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John Bellers (1654–1725): ‘A Veritable Phenomenon in the History of Political Economy’



Paul N. Anderson

What sort of a person would be an inspiration to Karl Marx *and* a champion of free trade, an advocate of gainful employment *and* hard work, a herald of providing education and medical care for the poor while *also* seeing their labour as the greatest resources of the rich, a prophetic voice seeking to curb the ills of heavy drinking *and* the developing of worthy living quarters for workers, a challenger of dishonesty in public service and in Parliament while *also* calling for a unified state of Europe and Christian unity, an exhorter of Friends to spiritual discipline, anger management, and prayer while *also* disparaging corporal punishment, needless imprisonment, and the death penalty?

Such a person is John Bellers (1654–1725), and as Vail Palmer points out, only two leaders of Quakerism in the early years the movement are known beyond its religious appraisals: William Penn and John Bellers.¹ Interestingly, however, the contribution of Bellers is better known among Marxist historians and socialism theorists than among students of Quakerism and religious history.² While Bellers is covered in many textbooks on Marxism, his place in introductory Quaker texts is either absent or modest.³ Nonetheless, Bellers deserves a place as a leading

¹T. Vail Palmer, “Religion and Ethics in the Thought of John Bellers,” *Truth’s Bright Embrace: Essays in Honor of Arthur O. Roberts*, edited by Howard R. Macy and Paul N. Anderson (Newberg: George Fox University Press, 1996), p. 61.

²The wife of Lenin, Nadezhda K. Krupskaya, refers to Bellers as “the first educator in the Marxist tradition.” Cf. John T. Zepper, “John Bellers—Educator of Marx?” *Science & Society* 47.1 (1979), p. 87.

³For helpful treatments of Bellers in Quaker texts see William C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, 2nd ed. prepared by Henry J. Cadbury (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1961), pp. 571–594; Neave Brayshaw, *The Quakers: Their Story & Message* (3rd edn., London: William

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representative of early Quakerism, whose contribution and work deserves a fresh consideration by historians of modernism and Quakerism, as well.⁴ Ruth Fry published excerpts of his works in 1935, but the full compendium of Bellers' writings remained unavailable until they were gathered and published by George Clarke in 1987, who cites his multivalent contribution as follows:

The range of his thinking covers an immense field: the abolition of mass poverty and endemic unemployment; free education for all; a nationwide free health service—the health of its citizens should be a direct responsibility of the State rather than be dependent upon fickle charity. He pressed home the need for prison reform: imprisonment should equate with reformation rather than retribution. He was among the first, perhaps the very first, to propose the abolition of capital punishment. He proposed the formation of 'an European State' which included legislation for a council of the various religions.⁵

John Bellers became a member of Britain's Royal Society in 1719, but he is remembered most broadly as "champion of the poor and of a league of nations," seen by Eduard Bernstein, for instance, as a link between Cromwell and Communism.⁶ Referenced at least ten times in *Das Kapital*,⁷ Karl Marx refers to him as follows:

As John Bellers, a veritable phenomenon in the history of Political Economy, saw most clearly at the end of the 17th century, the necessity for abolishing the present system of

Sessions Ltd, 1946), pp. 203–204; Elbert Russell, *The History of Quakerism* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1979), pp. 160–161; John Punshon, *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1984), pp. 110–112; Alfreda Vipont, *The Story of Quakerism* (3rd edn., Richmond, IN: Friends United Press), pp. 115, 132–134, 164; Arthur Raistrick, *Quakers in Science and Industry* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), pp. 82–88. An outline of Bellers' proposal for a College of Industry is presented in *Early Quaker Writings*, edited by Hugh Barbour and Arthur O. Roberts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 451–459. See also Stephen Allott, *Quaker Pioneers* (London: Bannisdale Press, 1963); Charles Kohler, *A Quartet of Quakers* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1978).

⁴Seeing Bellers as a fitting representative of Quakerism, see Karl Seipp, *John Bellers, ein Vertreter des frühen Quäkertums* (John Bellers, a Representative of Early Quakerism; Nürnberg, 1933). See also the robust treatment of Bellers in Auguste Jorns, *The Quakers as Pioneers in Social Work*, translated by Thomas Kine Brown, Jr. (Port Washington, NY: Kennicat, 1931/1969), pp. 75–88, 143–152, 162–172. In Braithwaite's words, "John Bellers was by far the greatest of the early Quaker social reformers, and it has been right to give prominence to his work, so that he may become known in his own land." (*The Second Period of Quakerism*, p. 594).

