

# L'Humanitaire (1841), the first libertarian communist publication (excerpts)

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## L'HUMANITAIRE,

ORGANE DE LA SCIENCE SOCIALE.

L'Humanitaire paraît une fois par mois, du 10 au 15. Il est fondé et rédigé par une collection de souscripteurs, qui retirent un nombre d'exemplaires équivalant à leur souscription. Le bureau du journal est rue de la Verrerie, 52. Des dépôts du journal sont établis chez Rouanet, libraire, rue Verdelet, 4; chez Prévôt, libraire, rue Bour-

bon-Villeneuve, 61; France, libraire, rue de Seine-Saint-Germain, 18; Faguet, libraire, galerie de l'Odéon. — Prix d'abonnement pour Paris: un an, 2 fr. 40 c. — Six mois, 1 fr. 20 c. — Pour les départements: un an, 3 fr. — Six mois, 1 fr. 30 c., en un mandat sur la poste.

### DE LA SCIENCE SOCIALE.

Cette partie de la philosophie que, dans notre grossier et absurde langage, on appelle *Science sociale*, a pour but d'indiquer à l'espèce humaine les moyens de se conserver et de s'améliorer. Maintenant, qui nous fera connaître les moyens de conservation et d'amélioration? d'où partirons-nous pour arriver à cette découverte? quelle sera la base sur laquelle nous appuierons notre loi sociale? nous n'ons le rechercher.

Vous avez cette prétention, n'est-ce pas? non; nos facultés n'en sont point encore à cet état de déviance; nous savons distinguer le mal de l'accident; et, probablement, nos adversaires n'ont jamais su faire cette distinction. Le premier n'existe nulle part dans la nature; il disparaît donc totalement le jour où l'homme sera assez éclairé et assez sage pour baser sa règle de conduite d'après les lois immuables de la nature. Le second (l'accident) est le cas où une portion de la matière se trouve privée de la loi universelle, et cela par une cause fortuite, laquelle, dans certains cas, aurait pu être empêchée par la détermination de l'homme, sur laquelle, dans d'autres circonstances, l'homme ne peut avoir aucun empire.

Excerpts from L'Humanitaire, a journal published in 1841 in Paris. The journal expressed the tendency called "communistes matérialistes", also called "communistes immédiats" or "humanitaires". It was "the first libertarian communist publication", according to historian Max Nettlau.

## PRESENTATION

We translate excerpts from *L'Humanitaire*, a journal published in 1841 in Paris. <sup>1</sup> The journal expressed the tendency called *communistes matérialistes*, also called *communistes immédiats* or *humanitaires*. It was "the first libertarian communist publication", according to historian Max Nettlau. Unfortunately, due to the strong repression that ensued (in which 20 people were arrested) the newspaper was discontinued after the second issue. <sup>2</sup>

The articles of the two issues of the journal (published respectively in July and August of 1841) stand up for:

- the immediate creation of a society "*where all domination of man by man is entirely abolished*";
- the abolition of national borders (note: the word *humanitaire*, humanitarian, did not exist in the dictionary. It was then a neologism to refer to the idea of world human community, to universalism, internationalism, cosmopolitanism, etc., that is, it had a meaning different from that of today, which is restricted to state, military or bourgeois philanthropy); <sup>3</sup>
- the abolition of coercion to work and of division of labor through the introduction of attractive labor (an idea inspired by [Charles Fourier](#)), in a situation in which human beings travel freely and continuously throughout the world, leaving "*free course to the development of fraternity by ridding man of perpetual contact with the same beings, which engenders the individual attachment which is positively the denial of the one and universal law of attraction*", and where no one do the same work for more than a day; and
- coherent with the overcoming of the division of labor, the abolition of both sale and exchange, in a society which is organized in terms of free satisfaction of all human needs and free development of all faculties.

