

A Brief Outline of Equitable Commerce

Josiah Warren

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Mr. Editor: —Believing that the suggestions contained in the following article will be of service to those persons who interest themselves in the subject of Social Reform, and whose desire is to find a method of securing to the laborer the full amount of his product, I submit it to you if you think it worthy of an insertion in your paper.

P. I. B.

Boston, April 24 1852

From the Peaceful Revolutionist.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF

Equitable Commerce.

By Josiah Warren, (Its Discoverer)

The first corner stone of Equitable Commerce is precisely that which "the builders have hitherto rejected:" it is Individuality, —exactly the opposite of *Combination, United Interests, Partnerships, &c.* It is the disconnection, the *disunion*, the *disentanglement* of all interests and persons. Individuality is recognised as the great principle of order, progress, and harmony. The study of Individuality prepares us to admit, and habitually to respect the Sovereignty of every Individual, over his or her person, time, and property; which I understand to be the natural, the *Equitable Liberty* of Mankind, and which constitutes the second corner stone of Equitable Commerce. The Individualising of all interests makes this Liberty practicable; but it is impracticable in *Combinations, United Interests, Partnerships, &c.*

The best thinkers on Social Reformation have perceived that the antagonism of interests must be neutralised, and that they must be made to Co-operate together, before any great good could be effected—they took it for granted that antagonism grew out of the Individuality of interests and that therefore individual must be annihilated and the interests be "United." But experience has proved that Individuality cannot be annihilated, but the attempts have only produced confusion and disappointment—Unity of interests *did* make them co-operate—when they moved at all, they moved, certainly, in the same direction; but, like the wheels of Juggernaut, they have always crushed *Persons* in proportion to their progress.

We must find another solution to the Co-operation of interests—one which will not annihilate Liberty—that will not sacrifice persons to property. This solution is found in simple Equity. It is found in making COST *the limit of price*. If I am to have my supplies at what they may *Cost*, I am interested in co-operating to make them cost as little as possible; and on this ground, which is but simple Equity, is co-operation ensured; while (the Sovereignty of each individual being strictly preserved) the action of each is kept within the sphere of his own Individuality, and no collision of persons can take place; and persons and personal Liberty are preserved inviolate, which property considerations become secondary and subordinate.

In "Equitable Commerce, Cost is entirely separated, disentangled from value. The value or worth of a dose of medicine which saves a life, if equal to the value of the life saved. On this ground, ten thousand dollars would not, in some cases, pay for the medicine—but this is so false, so iniquitous, that civilized Cannibalism itself has not been able to carry out its own principles quite so far as this; and yet, false and iniquitous as it is, almost all pecuniary commerce of the world has been, and still is, conducted on this basis.

Cost is understood to be essentially the degree or pain, or discomfort, or sacrifice we incur in what we do or submit to. Any thing, therefore, which Costs an equal amount of discomfort or sacrifice as the labor in a bushel of corn or wheat, is considered an equivalent for the bushel of corn or wheat. Cost for cost, in equal quantities, is the basis for exchange, whether it is in prescribing for the sick, or mending clothes; at the wash tub or behind the counter; whether it is in raising food or in cooking food; in buying and selling land, or buying and selling matches; whether in making laws or making shirts, the prices of all pursuits are set and limited by the Cost of the labor connected with the operation. Of course the hardest, the most disagreeable labor, is the highest paid.

The value or worth of a thing being made the basis of its price, is the root of all speculations, all the fluctuations in business, the scrambling for gain, the insecurity of person and property, the continuous round of bankruptcies, and all the ruin, confusion, and suffering arising from these causes.

Cost being made the limit of price, Value becomes common property. Land, (in its natural state,) and all other natural wealth, like water in a river, has no price; and thus does simple Equity meet the common property idea half way; and the tendency of action on the Cost basis is to render labor a pleasure rather than a pain; at which point (pain being the limit of price) property would have no price, and the common property design would be fully realised, without the sacrifice of persons.

Preserving the *Sovereignty of every individual* at all times, all disturbing controversies on all subjects are immediately at an end. Profit making or the rivalries of trade being destroyed would neutralise the antagonism of Nations—the quarrels between rulers for the privileges of governing would cease when the business of Society should become Individualised—taken out of their hands. Then, if men deal Equitably with each other, there will be nothing left for rulers to do—they must cease to be, and their quarrels would cease to disturb the world; and all interests being made to Co-operate, the Universal Brotherhood of mankind would result of course.

At the root of all this lies only simple Equity, which in itself seems capable of regulating, and harmonising all the intercourse of mankind, from the most important transactions of Nations to the minutest courtesies of private life.

The principles themselves teach us not to make any attempt to carry them out by combined, or politic action; but, to respect the supreme right of every one to act according to the measure of his understanding; leaving him Free to make any application of them according to his own Individual views, feelings and wants, provided all is done within the sphere of his own Individuality at his own Individual Cost.

The practical applications of these principle to Education, work out a problem of unspeakable magnificence and beauty; and, like the other features of Equitable Commerce, nothing short of the Practical exhibition can enable the public fully to understand or appreciate it.

The subject has been twenty-one years under study and practical experiment in detached parts; and a more public stand is now taken for putting them together at Utopia, on the Ohio River, 40 miles above Cincinnati; [also at Modern Time, Long Island, (N. Y.) in the vicinity of Thompson Station, 41 miles from the City of New York.]

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