



”From Each according to Ability; To Each according to Needs” Origin, Meaning, and Development of Socialist Slogans

Luc Bovens, Adrien Lutz

► To cite this version:

Luc Bovens, Adrien Lutz. ”From Each according to Ability; To Each according to Needs” Origin, Meaning, and Development of Socialist Slogans. 2019. halshs-01973833

HAL Id: halshs-01973833

<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01973833>

Preprint submitted on 8 Jan 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

WP 1839 – December 2018

“From Each according to Ability; To Each according to Needs” Origin, Meaning, and Development of Socialist Slogans

Luc Bovens, Adrien Lutz

Abstract:

There are three slogans in the history of Socialism that are very close in wording, namely, the famous Cabet-Blanc-Marx slogan: From each according to his ability; To each according to his needs; the earlier Saint-Simon-Pecqueur slogan: To each according to his ability; To each according to his works; and the later slogan in Stalin's 1936 Soviet Constitution: From each according to his ability; To each according to his work. We trace the earliest occurrences of these slogans and their biblical sources and we show how the progression from one slogan to the next casts light on the development of early socialist thought.

Keywords:

socialism, utopian socialism, bible, Christianity, slogans

JEL codes:

B14, N00, Z12

“From Each according to Ability; To Each according to Needs”

Origin, Meaning, and Development of Socialist Slogans

Luc Bovens and Adrien Lutz¹

Abstract :

There are three slogans in the history of Socialism that are very close in wording, namely, the famous Cabet-Blanc-Marx slogan: From each according to his ability; To each according to his needs; the earlier Saint-Simon–Pecqueur slogan: To each according to his ability; To each according to his works; and the later slogan in Stalin’s 1936 Soviet Constitution: From each according to his ability; To each according to his work. We trace the earliest occurrences of these slogans and their biblical sources and we show how the progression from one slogan to the next casts light on the development of early socialist thought.

JEL classification: B14, N00, Z12

Keywords: socialism, utopian socialism, bible, Christianity, slogans

¹ Correspondence may be addressed to Luc Bovens, UNC at Chapel Hill, Department of Philosophy, Caldwell Hall, CB# 3125, 240 East Cameron, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3125; email: lbovens@unc.edu; and Adrien Lutz, Univ Lyon, UJM Saint-Etienne, GATE UMR 5824, F-42023 Saint-Etienne, France; email: adrien.lutz@univ-st-etienne.fr. Luc Bovens’s research was supported by a research fellowship from the Center for Human Values at Princeton University. Adrien Lutz’s research was supported by the Agence Nationale de Recherche’s research program Saint-Simonisme 18-21. We conceived this project in Marc Fleurbaey’s research seminar in Philosophy and Economics at Princeton University. We are grateful for comments by two anonymous referees, Michel Bellet, Kevin D. Hoover, Ian Hower, Ruth Tomlin, and for the input by Joseph Porter on biblical source materials.

Three Slogans

There are three slogans in the history of Socialism that are very close in wording, namely, the famous slogan of Étienne Cabet, Louis Blanc, and Karl Marx slogan: *From each according to his ability; To each according to his needs*; the earlier Henri de Saint-Simon and Constantin Pecqueur slogan: *To each according to his ability; To each according to his works*; and the later slogan in the Soviet Constitution of 1936, referred to as the Stalin constitution: *From each according to his ability; To each according to his work*. We will consider the following questions regarding these slogans:

- What are the earliest occurrences of each of these slogans?
- Where does the inspiration for each half of each slogan come from?
- What do the Saint-Simonians mean by “To each according to his ability”?
- What do they mean by “To each according to his works”?
- What motivates the shift from “*To each according to his ability*” to “*From each according to his ability*”?
- How should we envisage the progression toward “To each according to his *needs*”?
- What is the distinction between from “To each according to his *works*” and “To each according to his *work*”?

We will address each of these questions in turn. In the text, we have translated all source materials, respecting idioms in the English language, but preserving cognates as much as possible. In the footnotes, we did include some phrases from the French bible translations of the time when the actual word choice matters. We have used the masculine pronoun as a generic

pronoun in our translations considering that we are dealing with historical texts. Biblical passages in English are from the English Standard Version.

The slogans have received some recent attention in the academic literature. For a discussion of the Cabet-Blanc-Marx slogan within Marxist thought, see Gilabert 2015, and for a recent discussion of the Stalin slogan, see Boer 2017.

Earliest Occurrences

The Cabet-Blanc-Marx Slogan

In Marx ([1875] 1890–91, 21) we find “[From] each according to his abilities [*Fähigkeiten*], to each according to his needs [*Bedürfnisse*]!” in the *Kritik des Gothaer Programms*, which was written in 1875 and published posthumously in 1890–91. Blanc’s (1849a, 19) version is in *Le Catéchisme des Socialistes*: “From each according to his faculties [*facultés*], to each according to his needs [*besoins*].” There are also multiple variants in Blanc’s political speeches dating from April 1848, which can be found in Blanc 1849b, 72 and 75 and in De Lamartine et al. 1849, 199. The earliest variant (Blanc 1849b, 72) reads: “each should work according to his aptitudes [*aptitudes*] and strengths [*forces*]” and “each should consume according to his needs.” Cabet’s *Voyage en Icarie* (1840) was first published in England under a pseudonym, as an alleged French translation of a fictional English travel report to the imaginary country of Icarie where inhabitants practice a cooperative economic system based on collective ownership. It was the inspiration for a number of Icarian communities that were founded in the United States with variable, though typically short-lived, success. On the front cover of the 1845 edition (but not of the 1840 or 1842 editions) there is the epigraph: “First Right: To Live – To each following his

needs” and “First Duty: To Work – From each following his strengths.” This is the earliest occurrence of the complete slogan that we have been able to locate.