The journal caused scandal, and was strongly criticized and fought by the other socialist tendencies of that time, such as the icarians (followers of Étienne Cabet, advocate of an authoritarian, pacifist, a-

classist Christian communism, author of the Utopia *Travels in Icaria*, and founder of the newspaper *Le Populaire*) and the reformist socialists with spiritualistic and nationalist tones (such as the *L'Atelier*, *Le Travail* and *La Fraternité* newspapers). <sup>4</sup>

The redactors of *L'Humanitaire* were: Gabriel Charavay (hosier, then journalist and bookseller), Jean Joseph May (agronomist), Julien Gaillard (plumber), Pierre Antoine Nicolas Page (jeweler). We know the names of the other participants because of the strong police repression that hit them: the feminist Louise Dauriat, the hosiers Jean Charavay and Donatien Dauvergne, the jewelers Anselme Mugnier and Augustin Noël, the printers François Garde and Claude Chassard, the shoemakers Antoine Fombertaux and Jean Sans, the roofer Désiré Gaillard, the tailors Alexis Trottier and Théodore Ber, the bookkeeper Corneille Homberg, the bricklayer Silvain Murlon, the cabinetmaker Quéré, the tanner Auguste Sauvaitre, the bootmaker Jean Sans, the merchant clerk Hyppolite Loudier, and the wine merchant Etienne Rousseau. <sup>5</sup>

Many themes that appeared in *L'Humanitaire*, such as that of continual travel, reappeared widely developed later in 1857, in Joseph Déjacque's *L'humanisphere. Utopie Anarchique*. Also in Karl Marx, especially in *The German Ideology*, 1846, and in the *Manuscripts of Paris*, 1844, [the question of overcoming the division of labor by a free association of individuals on a world scale, culminating in the theme of the abolition of labor as such](#). In these works of Marx, there are even phrases that seem almost transcribed from *L'Humanitaire*, for example: "*What is life but activity?*" However, there is no evidence that they have read the journal. It is possible that they were influenced by direct contact with ideas circulating in the 1840s Parisian proletarian milieu, or even that they have developed these ideas independently, since the concrete problems that lead to addressing these issues are common to proletarians throughout the world, even today.

The journal also published a biography of Sylvain Maréchal (which we did not translate), with whom they identified because of their "*anti-political or anarchist*" ideas.

By the way, one of the redactors of *L'Humanitaire*, Jean Joseph May, is quoted by the spy Lucien de La Hodde, who reported: "*Mr. Jean Joseph May, who is dead - the God of community guard his soul! - was not an ordinary man, since Mr. Proudhon deigned to take his ideas. The famous an-archic system of government, that is to say, of government without rulers or governed, is neither more nor less than the property of the deceased Mr. May.*" <sup>6</sup>

[humanaesfera](#), March 2017

#### Notes:

[1] The two issues of *L'Humanitaire* in French can be accessed [in this link of Gallica](#) of the National Library of France.

[2] [Prehistory of the Idea](#) - Nick Heath

[3] [http://www.persee.fr/doc/mots\\_0243-6450\\_2001\\_num\\_65\\_1\\_2492](http://www.persee.fr/doc/mots_0243-6450_2001_num_65_1_2492)

[4] <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-michel-paris/blog/150415/premier-proces-de-communistes-materialistes-novembre-1841>

[5] <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Humanitaire>

[6] <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-michel-paris/blog/150415/premier-proces-de-communistes-materialistes-novembre-1841>

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## L'HUMANITAIRE, Organe de la Science Sociale (excerpts)

### [HUMAN FACULTIES, REASON AND UTILITY]

"The complete development of all human faculties will be the guarantee of the *utility* \* of all their acts.

[\* *L'Humanitaire*'s note: We understand by this word {utility} all that contributes to health, to

preservation and therefore to human happiness; we understand by the word harmful all that is contrary to it.] Thus evil, that is, the act by which man is harmful to himself, or harmful to a being of his kind, must become impossible in a social organization based on human nature. [...] The complete development of the faculties will result in **reason**, or accurate, precise knowledge of the useful and the harmful [...]. Someone will tell us: "Is it not true, therefore, *that man is evil*, since you intend to withdraw even the possibility of doing harm?" No, certainly not, men are not evil; they are foolish and ignorant. A social order in evident opposition to the eternal laws of matter and to the necessities of human nature falsified all our knowledge, obstructed the development of science, and impelled the ignorant and brutalized man to commit acts detrimental to his preservation. In order to remedy evil, it is necessary to develop in man that precious faculty which he has received from nature, **reason**, to make it the measure of satisfaction of his material needs, since it is the only rule that he can consult in each of his acts. Through this development of reason man is removed from every possibility of doing evil, for it would be odiously absurd to pretend that a reasonable man, who never acts out of reason, can be harmful to himself.