⁵A. Ruth Fry, *John Bellers 1654–1725: Quaker Economist and Social Reformer* (London: Casell & Co., 1935), see also *John Bellers: His Life, Times and Writings*, edited by George Clarke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), quotation 18. Quotations of Bellers here are paraphrased from Clarke's book.

⁶The subtitle of chapter 17 on John Bellers in Eduard Bernstein, *Cromwell and Communism: Socialism and Democracy in the Great English Revolution*, translated from the 1895 German edition by H. J. Stenning (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930), pp. 253–280. On Bellers' political and economic contributions, see also Karl Seipp, *John Bellers: Ein Vertreter des frühen Quäkertums* (Nürnberg: Quaker-verlag, 1933); Philip S. Belasco, "John Bellers," *Economica* 5.14 (1925) pp. 165–174. Karl Seipp, *John Bellers, ein Vertreter des frühen Quäkertums* (John Bellers, a Representative of Early Quakerism; Nürnberg, 1933).

⁷According to Zepper, "John Bellers—Educator of Marx?" (reference, p. 87, n. 5).

education and division of labour, which beget hypertrophy and atrophy at the two opposite extremities of society.⁸

Given that Bellers launched his first appeal to Parliament in 1696 with the reasoned epigraph: “TO THE THINKING and PUBLICK-SPIRITED,” it is thus understandable to see his contribution interpreted as: (a) departing from the fiery and apocalyptic vision of first-generation Quakerism, (b) putting forward a rational and secular vision of social reform, or (c) advocating historical materialism against capitalism as a narrow economic philosophy. When the overall thrust of his 21 publications is considered in detail, however, each of these assumptions is problematic, and even wrong. While Bellers’ work has contributed remarkably to the establishing of hallmark structures of modern society—including but extending beyond economic theories of value—it grew directly out of the faith and experience of British Friends at the time, and the goal was nothing short of bringing forth the divine will on earth as it is in heaven. First, though, considering something of Bellers’ own story and situation is in order.

1 The Quaker Background and Situation of John Bellers

As a second generation Friend, John Bellers grew up in London, son of Mary Read and Francis Bellers. His father was a thriving grocery merchant with extensive business interests, and John grew up with a good number of first-hand experiences with business, trade, commerce, manufacturing, and management. Clarke surmises that Francis and Mary Bellers became convinced Friends in connection with the 1654 campaign of Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill to “conquer London,” and their family was centrally involved in the endeavors of Friends in southern England from the first decade of the Quaker movement on.

Hailing from Alcester, south of Birmingham, Francis would have been favorably disposed toward Quakers, Levellers, Diggers, and other dissenting groups, as they were active in the area.⁹ As a child, young John would have witnessed the persecution of Friends following a number of anti-Quaker laws passed between 1661 and 1665; thus, his concerns for the plight of prisoners likely resulted from first-hand experience and responses of Friends to those concerns. He was arrested three times during the years of 1684 and 1685 simply for meeting with other Friends, so his own encounters with

⁸Emphasis mine. These references to and quotations of Bellers are taken from Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I, Book One: The Process of Production of Capital* (First published in German in 1867, English edition first published in 1887 with some modernization of spelling; Moscow: Progress Publishers; translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling; edited by Frederick Engels; Transcribed: Zodiac, Hinrich Kuhls, Allan Thurrott, Bill McDorman, Bert Schultz and Martha Gimenez (1995–1996); Proofed: by Andy Blunden and Chris Clayton (2008), Mark Harris (2010), Dave Allinson (2015). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> (p. 355, n. 229).

⁹Clarke, pp. 1–3. A half century earlier, Gerrard Winstanley had also argued that the rich were greatly indebted to the labours of the poor; Bellers clearly follows that trajectory, Clarke, p. 19.

prisons, the poor, and the disenfranchised would have been extensive, despite coming from a well-to-do family.