Three years earlier though, in 1842, we do find the second half of the slogan in Pecqueur’s *Théorie nouvelle d’économie sociale et politique*. He distinguishes between *classement* (ranking); *rétribution* (reward); and *consommation et répartition des richesses* (consumption and the distribution of riches). With respect to the last category, Pecqueur (1842, 675) writes: “regarding CONSUMPTION and DISTRIBUTION of RICHES, [the formula] is: *To each according to his tastes or his needs [ses goûts ou ses besoins]*”; (capitals and italics in original).² We did not include Pecqueur as an author of this slogan, since he only offers us the second half.

The Saint-Simon-Pecqueur Slogan

Before the Cabet-Blanc-Marx slogan, there were versions of a different slogan in the early socialist literature, such as: “To each according to his ability; To each according to his works”. We find versions of this slogan in the writings of the followers of Saint-Simon in the late 1820s, the 1830s, and up to Constantin Pecqueur in 1842. The slogan is in the introduction of the *Doctrine de Saint-Simon* (1830, 112–69): “to each following his capacity [capacité]; to each capacity following his works [œuvres] (*Doctrine de Saint-Simon* 1830, xxvii) and is an epigraph

² This is not the complete criterion for (iii). He cryptically adds to this: “..., *and at the same time according to his means, his resources expressed and measured by the MONEY he possesses*” which we do not attempt to interpret here.

on the front cover of the Saint-Simonian journals *L'Organisateur* (1829–31) and *Le Globe* (1830–32): “To each according to his capacity, to each capacity according to his works”.³

In 1842, Pecqueur addresses (i) ranking and (ii) reward:

Thus, regarding RANKING, the formula is: *To each according to his relative strength [force relative], or his place in the general examination [le concours universel]*.

Concerning REWARD, the formula is: *To each according to his function and his conduct in this function.* (1842, 675; with capitals and italics in original.)

We can construe this to be a late version of the Saint-Simonian slogan, with “relative strength” taking the place of “capacity” and “function and conduct in his function” taking the place of “works”.

Pecqueur straddles both slogans. He repeats the first and second parts of the Saint-Simon slogan. As to the second part, he accepts differential remuneration in reward on grounds of the nature of one’s function and how well one does in this function. But when it comes to “consumption and distribution of riches” he anticipates the second part of the Cabet-Blanc-Marx slogan: Each person should get a minimal level of riches so that everyone’s needs and tastes are satisfied. We will return to the issue of how socialists envisage the satisfaction of needs below.

³ This epigraph changed in 1832: “To each according to his vocation. To each capacity according to his works.”

The Soviet Constitution Slogan

Skipping one century forward we see yet another slogan in the Soviet Constitution in 1936, which combines the first part of the Cabet-Blanc-Marx slogan with the second part of the Saint-Simon-Pecqueur slogan, while substituting the singular “work” for “works”: “From each according to his ability [способности], To each according to his work [труду].” We find it at the end of the first chapter entitled “The organization of Soviet society” following Art. 12: “The principle applied in the U.S.S.R. is that of socialism: ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his work’.”

Inspiration

We have presented the three slogans in Table 1. Each slogan does not precisely occur word for word in the original language as it is expressed in Table 1, but we have individuated slogans by their content.

	Authors	Part One	Part Two
Slogan 1	Saint-Simonians, Pecqueur [1829–1842]	To each according to his ability	To each according to his works
Slogan 2	Cabet, Blanc, Marx [1845– 1875], with Part Two in Pecqueur [1842]	From each according to his ability	To each according to his needs
Slogan 3	1936 Soviet Constitution [1936]	From each according to his ability	To each according to his work

Table 1. Three Slogans in Chronological Order

What was the inspiration for these slogans? The writings of the early French socialists contained many religious references and they were driven by a religious vision. The Saint-Simonian Gustave D'Eichthal goes as far as to say that with Saint-Simon's social theory "God's reign has arrived on earth" (*Doctrine de Saint-Simon* 1830, 11). Saint-Simon's last book, which lays out his views on social justice, was titled *Le Nouveau Christianisme* (1825). Cabet was the author of a tome entitled *Le vrai Christianisme suivant Jésus Christ* (1846). This "true Christianity" was meant to be an inspiration for a just political and social order. Blanc (1850, 72) explicitly attributes divine authorship for the second slogan: "Equality is but proportionality, and will not genuinely exist until each WILL PRODUCE ACCORDING TO HIS FACULTIES AND

CONSUME ACCORDING TO HIS NEEDS, according to the law, which is, as it were, written by God himself into the [social] organisation” (original emphasis).⁴

In table 2, we list all five parts of the slogans and we link each to a corresponding phrase in the Bible. In the footnotes we provided some philological backing: The wording in the French Bible translations at the time does make the links between the slogans and the biblical passages plausible. In later sections, we will also show that the biblical passages can be interpreted as promoting ideals that relate to the ideals that the socialist authors of the slogan wish to promote. Our concern here is strictly historical and exegetical—our presentation should not be read as a defence of Christian Socialism. Whether Christianity is truly supportive of or even compatible with Socialist or Communist ideals is a grand question which has received much attention over the years (see Finger 2004) but is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴ The text actually states “son organisation” which can both be rendered as “God’s organisation” or as “the law’s organisation.”