[...]

#### [SOME COMMON CRITICISMS]

After studying and researching for a long time the solution of all these problems, we are **certain** that the **egalitarian situation** alone can solve all of them; our journal will prove this in an evident and irrefutable way.

The first consequence of this principle being **unity, indivisibility** can admit no division, no partitioning of the soil. We therefore want the **community of goods**.

But what a storm of recriminations and objections do these two words, equality and community, raise?! *"Equality, absolute law, does not exist anywhere. Its attainment will be the denial of the intellectual and moral being! It will be the destruction of science and the arts, the return to brutality and the savage state! And activity, this noble and precious faculty of man, is annihilated by equality! And what a languor, what monotony, what coercion in the community of goods! Besides, how much dissent among the Communists! Each one understands the community in their own way! Where does this lack of unity come from? Why this new communist journal, when there are already two in Paris?"*

#### [INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL FACULTIES]

Physiologists recognize in man three distinct natures, in short, three orders of facts. There are three kinds of need: physical needs, intellectual needs, and moral needs. Far from wanting to challenge this trinity of the human organism, which we are perfectly convinced of, what we say is that society must satisfy all human needs. Thus, since we recognize in man the intellectual and moral needs, whose satisfaction for us is as imperative as physical needs, then we are far from wanting to annihilate the intellectual and moral being. We will show, on the contrary, that the egalitarian organization allows alone the complete development of all human faculties. This is, moreover, the consequence implied in the formula we use to announce the social problem. In fact, when we put as a principle that the goal of social science is to guarantee the preservation of the human species, we also imply that it must guarantee man the development of all his intellectual faculties, since only this indicates the means to achieve this goal. Thus, that silly objection that equality is the negation of the intellectual being is annihilated.

So the other objection that egalitarian law would destroy science and the arts also collapses.

#### [HUMAN ACTIVITY, ATTRACTION, UTILITY]

*"But equality crushes, stifles, and annihilates human activity."* Ah! If so, we would be very criminal, and equality would be a horribly atrocious law! But we know that to live is to be active. Far from wanting to deny in man this need to know, to reason, to act, and, consistent with the principle we set out, we want this need to have complete satisfaction. We will prove that the egalitarian situation can guarantee alone this satisfaction. But it is not enough for human activity to have complete satisfaction to make everything better in this regard. Social science, which seeks all the means which are useful to humanity, must also find the means of unceasingly attracting this faculty to useful objects, rather than letting it be lost in aberration or futilities. We believe that to attain this result is to arrive at the ultimate term of perfectibility.

#### [THE QUESTION OF LANGUOR, MONOTONY, COERCION]

As for the accusation of monotony, of languor, which is addressed to the community, it can only be made by those who have no idea of the communist organization. See, in effect, how monotonous this organization is: man, under this regime, will merely go around the world only four or five times. The organization of work, ordered according to the principle of community, is no less accommodative; never, in this social order, someone will be connected longer than a day to the same work. What a languor, therefore, in this state of affairs where man will travel continually! And this in order to operate the most intimate mixture of the human race, to ceaselessly stimulate his activity by always offering him new facts to study, to leave free course to the development of **fraternity** by ridding man of perpetual contact with the same beings, which engenders the individual attachment which is positively the denial of the one and universal law of attraction. Oh yes! In such a combined social organization there must be unbearable monotony and languor! Readers, do not think this is all a dream, we will prove it to be a reality.

After what was said, we believe it is useless to respond to this other objection: "the community imposes on man unbearable coercion". Certainly, none of those who make this objection carries the love for freedom higher than we do. All of them would be very embarrassed if we asked them for a plan of a social organization where *all domination of man by man is entirely abolished*: we will give this plan in this journal.