His family was connected with London's Six Weeks Meeting—the 'Prime Meeting in the City,' according to Fox¹⁰—and when his father died in 1679, John assumed the role of the head of the family. John followed his father in leadership among Friends, and in 1680, he was appointed Treasurer of the Box Fund, which organized assistance for poor and unemployed Friends. This fund also granted aid to refugees from other countries, sometimes claiming to be Friends in order to receive benefits, so Bellers was charged with creating livelihoods for immigrant refugees early in his adulthood. In addition to his occupational work as a cloth merchant, these experiences gave him a good deal of knowledge about the economic needs of the poor and practical ways of meeting those needs. He served on the Meeting for Sufferings of London Yearly Meeting from 1681 onwards, representing Yorkshire, and he was well known by leading Friends of Britain at the time. The signing of several of his proposals by 45 leading Friends of the day bears out that fact.¹¹

As a member of the Second Day's Morning Meeting, working with Quaker tracts and promotional writings, Bellers also fostered a concern to get Quaker convictions considered in reasoned ways among Friends and in the world at large. Rather than engage in pamphlet or tract debates, where the views of adversaries received as much attention as the convictions of Friends, Bellers proposed in 1698 that 10,000 copies of Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* be printed and sent to leaders of Parliament and every township. While this particular plan was unsuccessful, two years later, 6606 copies of Barclay's *Apology* were published by London Yearly Meeting and made available for purchase. They were not distributed gratis, to Bellers' disappointment, but this was nonetheless a significant step, as Barclay's *Apology* had been published only in Amsterdam before that time.¹² Nonetheless, from working with a number of publication ventures, Bellers was emboldened also to publish his own concerns, some of which the Second Day's Morning Meeting did support, and many of these were sent to Parliament, religious leaders, the Queen, and other Friends.

In 1685, he purchased a 10,000-acre plot of land in Pennsylvania for the resettling of French Huguenot Protestants in the New World. They were being persecuted following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and Bellers organized provision for their resettlement in America. In 1686, he married Frances Fettiplace, and they became

¹⁰Clarke, pp. 2–4. The Six Weeks Meeting oversaw all of the Friends Meetings in London, and Francis was a member since its inception in 1671. He was also present at the first Meeting for Sufferings in 1676, and he was a trustee of the Devonshire House, which from 1678 onward served as the central headquarters for Friends for the next two and a half centuries.

¹¹These signatures are included as documenting the corporate support of leading Friends of the day, bolstering the weight of his proposals for the College of Industry in 1697 and his epistle to Friends in 1723.

¹²Clarke, pp. 4–5, 253–254. Barclay's *Apology* was published in Latin in 1676 and in English in 1678, and to this day, it remains the most comprehensive theological articulation of Quaker convictions and beliefs.

close to such leading Quakers as William Penn, John Penington, and Thomas Ellwood, living at The Grange, Chalfont St Peter (the former home of Isaac Penington) connecting also with Jordans Friends Meeting, where the births of their four children are recorded. He was also friends with Sir Hans Sloane (founder of the British Museum) and other leaders of British society. In 1717, Frances and two of their children died, perhaps from smallpox. In the following years, John continued his work, publishing several letters to Friends, a letter to Parliament, and a letter “to the criminals in prison.” In these final writings, many of his lifelong concerns are once again levied (including repeated references to his vision for a College of Industry) in a pastoral tone, and several are concluded with a prayer. John Bellers died in 1725 of unspecified illness.

2 Proposals for a College of Industry of All Useful Trades and Husbandry

The central passion in the lifetime writings of John Bellers was a Proposal for a College of Industry, whereby the poor could find employment, become productive, and contribute meaningfully to society. Rather than seeing this as an appeal to charity, Bellers sought to design a plan that would render a profit for investors and raise standards of living within society at large. He knew such a plan could work because of his management of the Quaker Box Fund, which provided employment for the poor; and, given his experience with a number of family business enterprises, he believed that such a venture could be run profitably, to the benefit of all.

The second half of the seventeenth century in England was a tumultuous time economically. Following the Civil War (1642–1651) and the end of Cromwell’s Commonwealth (1660), those who owned property did well, but others fell behind economically. Prices went up, but wages went down, and the gap between the rich and the poor grew starkly.¹³ This resulted in the return of feudalism, which the established Church sometimes supported in return for the support of the rich. While Britain moved toward a free economy, it was still controlled by the merchants, industrialists, and bankers, who were more concerned with making profits than the wellbeing of the populace. Workers laboured from dawn to dusk, and if they became ill or died, they were simply replaced by others who needed work to avoid starvation.