Part of Slogan	Reference	Bible Passage within Context
To each according to his abilities	Matthew 25:15	15. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability . Then he went away.
To each according to his works	Romans 2:6	6. [God] will render to each one according to his works : 7. to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life;
From each according to his ability	Acts 11:29	29. So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability , to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.
To each according to his needs	Acts 2:45	And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need .
	Acts 4:35	34. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35. and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need .
To each according to his work	1 Cor. 3:8	8. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor .

Table 2. Biblical Origins of Constitutive Parts of the Slogans

Let us go through the bible passages in Table 2. “To each according to his ability” is a phrase in the Parable of the Talents. A man gives his three servants respectively five, two and

one talents and takes off.⁵ When he returns, the servant with five talents has earned five more talents, the one with two talents has earned two more, but the one with one talent has buried the one talent and dug it back up to return to the master, saying that he was afraid to lose it. The former two servants are praised and the latter is dismissed.⁶ Romans 2:6 conveys the idea that God will reward people according to their works on Judgment Day.⁷ Acts 11:29 is about charity. Peter reports that the prophet Agabus came from Jerusalem to Antioch and predicted a severe famine in the Roman world. The church of Antioch sent relief to Christians in Judea, each according to ability.⁸ Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:35 describe social practices of early Christian communities. Members sold off goods and the proceeds from the sale were brought to the apostles and “shared out to the needy *as anyone from time to time had need*” in Barrett’s

⁵ A single talent was a very large sum of money, more precisely, “what a laborer might hope to earn in half a lifetime”. (France 2007, 706)

⁶ Matthew 25:15 is translated as “*selon la capacité différente de chacun d’eux*” in the Lemaistre de Sacy translation (1667 vol. 1, 100) and “*à chacun selon sa capacité*” in the de Beausobre and Lenfant translation (1719 vol. 1, 109), which matches the quotes in the Saint-Simonians. A similar parable is recorded in Luke 19:11–27, but no phrase that is equivalent to “to each according to his ability” occurs in this passage.

⁷ For a discussion of this passage, see Cranfield 1975, 146. Romans 2:6 is translated as “*selon ses œuvres*” in Lemaistre de Sacy (1667 vol. 2, 12) and in de Beausobre et Lenfant (1719 vol. 2, 20), which matches the quotes in the Saint-Simonians. See also Psalm 61:13.

⁸ Acts 11:29 is translated as “*selon ses forces*” in de Beausobre et Lenfant (1719 vol. 1, 428) which matches the quotes of Cabet and Blanc.

translation (1994, 169) reflecting an iterative reading of the Greek verb construction.⁹ The French translations at the time are adequately rendered as to all or to each “as any had need”.¹⁰ For 1 Corinthians 3:8, the Russian Synodal translation (1917) is reflected in the original wording of ‘according to his work’ in the 1936 Soviet Constitution.¹¹

There are two additional biblical references that do not explicitly contain the slogans, but the authors of the texts make use of the references in support of the slogans. We have listed these passages in Table 3.

⁹ Barrett’s “from time to time” renders the iterative meaning of the imperfect “εἶχεν” (to have) plus the particle “ἅν” in the original which is used in both passages.

¹⁰ Acts 2: 45 is translated as “*selon le besoin que chacun en avoit*” and Acts 4:35 is translated as “*selon qu'il en avoit besoin*” in Lemaistre de Sacy (1667 vol. 2, 436) which is close to the versions of Pecqueur, Cabet and Blanc.

¹¹ The Russian Synodal translation (1917) uses the term “труды” for “κόπον” (or “labour” in the English Standard Version) and it is this term that we find in the Soviet Constitution. In the English translation of the Constitution, “труды” is rendered as “work”.

Part of Slogan	Bible Passage	Found in
From each according to his ability	Mark 10: 44. and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all ¹²	Blanc (1849a, 8–9)
To each according to his work	2 Thess 3:10. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.	Soviet Constitution, Ch. 1, Art. 12

Table 3. Supporting Biblical References

Blanc (1849a, 8–9), in his discussion of “from each according to his ability”, quotes Mark 10:44 and illustrates this by saying that the stronger one of two neighbors should carry more weight. Article 12 of Chapter 1 of The Soviet Constitution states:

In the U.S.S.R. work is a duty and a matter of honor for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle: “He who does not work, neither shall he eat.”

The principle applied in the U.S.S.R. is that of socialism: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.” (Constitution of the USSR)

¹² We use the American Standard Version here because it is closer to Blanc’s rendering of the text in French. Matt 20:27 and Luke 22:26 recount Jesus making a claim that is substantially identical.

The phrase “He who does not work, neither shall he eat” matches the analogous proportional principle “[food] to each according to his work” which we find in the second part of the principle of Socialism in the Soviet Constitution. Lenin (1918, 391–92) quotes the phrase “He who does not work, neither shall he eat” in “On the Famine.” He does not make the biblical reference, but the phrase is taken directly from 2 Thessalonians 3:10. In this passage the author of 2 Thessalonians (traditionally identified as Paul) tells his companions to shun the idle and to set an example by working for their food.

