

Robert A. Fenn

A Next to Final Word on Samuel Bailey and the "Observations on Certain Verbal Disputes in Political Economy"¹

Dear Sir,

In the Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch 13 (S. 347-349) there appeared a small research note by Dr. Ljudmila Wassina on the autorship of *Observations on Certain Verbal Disputes in Political Economy*, London 1821. In that note she raised certain questions about its autorship caused by a letter I sent regarding this item to the editors of MEGA², II/4.1 several years ago. Although I agree with the main reasons in her answer to me, I can now provide far stronger evidence for Samuel Bailey's *non-autorship*, than she gives in her article. I am afraid that she never received a later letter I sent her with the following note derived from research on Bailey's manuscript note books (there seems to be some problems with mail between Toronto and Moscow-one of my colleagues sends 12 duplicate copies of every letter in order to make sure that one gets through!!). I would be grateful if the short research note I append to this letter could be published in your next issue (if there is space for it).

May I also make one suggestion for a department in the Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch? One of the inevitable features of publishing is misprints - I am editing the notebooks and essays of James Mill (1772-1836), and I seem to find them in my own transcriptions every time I look at them. Despite the excellent standards of the MEGA² edition, some misprints have crept into it. It would be useful to have a short section of each Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch devoted to a report of these, and for additions to both the Erläuterungen and Korrekturenverzeichnis. For example, in the *Civil War in France* there is a reference by Marx to the "circumlocution office." In a letter to the Editorial Board of MEGA² of 2 November 1988 I enclosed the following (overlang) note:

On page 58, lines 5-6 [Abt. I, Bd. 22, S. 58.5-6] the text reads "not hiding itself behind circumlocution office". In the annotations [Erläuterungen, I, 22, S. 883] you should add: "The term 'circumlocution office' is taken from the novel by Charles Dickens *Little Dorrit*, 1855-1857." In the *Oxford*

¹ Wir veröffentlichen nachfolgend ein Schreiben vom 18. Dezember 1991, das Prof. Fenn an den Herausgeber des Marx-Engels-Jahrbuches und den Dietz Verlag Berlin GmbH gerichtet hat und in dem er sich auf die Debatte mit Ljudmila Wassina im *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch 13*, Berlin 1990, S. 347-349, hinsichtlich der Autorschaft des genannten Werkes bezieht. - Die Herausg.

Companion to English Literature, ed. Sir Paul Harvey, 4th ed., Oxford 1973, p. 170, under the entry **Circumlocution Office** you will find the following: "the type of a government department satirized in 'Little Dorrit.'" Under the entry **Little Dorrit**, p. 481, you will find, in part, the following: "the Circumlocution Office (a satirical presentment of the government deapartments of the day, with their incompetent and obstructive officials, typified in the Barnacles)." I shshould add that Marx's English is not entirely perfect in the phrase quoted, it should read: "not hiding itself behind [a] circumlocution office."

I can think of other omissions and errors in the volumes published to date; such a list appearing in the Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch might be of use to the readers and other users of these texts.

I enclose my research note on a separate page.

May I wish you the greatest success in the continuation of your journal an of the MEGA² edition?

With the best wishes of the season,
Yours very sincerely
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Associate Professor of Political Science

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About 1927 Samuel Baily obviously stumbled across *Observation on Certain Verbal Disputes in Political Economy*, London 1821, for the first time. Like every reader since, who has read both that work, and Baily's *A Critical Dissertation on the Nature, Measures, and Causes of Value*, London 1825, the obvious similarity of views suggests that either the same person wrote both works, or that the latter work was plagiarized from the former. This struck Baily who wrote in his personal journal: "N.B. This book exhibits some striking coincidences with my Treatise on Value - so striking that I might possibly incur the charge of plagiarism if any one compared the two works. The truth is however that I did not see this pamphlet till my own book was published."² It surely is impossible for Bailey to have written *Observations on Certain Verbal Disputes*, and to be worried about a charge of plagiarism. *Quod erat demonstrandum*.

But why a "Next to Final Word"? There is one very intriguing point left. Who was the rather talented author of *Observations on Certain Verbal Disputes*, and, as well, from sty-

² This quotation comes from: Ken Dennis, "The Baily Notebooks and Autorship of *Verbal Disputes*", *History of Economic Thought Newsletter*, No. 11, Autumn 1973, p. 17. The notebooks are in the Library of the University of Edinburgh (ref. MSS Gen. 69/7, 107).

The *History of Economic Thought Newsletter* is exceptionally rare as it only goes to the members of the History of Economic Thought Society, and hence most libraries do not receive it. I am indebted to my Colleague Prof. Samuel Hollander of the Dept. of Economics of the University of Toronto for drawing my attention to this article, and for providing me with a copy of it.

listic evidence, *An Inquiry into those Principles, Respecting the Nature of Demand and the Necessity of Consumption, Lately Advocated by Mr. Malthus, etc.*, London 1821³ He was clearly a college graduate (he knew Greek, Latin, and French fluently, and had an excellent command of logic), and was well up on economic literature, and, rather unusually for this period, meticulous about his citations - he gives not only the page number and chapter of most of his quotations, but refers to the editions he used as well.

Marx's comment on these works, in essence, was that such verbal quibbles were a sign of the degeneration of the field.⁴ It is quite striking the extent to which he sees these works as Ricardian. In the English tradition they are seen as near mortal blows to the rigour and validity of the Ricardian system. Hence the vigour, indeed venom, of James Mill's response to Bailey's *A Critical Dissertation*, when he reviewed it anonymously in 1826.⁵

The point regarding such "verbal quibbles" that an English economist would make would be the exact reverse of Marx's. In that difference of attitudes lies the gulf between the German philosophic tradition (of which Marx is an undoubted part) with its emphasis on the concept of totality, and the English approach to such questions (which goes back to Locke and his concern for the definition and precisions of one's terms and one's language). A small, but useful, book might be written on this subject.

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³ Dennis raises the same point in his article, p. 18. These pamphlets are well above the quality of most of the controversial work of this period. Both books were published 10 April 1821, see *St. James's Chronicle*, London, 10 April 1821, p. 1, col. 2.

⁴ The major discussion is in *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Manuskript 1861-1863), MEGA², II/3.4, S. 1279, 1313-50.

⁵ "On the Nature, Measures, and Causes of Value", *Westminster Review* (Jan. 1826), V 157-72.

The MEGA² edition does not identify these articles by their authors - it should. The identifications may be easily found in the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, ed. W. E. Houghton, 5 volumes, Toronto 1966ff. Those for the *Westminster Review* are in volume III, the *Edinburgh Review* identifications may be found in volume I.