While London was the commercial center of the world at this time, it was not a healthy place to live. Many diseases afflicted the inhabitants, and the death rate exceeded the birthrate, as three out of four children died before their first birthday.¹⁴ Those with no income were forced either to beg or to steal, lest they starve, and while some children who had been turned out into the streets found a meager existence in

¹³According to Bernstein (1930), the salary of a soldier during Cromwell’s reign had dropped by 40% just three decades later; wages went down, despite the fact that prices overall had risen.

¹⁴Clarke, pp. 11–13.

workhouses, others developed gangs of rogues, known as “the Black Guard children.” These were simply written off as criminals to be imprisoned, punished, or sentenced to death—sometimes for minor crimes. Further, even standard trades were subject to catastrophic ups and downs, as a change in fashion could put clothing makers and marketers out of work, or an agricultural downturn could sink farmers and produce merchants financially. The years between 1693 and 1699 were especially dire along these lines, and they were known as “the Hungry Years.”¹⁵

It was at this time that John Bellers proposed his College of Industry as a means of turning things around—a model for the entire society to follow if it were willing. Bolstered by the abandoning of the 1662 Licensing Act in 1695 (having been renewed in 1685 and 1690, a code prohibiting the publication of unsanctioned books and pamphlets), Bellers published the first of his 21 pamphlets that year, addressing fellow Friends.¹⁶ Citing the words of Jesus in John 12:36, he addressed it “To the Children of Light. In Scorn Called Quakers.” After receiving critical feedback, he revised his work and published it formally in 1696, addressing it to Parliament.¹⁷ In addition to the introductory letter to Friends and the proposal itself, Bellers cited Lord Chief Justice Hale’s 1683 pamphlet, “Discourse Touching Provision for the Poor,”¹⁸ included a letter “To the Lords and Commons in Parliament,” and capped it off with “An Appeal to Friends Concerning the Education of Children.”¹⁹

In proposing his scheme, Bellers declares his purpose at the outset: “There are three things I aim at: first, profit for the rich (which will be life to the rest); second, a plentiful living for the poor, without difficulty; third, a good education for youth, that may tend to prepare their souls into the nature of the good ground.”²⁰ He also poses a number of insights, quips, and maxims, conveying elements of wisdom, as follows:²¹

- ‘It’s the interest of the rich to take care of the poor, and their education, by which they will care for their own heirs.’
- ‘However prevalent arguments of charity may be to some, when profit is joined with it, it will raise most money, provide for most people, hold longest, and do [the] most good. For what sap is to a tree, that profit is to all business: by increasing and keeping it alive.’

¹⁵Clarke, pp. 12–13.

¹⁶Clarke, pp. 42–43.

¹⁷It was also published again, with endorsements by leading Friends, in 1697.

¹⁸Published posthumously (1609–1676), Justice Hale was known for his honesty, integrity, and advocacy for the poor.

¹⁹The final printing in 1697 includes an endorsement by 45 leading Quakers, including William Penn, Leonard Fell, Robert Barclay, and Thomas Ellwood.

²⁰Clarke, p. 53; rendered in modern English.

²¹These quotations are rendered in modern English, taken from his 1696 introduction (Clarke, pp. 53–55).

- ‘As a good and plentiful living must be the poor’s encouragement, so [is] their increase [to] the advantage of the rich. Without them, they cannot be rich; for if one had a hundred thousand acres of land, and as many pounds in money, and as many cattle, without a labourer, what would the rich man be, but a labourer?’
- ‘. . . the labour of the poor being the mines of the rich.’
- ‘This college-fellowship will make labour, and not money, the standard to value all necessaries by.’
- ‘Money in the body politic, is what a crutch is to the natural body—crippled; but when the body is sound, the crutch is but troublesome. So when the particular interest is made a public interest, in such a college, money will be of little use there.’
- ‘And it’s as much more charity to put the poor in a way to live by honest labour, than to maintain them idle; as it would be to set a man’s broken leg, that he might go himself, rather than always to carry him.’

Having outlined the theoretical bases for his proposal, Bellers then lays out strategic elements of his vision, including lists of advantages for all parties involved.