The Saint-Simonian Slogan “To Each According to his Ability”

The Saint-Simonians are foremost opposed to any form of inheritance. In the France of Saint-Simon’s time, nobility was handed wealth and privileges by birth and Saint-Simon accused them of being idle and not putting their wealth and privileges to work for the good of society. The lottery of birth leaves it to chance who will be assigned functions and this is to the detriment of the poor (*Doctrine de Saint-Simon* 1830, 15–42). “All privileges of birth,” the Saint-Simonians write, “will, without exception, be abolished” (*Doctrine de Saint-Simon* 1830, xxxvii).¹³

The Saint-Simonians want to put the state in charge of offering an education, the means of production, and a function that correspond to each person’s talents so that they can contribute to the social good (Anon. 1831b). The state is meant to discharge of this function through the banks. Saint-Simonians do not advocate communal property or communal ownership of the

¹³ This epigraph can be found on all front pages of *L’Organisateur* and also *Le Globe* (except some issues in 1832).

means of production. Rather, functions controlling the requisite means of production must be placed in the right hands so as to advance the social good. And it is these functions and means of production that need to be apportioned *to* people in accordance with their ability and as the outcome of an open competition.¹⁴

The contemporary political ideal of positions open to all under fair equality of opportunity is already inscribed in the last sentence of Article VI of the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789: “All titles, positions and public employments are equally admissible to all citizens, who are equal in the eyes [of the Law], according to their ability and without distinction other than the distinction between their virtues and their talents.” The Saint-Simonian program adds to this the ideal of equality of opportunity. It is not sufficient that functions should be formally open to all, but the state should provide the opportunities required to take up these functions. Putting the banks in charge of redistributing the wealth of the deceased addresses this concern. The state should provide people with education and the means of production so that they can take up the positions that permit them to realise their native abilities given their level of ambition. The phrase “égalité de chance” is found in the Saint-Simonians, which can reasonably be translated as “equality of opportunity”: “There is only one equality possible and equitable in the interest of all, that is, *equality of opportunity...*” (Anon. 1831a). There is also a more colourful passage with Messianic overtones: “The day revealed by Saint-Simon approaches in which each shall have an inheritance and each receives from the distributor state the means of production, an education, and functions in line with his vocation” (Anon. 1831b).

¹⁴ Bazard, et al., 1830 discuss the role of banks (1830, 112–39) and property (1830, 139–169).

What is Saint-Simon's rationale for organizing society in this manner? He writes that there is a single principle given from God to men and this is to organize society so that it will be "most advantageous to the greatest number" (1825, 3185). One might think that in this passage Saint-Simon is connecting to the utilitarian tradition, aiming for the greatest happiness of (or for) the greatest number, as we find it in Hutcheson (1729, 180), in his contemporary Bentham (1843, 291), and later in Mill (1863, 210). But a reading in the spirit of Rawls' Difference Principle (1971, 75–83) is more plausible: for Saint-Simon (1825, 3205), "the greatest number" or the "most numerous class" are coextensive with "the poorest people" and society should be organized toward improving their lot. This is especially clear in the epigraph of the Saint-Simonians publication *Le Globe* (1830–32): "All social institutions should aim to improve the moral, physical and intellectual situation of the most numerous and poorest class."

Saint-Simon considers two alternative arrangements. There is the current arrangement with an idle nobility inheriting top functions. This he rejects because it leaves the poor destitute: first, the poor cannot access these positions and second the production is too limited with an idle nobility at the wheel. Saint-Simon (1821, 2464) also considers an arrangement in which leading positions are assigned on a rotating basis. This he says is "Turkish-style Equality" contrasting it with "Industrial Equality," which follows his slogan. He rejects Turkish-style Equality because it also leaves matters to chance and fails to connect social functions with the ability to contribute to the social good.

Is it reasonable to find inspiration in Matthew 25:15 for Saint-Simon's view of how society should arrange opportunities? In Matthew's Parable of the Talents (25:14–30), the Master offers his servants different amounts of money because he knows that they have different abilities – one can handle greater investments than the other. The Greek unit of money is

τάλαντον and is translated as “talent” in most Bible translations. The master gives them differential amounts of talents because he knows the servants to have differential abilities to handle the money. One can also think of it as an allegory of God providing differential natural abilities and expecting people to treat these natural abilities as opportunities to build on. So, there is a close connection between “talent” and “natural ability” and already in the fifteenth century the word “talent” has come to mean natural ability in English based on Matthew 25:15.¹⁵ Hence it is defensible to use this passage as inspiration for the ideal that society should provide people with the opportunities to develop their natural talents.

The Saint-Simonian Slogan “To Each According to his Works”

Saint-Simon is not an egalitarian when it comes to social status or remuneration. Inequalities will remain because people bring different abilities and levels of ambition into the association. Now both social status and benefits should be proportional to achievements which will lead to inequalities. It would be absurd, says Saint-Simon, to deny such inequalities. In earlier writings Saint-Simon defends remuneration proportional to the “*mise sociale*” or the social stake (Saint-Simon 1821, 2464; and 1819–20, 2188). The social stake are the resources that a person puts into society generating social utility, including both his human resources (ability and effort) and his financial resources (capital). Benefits should be proportional to this social stake. The Saint-Simonians introduce the slogan in the following form: “To each ability according to his works”

¹⁵ In the Oxford English Dictionary, entry III for “talent” is: “mental endowment; natural ability [from the parable of the talents, Matthew XXV: 14–30 etc.] with a first occurrence in the English language in this meaning dating back to 1430.”

(*Doctrine de Saint-Simon* 1830, xxvii, xxviii, 11). We also find: “Each should be ... remunerated according to his works.” (*Doctrine de Saint-Simon* 1830, 111) At one junction there is mention of proportionality to “personal merit” (*Doctrine de Saint-Simon* 1830, 89).

Saint-Simon wants remuneration proportional to one’s contribution to the social good. The Saint-Simonians and later writers will try to delineate what goes into this contribution in ways that are congruent with Saint-Simon’s own thought. Fourier (1829, 362–71) bases remuneration on labour, capital and talent with a division key of $5/12^{\text{th}}$ for labour, $4/12^{\text{th}}$ for capital, and $3/12^{\text{th}}$ for talent.¹⁶ Similarly, in Pecqueur (1842, 675), a worker’s remuneration should be “according to his function and his conduct within this function” whereas functions are assigned on grounds of “relative power and one’s placement in the general examination.”