#### [ON DISSENT]

Finally, we will answer the third and final objection: "*the communists are divided; each one understands the community in its own way*". We answer: this is true. But what is the main cause of dissent? There is no need to search for long; it is in the absence of a work that formulates the doctrine in a clear and complete way. All those that have been published to date have not reached the goal announced in them. Both old and new works, whether because of the ignorance of their authors, or fear of hurting some prejudices, are full of false ideas, inconsequences and contradictions, which, rather than bringing together, only cause division. Thus a work, or publication, that clearly and emphatically exposes the communist organization is indispensable to reestablish unity in doctrine, and among men who profess it. We have come to accomplish this task. Do not accuse us of coming to sow the quarrel, seek or desire disunity. All our efforts will, on the contrary, tend to gather men of good faith under the banner of *truth*. We are deeply convinced that the truth is the most powerful link to gather men, just as we are equally convinced that error and lies are eternal causes of division. We will never retreat before the truth, and we will grapple with the prejudices that prevent us from reaching it. Mortal war to all errors, to all prejudices! The lie already trembles before the aspect of the truth that advances: long live the truth!" (Doctrine, *L'Humanitaire*, N° 1)

#### [FREEDOM AND TYRANNY]

"Will they say that thus removing from man the possibility of doing evil, we annihilate the self, murder human freedom, constituting a tyranny of a new kind, but no less odious than the one that existed? We have already declared that no one is more ardent friend of freedom than we are, that no one

abhors more tyrannies than we do; if the objection were true, our doctrine would be in contradiction with the statement we made. Let us examine it. First, what is freedom? What is tyranny? *Freedom is a situation where man obeys no authority other than reason; tyranny is the opposite, or a situation where he is forced to commit acts other than those his reason dictates to him.* So what is reason? It is science, or knowledge of what is useful and what is harmful. This knowledge is easy to acquire. Assuming that error takes the place of truth, it can not last long; the facts will come readily to unmask it. Therefore, there is no tyranny in our organization, because man obeys no authority other than reason; the latter alone has all the conditions of true freedom. (On social science, *L'Humanitaire*, N° 2)

#### [FAMILY, SALE, EXCHANGE]

“You [the journal *L'Atelier*] ask us if we mean ‘by community this most intimate life where, in regard to marriage and family, one voluntarily associates both by necessity of economy and by feeling of fraternity, and where all means of existence would be common’. We respond that this is not how we mean by community, whose organization, moreover, has no relation to the association you present to us. Judging from this association that your paper presents, we are very far from you. [...] Let's see: if between two men, one is stronger than another, which produces less, and that, however, has as many needs as the former (which is not so unusual), then the less strong will be more unhappy. But this is still not the best side of the coin. Suppose (which is not impossible) that the weaker have, unlike the stronger, a family to feed with the modest work of their arms. What does your so-called community of means of existence become? Is not it a bitter joke? An outrageous joke? And is not that also exactly the current order of things which you just changed the name? So do not speak of fraternity, for it will make no sense in a similar association.

As for the *selling system* as well as the *exchange system* that you want to replace and that we consider as an equally useless gear, neither figures in our theory. Each commune will be supplied abundantly by means of transport with the objects that all its members need, without the intervention of sellers, nor exchangers. It is only necessary that the need be revealed by each one so that it is satisfied instantly and under the same conditions.

#### [MACHINES, LAZY PEOPLE, HUMAN ACTIVITY]

Until then, you [the journal *L'Atelier*] say you can agree with us if we abounded in your sense, but you say you pity us if our ideas of community go further; if we ‘dream of a **golden age** where work is but a pleasant distraction, where the fruits of the earth are so numerous that one can not refuse even the lazy one to sit at the banquet’. Then, pity at easy, for the age of gold which you have painted as an error is the constant goal which we are aiming at. Yes, the work will be a pleasant distraction. If it should not be so, then what is the meaning of these machines that alone do the work of so many arms? Why should this innumerable multitude of mechanisms, more and more ingenious, be invented if it were not to multiply the product of labor, shorten its duration, and make it attractive by suppressing what is painful? We will not ask whether you are against the mechanics, which would be to insult you, for you know as much as we do that if it is a great evil today, it will be a great good when society is organized as it should be, and when man will need only to lead them and discover new ones. But then we wonder why you are so excited in favor of industrial reform? Surely it is not to leave the work as unpleasant as it is nowadays, nor to make it worse.