Advantages to the nation and society: first, two third of the people will be working and also gainfully employed; second, jobs and trades themselves will be preserved so that people can retain employment over the long term; third, the land itself will be cultivated through agriculture and development (husbandry) so that it will be more useful. (57–58)

Ten proposals for the founders include the following: (1) 18,000 pounds would be raised to purchase land, stock (cattle and agriculture), trade tools and machinery, buildings; (2) the value would be tabulated annually, and investors would be awarded a portion of the profit in accordance with the fraction of their investment; (3) the more founders and skilled tradesmen the better; (4) 25 pounds is the minimum investment; (5) one vote is awarded to each investor (of 50 or 100 pounds) with five votes being the maximum; (6) 12 or more proprietors will be chosen annually to inspect, evaluate, and advise the college; (7) these positions would not be salaried, but the trustees would be hosted by the college; (8) corrections would involve either the abatement of food or expulsion, not corporal punishment or detention within the college, lest their poor example be corruptive; (9) because the whole success (under God’s providence) will lie in a right beginning, adherence to rules and displaying good lives and tempers will set a pattern of upright and plentiful living for generations to come; (10) if subscriptions rise much beyond those of the initial founders, later supporters will share in proportion to their subscriptions at the time. (58–59)

Thus, a hypothetical model would include the following features for a college of 300 persons—including men and women and children, adults, and the elderly—with between 200 and 220 working for profitability and community maintenance.²² In

²²A digest of Bellers’ schematic outline (Clarke, pp. 56–57); some overlap between the categories is inferred (some of the men’s work would be done by the elderly, etc.). For a good summary and overview, see Barbour and Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings*, pp. 451–459.

Bellers' estimation, this would include 118 adult labourers of all trades (36 different trades listed—44 tradesmen, 82 women and girls, 24 men and boys on the farm); 8 women and girls doing childcare and bed-making; “men’s work” done by as many as 140 (including some of the trades listed above); 100 elderly and children housed there, contributing to community as able, including doing some of the men’s work. Bellers offered a number of different schemes and ratios, but he believed that working communities of one or two thousand could also work, bring increased profit to the founders. Bellers then lists advantages to different groups, and he lists rules, as well.

Nine advantages to the rich and the founders are as follows: (1) they will make greater profits and have more for themselves and their heirs; (2) they will also have access to the goods produced; (3) larger colleges can produce even greater profits, especially if international trade results in surplus goods creating new markets; (4) if the poor are given jobs, replacing debauchery with temperance, society will be better for it; (5) investors will receive an allowance from the profits, thereby increasing their income; (6) the college could provide a living space for investors’ family members; (7) investing in property is not likely to be lost or stolen, as can happen with money; (8) people living in the estate could learn about work instead of simply wasting their time with play; (9) housing people in colleges would support ten times as many people as alms-houses or hospitals because they would be gainfully productive. (Clarke, pp. 59–61)

Eight advantages to workers and the poor include: (1) the poor will move from poverty to riches, which will allow them to marry, have families, and enjoy greater health and prosperity; (2) each man will be able to provide for himself and his family, and the stability of long-term employment is thereby ensured; (3) steady employment will reduce loss of income resulting from bad debts, exorbitant (“dear”) crediting, and lawsuits; (4) as workers approach their senior years, they can be ensured a livable situation, as there will still be meaningful work for them to do within the college; (5) the cares for one’s life are provided for better for the elderly in the college than outside the college, as one can continue to contribute, even if in less strenuous ways; (6) since worldly cares are addressed, the college can become a suitable place for religious instruction and a school of virtue; (7) the college would welcome the poor into the model of primitive Christianity, where all was held and shared in common, allowing them to share in the miraculous blessings that the rich enjoy; (8) such a college would enjoy permanence and longevity, as a corporate venture possesses greater generativity and resilience than individual ones. (Clarke, pp. 61–62)

Rules for governing college workers include the following: (1) all colleges and hospitals in England and Holland should be visited to take inventory of and learn from their useful rules and orders; (2) trade standards should be considered within each of the professions so as to inform fitting rules and laws; (3) this should be called a “college” rather than a “work-house,” as the former implies a more grateful and educative approach; (4) members of the college, as well as master-workers versus apprentices, and women versus girls, should be distinguished by uniform dress and caps; (5) a number of boys and girls should wait at table upon men and women, thus

enhancing the workers’ standard of living; (6) living wards should be designated for young men and boys, young women and girls, married persons, and the sick and the lame; (7) the college should provide separate work areas for men and women; (8) men would be apprentices until the age of 24 and women until the age of 21 (or marriage), and they would then have liberty to leave or stay in the college as they wished. (Clarke, pp. 62–63)