These early 19th century thinkers were trying to determine how to measure one’s contribution to the social good—a question which is still very much with us.¹⁷ They took some mixture of talent, ambition, effort, work, and capital to be relevant. The capital could be capital acquired as remuneration on grounds of earlier contributions to the social good. It could also be capital acquired through inheritance in the transitional stage. The Saint-Simonians rejected the violence of the French Revolution and favoured gradual change. They did not favor confiscation of wealth and thought the abolition of inheritance should be introduced gradually. Hence present financial capital acquired through inheritance would stand and could be part of one’s social stake.

¹⁶ We have not been able to find any information on why Fourier proposes this particular division key.

¹⁷ We find the same discussion today in terms of “performance-related pay”. (Brown and Armstrong 1999; Armstrong and Brown 2006; and Frey 2013).

The model for remuneration according to works clearly comes from God rendering to each according to works on Judgment Day, as in Romans 2:6. The Saint-Simonians explicitly take “celestial punishments and compensations ... according to works” as a model for rewards within our “terrestrial hierarchy” which should not be “according to birth” but “according to ... works” (*Doctrine de Saint-Simon*, 89). We will return to the question of what enters into works in the penultimate section titled “The distinction between ‘To each according to his *Works*’ and ‘To each according to his *Work*’.”

The Shift from “*To Each According to his Ability*” to “*From Each According to his Ability*”

What brings about the shift from “To each according to his ability” to “From each according to his ability”? As long as the social organization is structured around hierarchy and private property, as in Saint-Simon and followers, each individual must be offered the proper rank and private property in order to have the opportunity to contribute to the social good. But both Cabet and Blanc abolish hierarchy and private property and hence there is no need any more to insist that the right assignments are made *to* the right people. All we need to do then is insist on a moral principle of social responsibility, namely the requirement that people contribute to the social good in accordance with their capacities.

As to hierarchy, Blanc’s reference to Mark 10:44, which documents Jesus’ intervention in a quarrel between the apostles about who is more important, is telling. Blanc (1849a, 8) encourages social responsibility: “who can do the most, must do the most” (*qui peut le plus doit*

le plus). This passage is reminiscent of Luke 12:48: “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.”

In Cabet’s *Le vrai Christianisme*, he expounds on the Christian emphasis on the *good will*: “Thus, for Jesus, duties are proportional to capacity; each must do, and the more one can do or give, the more one should give or do” (1846, 153). He bases this interpretation on Mark 12:40 and Wisdom of Solomon 6:8–9 which both play on the theme that greater punishments await more powerful people for wrongdoings.¹⁸

The actual phrasing “from each according to his ability” is closest to Acts 11:29 in Table 2. This passage is in the context of charity rather than work, but it also expresses the idea that each should contribute what they can for the benefit of the social good. In the original Koine Greek, the passage actually reads “in proportion as they prospered.” It goes on to say that each “determined to send [a contribution]” which suggests that each was free to determine how much to send, which also accords with Paul’s instruction in 2 Corinthians 9:7. Hence, in one’s personal

¹⁸ Cabet’s rendering of the texts is not quite accurate. Mark 12:40 states: “[The scribes] will receive the greater condemnation.” Cabet renders the quote as: “A Pharisean, says [Jesus], a doctor of Law, who sins against the Law, will be more harshly condemned.” The translation freely integrates materials from Mark 12:38 and Mark 12:40 as found in the bible translation of Lemaistre de Sacy: 1667: 175–6. Cabet quotes from *La Sagesse* 6: “9. Mais les plus grands sont menacés des plus grands supplices. 10. C’est donc à vous, ô rois, que j’adresse ces discours, afin que vous appreniez la sagesse” (Lemaistre de Sacy: 1705: 98). The passage maps onto the Wisdom of Solomon 6:8-9: “6.8 But a strict inquiry is in store for the mighty. 6.9 To you then, O monarchs, my words are directed that you may learn wisdom and not transgress.”

decision-making about charitable giving, a principle of proportionality to wealth functions as a guideline (Barrett 1994, 565).

The Progression Toward “To Each According to his Needs”

Both in Blanc and in Marx remuneration according to needs is taken up as an ideal for the future communist society, but as of now, they say, we should strive for remuneration according to performance.

Blanc’s discussion of remuneration is complicated. To make sense of the various texts, we distinguish between four stages. The *first stage* is the noncooperative mode of production in which wages are presumably determined by the labor relations in France at the time and to institute wage equality under these conditions, says Blanc (1850, 75), would be an incentive for idleness. Blanc (1839, 23) discusses what remuneration should be like in the social workshops. He starts off by saying that the difference in salaries should be on a gradient as a function of the hierarchy of functions, with the subsistence minimum as a lower bound. However, a few lines below this passage, he writes that the part of the revenues earmarked for remuneration should be divided in *equal portions* (1839, 24). When he is questioned about this in a review of his work, he takes a step back and responds as follows.¹⁹ Due to the false education that the masses have received about what constitutes fair remuneration, the best we can do at first is to let wages be in line with a ranking of functions. To do otherwise would be “too much of a shock” (1841, 109). This is the *second stage*. Only in a *third stage*, we can move to wage equality. Blanc (1849a, 9)

¹⁹ On this point, see particularly Blanc, 1841, 108–110; Blanc 1844, 364–65; and Blanc 1850, 72–77.

says that equal wages serve to avoid jealousy and hatred between workers. Wage equality should also be understood in terms of purchasing power parity though, since “the conditions of the material life are not the same at all points in France” (1849a, 53). Finally, in a *fourth stage*, we should move to a system in which remuneration can satisfy needs as much as possible. A new education is meant to change ideas and morals in this respect and people will come to acknowledge the limits of their needs “indicated by nature and assigned by morals” (1849b, 72). Blanc is explicit that we cannot move to a system of remuneration on grounds of needs today. Robert Owen, Blanc writes, is not a “practical reformer” because he wanted to move to a remuneration according to needs, “in a society in which this repartition is not even based on services [rendered]” (1839, 22). Hence, Owen’s mistake seems to be that he wishes to jump from stage one to stage four, without passing through stage two and three. “History,” Blanc says, “is not made in one day” (1849b, 72).

