

³ *Au Canada et aux montagnes Rocheuses, en Russie, en Corse, à l'Exposition universelle d'Anvers*, 1886, p. 145.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

salary.”¹ That being the case, there is no doubt that such harmony can indeed be achieved.

However, in discovering how people of different races and backgrounds make use of their personal freedom, one also wonders if indeed self-government can be fruitfully enjoyed by all. Former serfs in Poland have reclaimed their self-government, but they have not yet acquired the necessary qualities of order, economy and foresight². In Russia as well, the abolition of serfdom has not generally made peasants richer, due to a lack of self-control on their part³. In many countries, newly emancipated women do not take care of their children⁴. Therefore, it is not insulting to say that Blacks are not Anglo-Saxons cooked under the sun⁵, de Molinari asserts, and certainly divine Providence have a plan for all races⁶. And who knows if many oppressed peoples will not prosper and grow in the future; in fact, is it not likely that the Western type will fade away, and that other civilizations will grow in importance?⁷

But at the moment, many individuals are in need of tutelage, in some shape or form.

¹ *À Panama. L'isthme de Panama, la Martinique, Haïti*, 1887, p. 81.

² *Au Canada et aux montagnes Rocheuses, en Russie, en Corse, à l'Exposition universelle d'Anvers*, 1886, p. 154.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 195-196.

⁵ *À Panama. L'isthme de Panama, la Martinique, Haïti*, 1887, p. 31.

⁶ *Cours d'économie politique*, vol. 1, 1855. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 11, p. 189.

⁷ *À Panama. L'isthme de Panama, la Martinique, Haïti*, 1887, p. 242.

Public tutelage is costly and ineffective, and involves the restriction of liberty for all men and women capable of self-government¹. The best solution would be for private companies to be in charge of this comprehensive educative mission, and for lacking individuals to submit themselves to their guardianship, on a voluntary basis².

Among the many countries Gustave de Molinari visited, Russia occupies a special place in his heart. He first discovered this country in 1860, when invited to give a series of lectures on political economy. Receiving a warm welcome, and witnessing a fast-changing society aspiring for freedom and progress, he was properly enchanted. But although he published numerous articles in the Russian press, continued to have many Russian friends, and helped his son settle in Kiev where he worked for the Russian government and later acquired Russian citizenship³, the country's situation did not evolve as he had hoped.

Today, Gustave de Molinari is commonly described as an economist, a political philoso-

¹ *L'Irlande, le Canada, Jersey*, 1881, p. 263. — *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 295.

² *À Panama. L'isthme de Panama, la Martinique, Haïti*, 1887, p. 77. — *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 164 and 379.

³ Letter to Mrs Raffalovich, 1st January 1895. Institut de France, Ms 3691, f^o27.

pher, an historian, or a social scientist; but journalism was his real profession. For decades, he wrote daily about the political situation in France and frequently attended the National Assembly to witness the best moments of parliamentary eloquence, portraying himself as a serf and a slave unable to abandon his professional duty¹. Unfortunately, in his newspaper articles, he was forced to adopt a more moderate tone than the genuine radicalism reflected in parts of his books and even more so in private conversations and correspondence. During his term as chief editor of *Le Journal des Débats*, he kept out of the columns of this newspaper his belief in the privatization of everything, but tirelessly argued in its favor on every occasion². His monthly reports on the state of affairs in France and around the world in the *Journal des Économistes* could be cited as exceptions, but here as well his radical ideas are only alluded to.

His interest for history is more critical, and dominates his whole career. Already in Verviers, the school he attended was described by an inspector as being highly effective in

¹ *Le Travail Intellectuel*, 15th January 1848. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 4, p. 455. — *Le Messenger Russe* [Русский Вѣстник], 1859. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 15, p. 443. — Letters to Mrs Raffalovich, 29th December 1869 and 25th December 1873. Institut de France, Ms 3691, f°22 and 72.