Educating children and teaching them languages would involve: (1) learning vocabulary and dictionary meanings of words, leading then to understanding sentences and rules of grammar; (2) studying 4 hours in the morning and 4 hours in the afternoon is too much to sustain interest, as exercise and labour are good for the body and the mind; (3) while a rebellious temper must be subdued by correction, corporal punishment (“stripes”) weakens the presence of mind needed for ready learning, whereas a child’s love of learning is fostered by rewards and emulation; (4) while learning is worthwhile and gives “a useful varnish,” the body is supported by hands and legs, not just the head, lest “the head grows too big for the body,” causing the whole “to fall into rickets;” (5) though learning is useful, a virtuous and industrious education leads more readily to happiness “here and hereafter.” (Clarke, pp. 63–65)

In training the youth to pursue virtue and to develop temperance and productivity versus debauchery and idleness, a good education will make a person with “little estate” happier than one with “great estate” without it. In learning to mind the rational over feeling, and ‘the will being the greatest enemy a man hath, when it is not subject to he will of God; how valuable it is then for a child’s will to be kept under another direction than its own? It will be less difficult to submit it to the will of God, when grown a man, especially if seasoned with religious lessons of Scriptures.’

Thus, a college education will have several advantages over a private one, including: (1) learning many types of skills and tools; (2) learning all languages being used within the college, including one’s mother tongue; (3) helping children and adults alike submit more easily to rules and laws later in life; (4) they will be prevented from folly more effectively under the eyesight of a schoolmaster than by a family member; (5) as company is the delight of all creatures, being well governed within the college will avoid temptations and evils that are learned abroad; (6) a library of books, a Physick-Garden, and a laboratory for preparing medicines would provide all the conveniences and comforts a person could want, making such a college “an epitomy of the world” (Clarke, pp. 65–66). Bellers concludes:

I believe the present idle hands of the poor of this nation are able to raise provision and manufacturers that would bring England as much treasure as the mines do Spain, if send them conveniences abroad; when that can be thought the nation’s interest more than breeding up people with it among ourselves, which I think would be the greatest improvement of the lands of England that can be; it being the multitude of people that makes land in Europe more valuable than land in America, or in Holland than in Ireland; regular people (of all visible creatures) being the life and perfection of treasure, the strength nations, and glory of princes. (66)

While Bellers proposed such a scheme repeatedly until the end of his life three decades later, it was never implemented fully. Despite the appraisal that ‘schemes

were always too good to work, but not fantastic,²³ a more realistic assessment is that individual features of the proposal did find their way into implementation in more limited ways, even if Bellers' full-fledged vision was never actualized.²⁴ In 1696, Bristol Friends developed their own Workhouse, developed after Bellers' 1680 scheme, which purchased flax and cloth so that the poor and those in prison could make textiles and earn a wage. The Bristol Workhouse was able to provide employment for poor Quakers, education for their children and orphans, and residency for the elderly and infirm. In London, Bellers' appeal gave way to the establishing of the Clerkenwell Workhouse and School as a means of caring for orphans and the elderly. It later moved to Saffron Walden, where it continued as a school, educating children of Friends and others with some distinction.²⁵

While the charitable purpose of these and other institutions was strong, the workhouse emphasis fell short of Bellers' vision of a more collegial community, and sometimes the harsh treatments by supervisors and underfunded resources made the conditions difficult. In other ways, though, Bellers' vision caught on, and as Quakers developed businesses, industries, schools, and enterprises on their own terms, many of his ideas were implemented variously over the next two centuries or more. For instance, the Quaker industries developing around iron production in Coalbrookdale, around linen and textile manufacturing in Bessbrooke, and around chocolate making in Bournville are all characterized as providing housing and enhanced living conditions for their workers. And, Friends schools at Ackworth, Lisburn, and Bootham, for instance, have served students well, whether coming from Quaker backgrounds or otherwise. In these and other ways, elements of Bellers' vision of a College of Industry developed in their own ways and continued evolving, as situations required, for decades and centuries to come.²⁶

²³Barbour and Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings*, p. 451; see also Palmer's critique, "Religion and Ethics in the Thought of John Bellers," p. 74.