Marx also envisages that in the communist Society, the distribution should be “according to needs.” But he spells out three reasons why the time is not ripe for this yet ([1875] 1938, 10). To distribute according to needs the following three conditions need to be fulfilled.

First, we should abandon labor relations of subordination that are grounded on the idea that mental labor is superior to manual labor. Blanc’s argument as to why remuneration should be proportional to function in the second stage addresses the same issue: We currently think in terms of remuneration as an incentive and in terms of differential merit attached to a hierarchy of functions and our thinking in this regard needs to shift (1839, 23).

Second, labor should acquire a different meaning, that is, it should come to have intrinsic value rather than instrumental value. Blanc (1850, 73–74) also argues against labor as a mere means to increase our personal consumption. But for Marx, the alternative is that labor acquires

intrinsic meaning, whereas for Blanc, the alternative is that we come to see labor as a means to serve our community.

Third, through an all-round education, labor should have greater productive power so that there will be an abundance of goods. Marx does not tell us why an abundance of goods would enable distribution according to needs. We can see two reasons. First, it makes it possible to satisfy everyone's needs. And second, if there is no scarcity, then there is less reason for envy towards a person who receives more. Note that in Blanc (1849b, 72), the problem of scarcity is tackled differently: We should educate people to recognize the limits of their needs.

There is a marked difference between Blanc and Marx in their determination of what stands in the way of "to each according to his needs." For Blanc, we should change the person through education: People should be taught not to attach differential value to functions, to think of their labour as service to the community (1849a, 10), and to reassess the limits of their needs. For Marx we should change the world: Subordination in labor relations needs to be abolished, the nature of work should be non-alienating which will make it intrinsically rewarding, and production needs to be increased by tapping into our human resources to create abundance. In the transitional phase, Marx believes that people should be rewarded for their labor and that the relevant measure should be an aggregative function of the intensity and the duration of labor. It is this standard for the transitional phase that is taken up by the Soviet Constitution in the phrase "To each according to his work."

In the Soviet Constitution, the inclusion of the phrase "To each according to his work" and the phrase from 2 Thessalonians 3:10 ("If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat") goes back to Lenin who represents the link between work and remuneration as (i) self-evident and (ii) at the core of socialism (1917, 44), and not as a transitional phase.

Marx does worry about the transitional phase: He considers a case in which the labor of two people is equal on a measure of duration and intensity, but one person has a larger family to feed than the other (1875, 9). However, he offers no solution for this problem. Blanc, on the other hand, does make accommodations for needs in his transitional phases. The revenue of the social workhouses will be split in three parts. One part is for the remuneration of the workers, a second part is to cover the needs of the aged, sick and infirm and to bail out social workhouses in less successful economic sectors, and a third part is to invest in new means of production to expand the workhouse. (Blanc 1839, 24) Social security for the aged, sick and infirm and support for industries in need is a limited form of reward according to need. And it would then be a small step to introduce transfer payments to families to solve Marx's problem – addressing the needs of larger families.

Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:35 describe the early Christian communities as communities of mutual care providing for the needs of all their members. Early socialists such as Cabet saw these communities as a model for social justice which he wanted to implement in the Icarian communities that he founded.

The Distinction between “To Each according to his *Works*” and “To Each According to his *Work*”

“To each according to his work” in the Soviet Constitution seems to echo “To each according to his works” of Saint-Simon, but the singular-plural distinction is not as innocent as it seems. Remember how in Saint-Simon, “works” was determined by social stake (*mise sociale*) – that is,

by what one puts into the game. Part of this social stake is capital. This drops out once we move to collective ownership of the means of production, starting with Cabet. Another part of this social stake is ability, which determines a person's function. Remuneration for abilities also drops out in Cabet and Blanc. For Blanc (1849a, 8–9, see also 1850, 74), abilities are not a ground for reward because in so far as they are innate talents, they are God-given. For Cabet (1840b, 497), abilities are not a ground for reward because in so far that they are skills acquired in education, they are provided for by society. So, abilities do not provide the basis for a personal merit that could ground remuneration. Hence, if we revisit Fourier's triad that grounds remuneration, viz. work, talent and capital, then all that is left is work. That is, work is all we put into the game that can form the basis for reward.

Another difference between “To each according to his works” and “to each according to his work” lies in what it is that constitutes the reward. For Saint-Simon, it is not just about remuneration, but also about social status, one's place in the social hierarchy. We need to understand this within the context of Saint-Simon's objections to nobility. It was a radical idea at the time to make one's place in the social hierarchy not contingent on birth, but on one's own personal contribution to the social good. But Saint-Simon was not critical of a social hierarchy and social status as such. An early exponent of this position can be found in Étienne-Gabriel Morelly's *Code de la Nature* (1755, 56): “Each individual must be ranked according to his social status, titles, and honours, [measured] by degree of zeal, capacity, and the utility of the services [rendered].” We also find the emphasis on social status in the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, with Article 1 stating that *social distinctions* should be based on the common good and Article 6 that *titles (dignités)* should be based on ability, virtue and talents.