² *Revue bleue, politique et littéraire*, 1932, p. 329. — Letter to Arthur Mangin, 8th November 1885, private collection.

transmitting an accurate knowledge of world history to its young students¹. In this somewhat privileged environment, Gustave de Molinari read ancient classical authors such as Homer and Virgil², as well as French philosophers like Pascal, Chateaubriand, and Bossuet³, but it was his solid knowledge in history that was to impress fellow economists⁴ and which allowed him to give a special spin to liberalism as it was commonly defined.

De Molinari recognizes that laws and institutions must depend on the level of development of the whole society⁵. Some forms of government pertain to the traditional lifestyles of hunting and gathering, while others can only emerge when groundbreaking inventions have priorly opened up the markets of the world and equipped humanity with new ideas⁶.

Freedom was a slow and painful acquisition; it had to be. Compelled to tedious and debilitating works with very low returns, people could not, in the early ages of history, develop their intellectual or other capabilities, needed for the useful practice of self-government⁷.

¹ *État de l'instruction moyenne en Belgique, 1830-1842*, 1843, p. lxxviii.

² *L'Économiste Belge*, 1858, issue 16, supp. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 16, p. 196.

³ *Le Commerce*, 9th July 1848. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 5, p. 410.

⁴ *Journal des Économistes*, January 1856, p. 131.

⁵ *Esquisse de l'organisation politique et économique de la société future*, 1899, p. 235.

⁶ *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 69.

⁷ *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 77. — *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 447.

Only technical progress, by raising the intellectual capacity required of common workers, could effectively train them to self-control and self-determination¹.

Frequently attacked by large beasts of prey or by groups of fierce cannibals, human tribes could only survive by maintaining indisputable hierarchy and tight discipline². Unable to apply by himself basic principles of morality, the average individual had to receive rules that some of the most able among the group had gathered from observation and reasoning, and that they introduced as being the secret command of some sort of deity³. These rules involved every aspect of life, and represented a sort of tyranny that in retrospect must be called legitimate⁴.

The age of market competition had not yet arrived. What sort of free trade could be enjoyed at a time when primitive ships ventured into unknown seas, without map or compass? ⁵ How was the law of offer and demand supposed to do its magic, when tools were rudimentary, transportation was difficult, and safety could not be ensured? ⁶ Markets were

¹ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 447.

² *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 143.

³ *Religion*, 1892, p. 23-25.

⁴ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 389.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 450.

extremely narrow, and free competition could not be the sole balancing factor; general rules or customs had to be maintained, until further progress in the machinery of production and distribution¹. Many laws and institutions, later condemned by economists, were then legitimate: some examples include the privileges of nobility and clergy², guilds³, price setting⁴ mechanisms, tariffs⁵, and subsidies⁶.

War itself was justified, in ancient societies. First, humans found themselves introduced in a world where their place had to be won over through a long and difficult battle against numerous animal species, many of them equipped with better powers of destruction than he was; humans therefore had to learn how to use force effectively, if only to survive⁷. The industry of killing was useful and rightly seen as noble, when peace and security in the world were utopias and lives were every day at risk⁸. Building strength was a preliminary step before any progress in industry, or in technology, could be

¹ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 450.

² *Journal des Économistes*, December 1848. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 5, p. 255.

³ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 227.

⁴ *Notions fondamentales d'économie politique et programme économique*, 1891, p. 181.

⁵ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 79.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁸ *Esquisse de l'organisation politique et économique de la société future*, 1899, p. xix-xx.

achieved¹, and later to protect these early achievements from barbarian invasions². Today, however, market relations unite the whole world and international rule of law can be maintained by other means than brute force, de Molinari notes; consequently, wars have become detrimental after having long been useful, and militarism is nothing but an anachronism³.

Some ancient institutions, however, shall be maintained in the future, he argued; the first of them is religion. Surely, religious teachings are often ridiculous and outdated. We are told that the sky is occupied by a divine sovereign of absolute power, with his army of servants: angels, archangels, seraphim⁴; that with his tremendous powers, he built the whole world all by himself⁵; that he reigns over humanity and dictate rules of conduct⁶; that he will distribute rewards and sentences as he wishes, without having to justify his decisions⁷; that he highest reward is to be authorized to sit close to his throne and to gaze upon his holy face, and that punishments include being burned to death⁸; that he considers rebellion against his orders as

¹ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 88.