²⁴See, for instance, analyses of change following Bellers' contributions: Joan Kent and Steve King, "Changing Patterns of Poor Relief in Some English Parishes circa 1650–1750," *Rural History* 14.2 (2003), pp. 119–156; Nigel Smith, "John Bellers: His Life, Times and Writings," *Bunyan Studies* 1.1 (1988), pp. 82–83.

²⁵In addition to challenges regarding funding and livability, being a community without money brought on other problems, as Deidre Lynch's analysis notes: "Recent Studies in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 47.3 (2007), pp. 723–773.

²⁶Along these lines, Kenneth Boulding's appraisal of Bellers' work as having great evolutionary potential is developed by Keith Helmuth, "John Bellers and the Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism," *Quakers, Politics, and Economics*, edited by David R. Ross and Michael T. Snarr, Quakers and the Disciplines Series 5 (Longmeadow, MA: Full Media Services, 2018), pp. 263–282.

3 Bellers’ Proposals as Practical Extensions of Early Friends’ Concerns

While the tone, style, and thrust of Bellers’ published proposals are indeed different from the explosive writings of first-generation Friends, they cannot be seen as substantive departures from the convictions of Fox, Burrows, Howgill, and others. If anything, Bellers sees himself as carrying out the admonitions of Fox and first-generation Friends in programmatic ways, capping his 30 years of publishing and 50 years of activism by circulating in 1724 Fox’s Epistle: “Advice and Warning to the Magistrates of London, in the Year 1657 Concerning the Poor.”²⁷ Again, were it not for Bellers’ organizing to have Barclay’s *Apology* published in Britain, it might never have had the impact it did within the English-speaking world. Further, in standing with William Penn in calling for peaceable ways forward in Europe, Bellers proved to be a leader among contemporary Friends of international significance, extending the original concerns of Friends within evolving contexts and settings. Additionally, because of his connectedness with the likes of Sir Hans Sloane and other societal leaders in the South, Bellers was able to reach some audiences that earlier Friends from rural districts were unable to do.

More specifically, it is clear that many of Bellers’ proposals and schemes simply reflect expanding the conscience-based social concerns that Friends were already doing—expanded in entrepreneurial and civic directions. Some of these program adaptations are as follows:

- *Providing jobs for the unemployed and the poor*—Friends in London had been creating jobs and gainful employment for the poor and the unemployed for several years; Bellers served as the head of the Box Fund as of 1680, expanding its outreach to include proposing colleges of industry, where the needs of the poor, children, and the elderly could be addressed entrepreneurially.
- *Providing education for children*—Friends in London, Bristol, and elsewhere emphasized literacy and the gaining of practical skills through educational and experiential ventures; it is no surprise that Bellers sought to expand those values nationally.
- *Manufacturing and trade ventures*—having garnered experience in grocery, textile, and trade industries, Bellers thus devised plans to help prisoners and workers spin flax and make clothing as means of creating income.
- *Refugee immigration programs*—Friends had from the beginning of the movement offered hospitality to traveling Friends and those in need; Bellers expanded that service and organized means of caring for immigrants coming from abroad.
- *Resettlement of oppressed Huguenot families in the New World*—Pennsylvania was already opened up to those suffering religious persecution in Europe; Bellers simply followed the lead of Penn and contributed to the Holy Experiment by purchasing 10,000 acres where, religious refugees could prosper.

²⁷Clarke, pp. 252–269.

- *Prison ministries and outreach*—Friends had long cared for their fellow members in prison, feeding and clothing them; Bellers simply expanded those services to others, including some ways of making money with sewing and embroidery.
- *Nonviolence and peaceable concerns*—Since 1660, Friends' Testimony to King Charles II and the world was that that they were committed to peace and nonviolence; Bellers extended that concern to call for a reduction in the corporal punishment of prisoners and the abolishment of the death penalty.
- *The peace of Europe*—William Penn had published a vision for the peace of Europe; Bellers extended the vision by calling for something like a League of Nations and a forerunner of the World Council of Churches.