But this social status hierarchy becomes suspect in Cabet who is under the influence of a biblical ideal of social equality. He comments on Luke 2:14, which, following the Latin Vulgate translation, reads “Peace on earth to people of good will.”²⁰ Jesus, Cabet (1846, 151–52) says, is more impressed by good will than by ability, talent and power. Ability (only) grounds duties, with the implication being that it does not ground social status. In the Icarian communities, following Cabet, leadership positions in the workshops do not reflect a social hierarchy and are determined by elections (Cabet 1840a, 173) which is also what Blanc defends (1839, 24). And as mentioned in the previous section, for Marx, there will be no social subordination in the communist organization of labor.

First Corinthians 3:8 (“He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.”) can be read in the same vein. There is no distinction between both roles—the only thing that matters when it comes to one’s heavenly reward is one’s efforts. And this is then being transposed to remuneration for work. Second Thessalonians 3:10 (“If

²⁰ The Latin Vulgate takes the Greek version of the text with the genitive “εὐδοκίας” (rather than the nominative “εὐδοκία” as found in the Byzantine textual tradition) and translates “εὐδοκίας” as “bonae voluntatis”. The question then becomes how the genitive should be read. Cabet follows the genitive construction and renders it as (i) “people of good will”. Alternative renderings are (ii) “people upon whom God’s will/favour rests”. (Marshall 1978, 112) French bible translations of the 18th century follow either the nominative or rendering (ii) of the genitive construction, though we do find rendering (i) in French religious writings of the time, e.g., in Bossuet 1747, 218–19. Marshall (1978, 112) takes the genitive construction and rendering (ii) to be most probable based on parallel Aramaic phrases in the Qumran texts.

anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat”) requires more background. In 2 Thessalonians 3:9 the author argues that he and his co-workers do have a right to be maintained by the church—presumably because ministry is a sufficient contribution to the social good (see 1 Corinthians 9). But there were idle and disruptive elements in the Christian community in Thessalonica at the time who wanted to free-ride. For this reason, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-8 says that Paul and his co-workers did manual labor (“work”) for their food in order to set a model for the Thessalonian Christians and to distance themselves from the free-riders. The intent in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 was to exclude the idle elements in the communities by making remuneration contingent on manual labor.²¹

Conclusion

The roots of early French socialist and communist thought are deeply Christian. Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians, Cabet, and Blanc all borrow their core slogans from biblical passages and support their political views by Christian doctrine, writing roughly between 1825 and 1850.

The Saint-Simonians coined a version of the earliest slogan “To each according to his ability; To each according to his works” in the epigraph of their journal in 1829. The phrase “To each according to his ability” is taken from the biblical Parable of the Talents. It should be read as a principle of equality of opportunity. The phrase “To each according to his works” is taken from biblical passages stating that God will judge people according to their works. Early socialist writers try to express some principle of what is now known today as performance-related pay.

²¹ For further discussion of 2 Thess. 3:7–10 see Green 2002, 345–50.

They appeal to personal merit, conduct in one's function, "social stake" (covering ability, capital, or labour), and contribution to the social good.

Cabet coined a version of the well-known slogan "From each according to his ability; To each according to his needs" in 1845, which we will reencounter in Blanc and Marx. "From each according to his ability" is taken from a biblical passage documenting how early Christian communities made contributions to charity. Both Cabet and Blanc support this ideal by biblical passages that are variations on the theme that more is expected from people with greater talents or power. "To each according to his needs" is a biblical passage which enters as a principle of distribution of resources in early Christian communities. Blanc and Marx realise that we can only gradually implement this principle. They differ though in that for this principle to take effect Blanc requires a change in people through education whereas Marx requires a change in the nature of labor and labor relations.

In the Soviet Constitution of 1936 we find the third slogan: "From each according to his ability; To each according to his work." "To each according to his work" has its biblical origin in a passage from Paul in which the measure of heavenly reward is one's labor and in another passage in which Paul admonishes believers that they should work for their food. Marx takes this to be a principle of remuneration in the transitional phase before societal conditions permit us to implement "to each according to his needs." He proposes that remuneration should be proportional to both intensity and duration of work. Lenin, on the other hand, takes it to be a self-evident principle that is at the core of socialism. Blanc proportions remuneration in the transitional phase relative to work as a social gradient of functions within the workhouses, while mixing this with welfare provisions for the needy.

The shift from remuneration according to “works” to remuneration to “work” is not trivial. The Saint-Simonian measure of “works” was one’s “social stake”, that is, how much one had invested into the creation of the social good. This investment could be in the form of ability, capital or labor. But as ability and capital become irrelevant as ground for remuneration in the Communist society, only a measure of labor or “work” remains as a basis for remuneration.

We have discussed three socialist slogans with subtle differences between them. But there is more than meets the eye. The slogans are rooted in various biblical passages from which they drew their inspiration. And the progression between these slogans opened a window to the development and the contested issues of early socialist thought.

References

- Anonymous. 1831a. “Mysticisme constitutionnel.” *Le Globe* 7, no. 114 (April 24): 457.
- 1831b. “De la propriété.” *Le Globe* 7, no. 309 (November 5): 1235.
- Armstrong, Michael, and Duncan Brown. 2006. *Strategic Reward—Making it Happen*. London: Kogan Page.
- Barrett, Charles Kingsley. 1994. *The Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark.
- Beausobre, Isaac de, and Jacques Lenfant. 1719. *Le Nouveau Testament de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*. 2 vols. Amsterdam: Chez Pierre Humbert.
- Bentham, Jeremy. (1843) 1983. *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, Published under the Superintendence of his Executor John Bowring*, vol. 10. Edinburgh: William Tait.
- Blanc, Louis. 1839. “Organisation du travail.” *Revue du Progrès Politique, Social et Littéraire*, no. 4: 1–30.
- 1841. *Organisation du Travail. Association Universelle. Chefs d’Ateliers. Hommes de Lettres*. Paris: Administration de la librairie.
- 1844. *Révolution Française. Histoire de Dix Ans. 1830–1840*. Tome Premier. Bruxelles: Société typographique.