The word *lazy* will have no meaning in the language of the community, just as it does not have any meaning in the present language. *Man is an essentially active being*; he has a sum of activity to express. The goal of social science is to give this activity a good and not a bad direction; useful and not harmful, nor useless direction. Today the opposite is true. Individuals exercise their activity in pure loss, in futile, insignificant things, with sterile results. Why? Because bad examples of activities were given; because activities are misguided; because, in the end, they find themselves in a vicious social



environment, instead of a good social environment, where one would not have to do and would have seen nothing but useful things, and that nothing could mislead them. In this way the words *laziness*, *vagrancy*, and *idleness* are empty of meaning, unless one denies the incessant movement which manifests itself in nature, and consequently in man, which is but a way of being of that nature. Therefore, there are no lazy, vagabonds, or idlers, but active beings whom the vices of social organization cause them to be consumed in useless acts, and that a good society must let them express themselves in useful acts." (Reply to the journal L'Atelier, published in two parts, issues 1 and 2 of L'Humanitaire)

#### [A CRITICISM OF THE JOURNAL "LA FRATERNITÉ" TO "L'HUMANITAIRE"]

"Despite their good intentions", [La Fraternité] says, "the redactors of this journal [L'Humanitaire] conclude directly against the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity that they want, like us, to propagate.

*If the whole man consists of a material organism, as the journal claims, this organism must be taken as a measure of man and mark his place among his fellow men. But we see men divided into big and small, strong and weak, materially speaking. And if we take the palpable and visible demonstrations that L'Humanitaire believes to be the only rigorous demonstrations, then men are unequal among themselves.*

*'By what right', the giant and the athlete will question, 'do you want to make us believe that we are on the same level as the dwarf and the sick, lowering us to their smallness and fragility, since the visible nature made us great and strong beings? We were created to be masters, and they, to be slaves. It is the law of our organism.'*

*And L'Humanitaire can not contradict them, since the organism is its rule.*

*However, L'Humanitaire, full of good intentions, will probably answer: 'the fraternity wants you to do the sacrifice of your greatness and strength in favor of the frail and the small.'*

*What to say? Let the giant and the athlete answer: 'do you not teach us that the only motive of human actions is utility? Well, is it helpful for us to sacrifice ourselves for the benefit of those who are weaker than us? What we receive in exchange for what we would give them? What is fraternity? Men are no more brothers among themselves than they are brothers of trees and stones. Like trees and stones, man is an aggregation of material molecules, and everything that is not him, everything outside his organism, separated from his body, is foreign to him. The man chips the stones and eats the fruits. In the same unscrupulous way, he can explore the human-faced beings around him. And do not tell us that our moral needs are not satisfied when we make unhappy those whom you call fellow men. Our morality is, we repeat, utility, and if it is useful for us to eat men, we will eat them.'*

*L'Humanitaire, frightened by this language, will try to still murmur: 'but man is a fatally social being.' But, if you assume fatality as a principle, let us hear again these strong and vigorous men who we suppose you let them do whatever they want: 'fatality wants us to dominate, pillage, burn, devour, and if we are the strongest, our own strength is a proof of our right. If we do things that displease you, do not blame us, we are not free, but instruments of fatality.'*

*These few lines indicate some of the sad consequences of the materialistic, utilitarian, and fatal system on which L'Humanitaire is based."*