² *Grandeur et décadence de la guerre*, 1898, p. 25.

³ *Notions fondamentales d'économie politique et programme économique*, 1891, p. 37.

⁴ *Religion*, 1892, p. 51-52.

⁵ *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁸ *Religion*, 1892, p. 58-59. — *Science et religion*, 1894, p. 110.

the worst form of crime¹; that it is not enough for a guilty individual to pay for his mistake, but that punishing his descendants is legitimate²—all of this is just like in the autocracies of the past.

Religions, however, have been useful in managing human passions, at a time when self-government did not and could not be a force to be relied upon³. Unhygienic habits were prohibited⁴, and cruel necessities were made more bearable—among them, the sacrifice of the elderly, when they could not provide for themselves and the tribe had no resource to spare⁵.

In the modern era, religions need to abandon requirements and practices that are not in line with present conditions⁶. But their role is not over, de Molinari argues. Public opinion exercises direct control over both ideas and actions, but its judgments are often rushed and unreasonable⁷; the justice system cannot cover all disturbances and harmful behaviors⁸; and in fact, only religion can enforce basic tenets of fairness, with its omniscient judge and his forever punishments⁹. Satisfying the soul, alleviating

¹ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 175.

² *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 17.

³ *Science et religion*, 1894, p. 22.

⁴ *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p. 217.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 390-391.

⁷ *La morale économique*, 1888, p. 174.

⁸ *Science et religion*, 1894, 65-66.

⁹ *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 303.

hardships and sufferings, is a service beyond measurement, but certainly incredibly valuable: without it, many people would fall into despair and misery, to the detriment of the whole society¹. This is something Gustave de Molinari experienced himself. When writing his books *Religion* (1892) and *Science et Religion* (1894), he was facing numerous life events, one of them being the severe illness and ultimate death of his son-in-law, Ladislav Lowe, which affected him very deeply².

All in all, Gustave de Molinari argues that liberalism must embrace history and reconcile with its teachings. It will increase its respectability, and will serve as a vehicle for pragmatic reforms instead of dogmatic systems.

Socialists, however, refuse to admit the new conditions of the modern world, and think as if markets were still restricted and narrow, and workers totally incapable of self-determination³. Instead of replacing more and more legal rule by voluntary contracts, they aim at the opposite⁴. They claim to be progressive, but in fact they are going backwards.

¹ *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 8.

² Letter to Mrs Raffalovich, 13th January 1894. Institut de France, Ms 3691, f°26.

³ *Les problèmes du XX^e siècle*, 1901, p. 133.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Gustave de Molinari was most certainly an idealist and an optimist. In retrospect, he acknowledged that in the 1840s, advocating for complete and immediate free-trade and reaching out for well-intentioned socialists was unwise¹. In the 1860s, he was under the illusion that Russia was about to turn into the “paradise of economists”, and the second edition of his *Lettres sur la Russie*, published in 1877, left him with some cleaning-up to do². Finally, in the 1880s, when visiting the construction sites of the future Panama Canal, he got very excited, and the financial scandal that followed left him with bitter regrets about his involvement and interest in it, which were perfectly genuine³.

However, his ideas are not based on an idealist view of man. Progress is slow, special interests fight until the end, and many individuals just lack the moral capacities to effectively run their own lives, he believes. Drawing from a deep knowledge of history, a careful day-to-day study of politics and society as a journalist, and his liberal wisdom originating from Bastiat, Gustave de Molinari has offered unrivalled expertise on how liberty can prevail.

¹ *L'Économiste Belge*, 1857, issue 17. *Œuvres complètes*, t. 13, p. 344.

² *Lettres sur la Russie*, 1861, p. 331.

³ Letter to Mrs Raffalovich, 12th August 1886. Institut de France, Ms 3690, f°94.

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