- 1849a. *Le Catéchisme des Socialistes*. Paris: Au bureau du Nouveau Monde.
- 1849b. *La Révolution de Février au Luxembourg*. Paris: Michel Lévy, Frères.
- 1850. *L'Organisation du Travail. Neuvième édition Refondue et Augmentée de Chapitres Nouveaux*. Paris: Au Bureau du Nouveau Monde.
- Boer, Roland. 2017. "Stalin's Biblical Hermeneutics: From 2 Thessalonians 3 to Acts 4." *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 4 (1): 71–89.
- Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne. (1727) 1747. *Élévations à Dieu sur tous les mystères de la religion chrétienne*, vol. 2. Paris: Pierre-Jean Mariette.
- Brown, Duncan, and Michael Armstrong. 1999. *Paying for Contribution: Real Performance-Related Pay Strategies*. London: Kogan Page.
- Cabet, Étienne. 1840a. *Voyage et Aventures de Lord William Carisdall en Icarie*. I. Paris: Hyppolyte Souverain.
- 1840b. *Voyage et Aventures de Lord William Carisdall en Icarie*. II. Paris: Hyppolyte Souverain.
- (1840) 1845. *Voyage en Icarie*. Paris: Au bureau du Populaire.
- 1846. *Le vrai Christianisme suivant Jésus-Christ*. Paris: Au bureau du Populaire.
- Constitution of the USSR. 1936.
- www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/1936toc.html.
- Cranfield, Charles Ernest Burland. 1975. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol 1. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark.
- Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen de 1789*.
- www.legifrance.gouv.fr/Droit-francais/Constitution/Declaration-des-Droits-de-l-Homme-et-du-Citoyen-de-1789.
- Doctrine de Saint-Simon. Première Année. Exposition 1829. 1830*. Paris: Au bureau de l'Organisateur.
- Finger, Reta Halteman. 2004. "Cultural Attitudes in Western Christianity toward the Community of Goods in Acts 2 and 4." *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 78 (2): 235–70.
- Fourier, Charles. 1829. *Le Nouveau Monde Industriel ou Sociétaire*. Paris: Bossange Père.

- France Richard Thomas. 2007. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Cambridge UK: Eerdmans.
- Frey, Bruno. 2013. "How Should People Be Rewarded for Their Work?" In *Behavioural Public Policy*, edited by A. Oliver, 165–90. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gilabert, Pablo. 2015. "The socialist principle "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs"" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 46 (2): 197-225.
- Green, Gene L. 2002. *The Letters to the Thessalonians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Hutcheson, Francis. (1725) 1729. *An inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in two Treatises. I. Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design. II. Concerning Moral, Good and Evil*. London: J. and J. Knapton.
- King James Bible. www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.
- Lamartine, Alphonse de, and Adolphe Thiers, Louis-Blanc, Jules Dufaure, Prosper Duvergier de Hauranne, Alexis de Tocqueville, Louis Wolowski, Alexandre-Auguste Ledru-Rollin, et al. With an introduction by Émile de Girardin. 1849. *Le Droit au Travail au Luxembourg et à l'Assemblée Nationale*. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères.
- Lemaistre de Sacy, Louis-Isaac. 1667. *Le Nouveau Testament de Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ*. 2 vols. Mons : Gaspard Migeot.
- 1705. *La Sainte-Bible*. Brussels: François Foppens.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. (1917) 1976. *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Teaching on the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*. Peking: Foreign Language Press. www.cym.ie/documents/State_Rev.pdf.
- (1918) 1965. "On the Famine: A Letter to the Workers of Petrograd" *Collected Works of Lenin*, vol 27: 391–98. Moscow: Progress Publishers. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/may/22b.htm
- Marshall, Ian Howard. 1978. *The Gospel of Luke: a Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdsman.
- Marx, Karl. (1875) 1890–91. *Kritik des Gothaer Programms*. www.mlwerke.de/me/me19/me19_013.htm.
- (1875) 1938. *Critique of the Gotha Program: With Appendices by Marx, Engels and Lenin*. New York: International Publishers.
- Mill, John Stuart. (1863) 1969. *Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society*. London: Routledge.

Morelly, Étienne-Gabriel. (1755) 1841. *Code de la Nature ou le Véritable Esprit de ses Lois*. Paris: Paul Masgana.

Pecqueur, Constantin. 1842. *Théorie Nouvelle d'économie Sociale et Politique, ou étude sur l'Organisation des Sociétés*. Paris: Capelle.

Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Russian Synodal Text of the Bible. 1917. Orthodox Synodal Edition.

Saint-Simon, Claude-Henri. (1819–20) 2012. “L’Organisateur.” In *Henri de Saint-Simon. Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, edited by J. Grange, P. Musso, P. Régnier and F. Yonnet, 2099–2268. Paris: PUF.

-----(1821) 2012. “Du système industriel.” In *Henri de Saint-Simon. Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, edited by J. Grange, P. Musso, P. Régnier and F. Yonnet, 2323–2719. Paris: PUF.

-----(1825) 2012. Le nouveau Christianisme. In *Henri de Saint-Simon. Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 4, edited by J. Grange, P. Musso, P. Régnier and F. Yonnet, 3167–3266. Paris: PUF.