#### [L'HUMANITAIRE ANSWER TO LA FRATERNITÉ]

“What does this *giant* and this *athlete* mean? Do the acts that you make them commit have anything to do with the acts of a reasonable man? Of a man who has the least reason? They have all the characteristics of the starving savage, or a delirious madman. How do you allow yourselves to be accompanied by such singular beings? And where do you intend to lead them? If not to cottages, it is certainly to a jungle. Since we are not at all anxious to go with people who understand so little of joking, nor to go to a country that, judging by its inhabitants, must be more dangerous than recreational, we will let you travel without us, and we will only ask of you a description when you return. As for us, we will be transported for a moment to the future society, for which we have developed the theory, and there we will place the giant, the athlete, the dwarf and the sick, to whom we give back the reason that you had so improperly taken from them. Let us see if we will not be happier than you in our observation, and if we will not get better results. First, we must note that the four men, whose faculties have received a complete development, are perfectly equal, not equal in *height* and *strength*, but equal in the satisfaction of their needs and in the exercise of their faculties, for *each one consumes according to his appetites, and works according to his forces*. Since the organs of both the strong and the weak are equally satisfied, *perfect equality* occurs in the normal satisfaction of the organs of each. Consequently, our four characters are equal without being equally tall or equally strong. Therefore, they are *free* without presuming that *nature* had created some to be *masters* and others to be *slaves*. They practice *fraternity* in the most expansive meaning of this word. And though they know that ‘like trees, man is an aggregation of material molecules’, they do not think of *fraternizing with trees and stones*, and as foolish as they are supposed to be, they recognize the specific functions, relations, properties of the different ways of being of nature. They do not confuse the mineral kingdom or the plant kingdom with the animal kingdom. In each of these three realms, they also discover different ways of being. [...]

#### [L'HUMANITAIRE ANSWER TO LA FRATERNITÉ'S CRITICISM OF THE IDEA OF CONTINUOUS TRAVEL ON THE PLANET]

He [the journal *La Fraternité*] does not want us to desire ‘an era in which man *will continually travel to operate the most intimate mixture of the human race*’. After that, *La Fraternité* adds: ‘*What is this pretense mixture but the most brutal promiscuity, the most luxuriant negation of the family! What is a perpetual journey that must free man from daily contact with the same beings but the denial of fraternity which L'Humanitaire invokes, and the realization of this woeful ballad of the wandering Jew, who represents the terrifying sadness of a man condemned to run eternally through the world, unable to rest his head under a friendly roof, shake hands with a brother, or rest from the fatigues of life in the breast of a beloved family?! Who among us, when he heard this grim story in his childhood, did not weep over the isolation of this forced traveler, who crosses the ages as if he were crossing a vast desert?! Who would not regret having no friends or companions?! And it is this ballad, the most desolate idealization of the isolation in which men have passed until our days, that L'Humanitaire wants to make us consider as a model of happiness and perfection.*’

There is much poetry in this passage, some terms whose application is less than fraternal, and above all, complete ignorance of our doctrine. What do these words mean: *the most brutal promiscuity, the most luxuriant denial of the family*, but that the journal *La Fraternité* invents monsters to give itself the pleasure of fighting it? [...]

The newspaper to which we are responding intends that the continuous journeys, which have as their objective to rid man of the perpetual contact of the same beings, are the *denial of fraternity*. If he had read the complete sentence of *L'Humanitaire*, he would have seen that, far from destroying fraternity, journeys consecrate it in all its fullness, rendering impossible *the individual attachment which is positively the denial of the one and universal law of attraction*.

[...] By not accepting continual journeys, you partition the principle [of fraternity] and, without realizing it, you divide it into many parts: *domestic fraternity*, *city fraternity*, *fraternity of all men*, which reduces it to almost nothing when you go through all these steps. Fraternity has no degrees, no more than unity, it can not be separated from itself. So, wherever this principle is practiced, do you not perceive the possibility that *the wandering Jew rests his head under a friendly roof, shake the hand of a brother?* Notice that you make the wandering Jew do not perform better than the giant and the athlete. So, stop disturbing these singular beings.” (Answer to the journal *La Fraternité, L'Humanitaire*, No. 2)

[Translation from French by [humanaesfera](#), from [the version made available by Gallica digital library](#), of the National Library of France. We are not native speakers of English. So forgive us of the grammatical and syntactical errors in this translation. What motivates us to have done this translation is the function that English currently has as the lingua franca of the world. Please, if you want to improve the translation, please [contact us](#).]

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- 1. The two issues of L'Humanitaire in French can be accessed [in this link of Gallica](#) of the National Library of France.
  - 2. [Prehistory of the Idea](#) - Nick Heath
  - 3. [http://www.persee.fr/doc/mots\\_0243-6450\\_2001\\_num\\_65\\_1\\_2492](http://www.persee.fr/doc/mots_0243-6450_2001_num_65_1_2492)
  - 4. <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-michel-paris/blog/150415/premier-proces-de-communistes-materialistes-novembre-1841>
  - 5. <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Humanitaire>
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