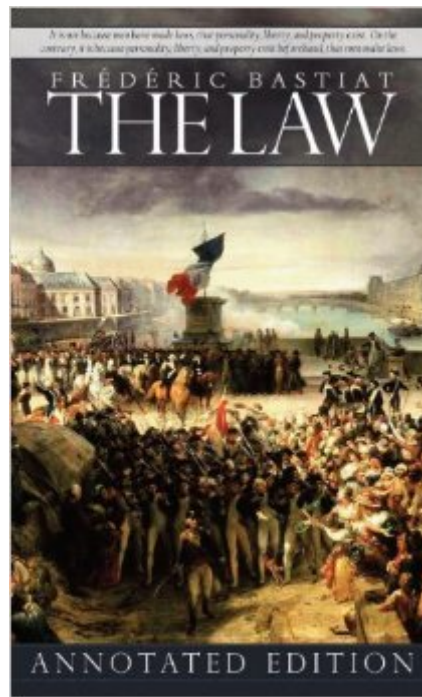


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# The Law



## Synopsis

Here, in this 1850 classic, a powerful refutation of Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto, published two years earlier, Bastiat discusses: what is law?, why socialism constitutes legal plunder, the proper function of the law, the law and morality, "the vicious circle of socialism", and the basis for stable government. French political libertarian and economist CLAUDE FRÉDÉRIC BASTIAT (1801-1850) was one of the most eloquent champions of the concept that property rights and individual freedoms flowed from natural law.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

What book is important enough that I read it once a year? The Law by Frederic Bastiat. Written in 1848 as a response to socialism in France, this book essay is just as relevant today as it was then. "What, then, is law? It is the collective organization of the individual right to lawful defense. Each of us has a natural right-from God-to defend his person, his liberty, and his property. These are the three basic requirements of life, and the preservation of any one of them is completely dependent upon the preservation of the other two. For what are our faculties but the extension of our individuality? And what is property but an extension of our faculties? If every person has the right to defend - even by force - his person, his liberty, and his property, then it follows that a group of men have the right to organize and support a common force to protect these rights constantly. Thus the principle of collective right - its reason for existing, its lawfulness - is based on individual right. And the common force that protects this collective right cannot logically have any other purpose or any other mission than that for which it acts as a substitute. Thus, since an individual cannot lawfully use

force against the person, liberty, or property of another individual, then the common force - for the same reason - cannot lawfully be used to destroy the person, liberty, or property of individuals or groups. Such a perversion of force would be, in both cases, contrary to our premise. Force has been given to us to defend our own individual rights. Who will dare to say that force has been given to us to destroy the equal rights of our brothers?

Fredric Bastiat was a 19th century French law-maker, economist and author. He wrote a number of highly technical works of economic theory, books that are still considered valuable contributions to free-market economic thought. But his least technical work, a pamphlet called *The Law*, has proven to be perhaps his most enduring from a modern political standpoint. Written in 1850, just two years after the French Revolution of 1848, the *Law* is part treatise and part polemic, an appeal to the French people reminding them of the proper sphere of the law and government and begging them to turn away from their descent into socialism. The *Law* is also a summary of much of what Bastiat considered to be important from his own work; at the time *The Law* was written he was very sick, and he would be dead within a year of its publication. As a French patriot, Bastiat was deeply moved by the disintegration he saw in French society. As the last vestiges of the class-society were replaced and the new "democratic" order was being instituted, the State was more and more being used as a means by which groups of citizens (special interests) could plunder one another through taxes, transfer payments, tariffs, etc, committing what Bastiat calls "legal plunder." As he saw it, the law was being perverted into a so-called "creative" entity, through which controlling groups would seek to enforce their particular agendas at the expense and through the pocketbooks of the people in general. Bastiat argues that the law should be properly viewed as the formal embodiment of Force. That is, human laws should be the organized and formal construction of justice. Just law, he says, is nothing more than the organization of the human right to self-defense.

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