Indeed, the style and delivery of Bellers' writings are different from those of his Quaker predecessors, yet they must be viewed as developments and programmatic extensions of Quaker concerns rather than as departures from the first generation leaders. That's the way movements develop. For instance, regarding a biblical and theological basis for the movement, Robert Barclay consolidated and systematized many of the convictions of Fox, Penington, and others, while also contributing his own analysis as a factor of his education and perspective. Bellers did something similar in relation to Quaker social and welfare concerns. Thus, while the thrust of his vision and work was somewhat cooler and more conventional than the fiery apocalyptic ministries of Fox and Burrough,²⁸ his concerns reflect a movement within Quakerism towards more of a realized eschatology, wherein Friends and other followers of Jesus sought to actualize God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

This is made clear in several particular ways. First, Bellers speaks to the social concerns of the situation of Friends and the larger society, as the plight of the poor, immigrants, orphans, elderly, and others was terribly dismal. As the Friends movement grew, so did their concerns with people around and within the movement. Second, Bellers is greatly concerned with propagating the message of Friends. Thus, he endeavors to have Barclay's *Apology* published in England and distributed widely—furthering the theological basis for the movement.²⁹ Third, Bellers publishes again the 1654 epistle of George Fox in his appeal to care for the needs of the poor. In that sense, Bellers did not see himself as departing from the first generation of Friends and their concerns; he saw himself as furthering those original concerns within his generation between four and seven decades later. The following appeals of George Fox are also Bellers':

- Friends should care for the sick, the fatherless, and the widows (the essence of pure and undefiled religion, as declared in James 1:28)

²⁸See Vail Palmer's analysis of the movement from dynamic readings of Scripture during the first decades of the movement, in contrast to more programmatic and text-citing references to Scripture as a source of authority: "Quaker Peace Witness: the Biblical and Historical Roots," *Quaker Religious Thought* 23.2 and 3 (#s 68 and 69, 1988), pp. 40–41.

²⁹In his 1724 letter to Friends, Bellers adds his 1697 advocacy for the publishing of Barclay's *Apology* two decades earlier, arguing 11 reasons for printing 10,000 copies and making them available gratis to Parliament, ministers of state, and magistrates.

- Friends should be willing to share of their abundance with the poor and those in need, as those who despise the poor despise their Maker
- The Word of the Lord to all is to care for the poor and to provide a way for them to work as a means of furthering the blessing of all
- Caring for the needy produces the fruits of true religion and works of charity, the fruits of love, and the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23)
- The one who gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and the Lord restores double from his storehouse
- Friends are called to stand in the wisdom of God as preservers of Creation, caring for the poor and the sick, and come and “do the work of the Lord while ye have power.”

As the situations faced by Friends entering the eighteenth century were different from those faced by Friends half a century earlier, the social situations of many Friends had also changed. As the movement had now grown from several hundred to as many as 50,000 by its fifth decade, and Friends not only called for change and societal reform; they became agents of renewal, themselves. Therefore, it was not enough simply to issue prophetic calls for repentance; Friends helped to build the structures of society that would make realized eschatology possible. As John Punshon puts it,³⁰

Whereas the social testimony of early Friends had been directed to the pride of the wealthy, Bellers’ activity was devoted to the amelioration of the conditions of the poor. This most certainly arose from his spiritual convictions, but at the same time extended the primarily political concerns of William Penn into the field of economic and social policy. Bellers the business man was no mean economist.

4 Bellers’ Proposals as Realistic Means of Furthering the Kingdom of God

While Marxism has come to be identified as an atheistic countering of religion as “opiate of the people,” most of its ideals are rooted in the Judeo-Christian values outlined in Scripture and western religious traditions.³¹ Indeed, the weight of established religion has at times been used to resist reform and progressive

³⁰John Punshon, *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1986), pp. 110–111.

³¹That famous statement by Karl Marx is from his essay, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” translated by Annette Jolin and Joseph O’Malley (*Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), and the fuller reference is:

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to

movements in some cases, but religious origins of conscience and organized reforms have also been robust over the centuries, and this fact has often gone underrepresented over the years. This is especially the case with reference to Karl Marx's incorporation of Bellers' insights into his own ideological platform, which were deeply rooted in Christian conviction. Put tersely, Bellers' being a "veritable phenomenon in the history of political economy" was a direct result of religious conviction, not an exception to it.

While Karl Marx turned against religion during his university years, siding with Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and others, he had earlier argued that, in contrast to the frivolous philosophy of the Epicurians, "union with Christ bestows inner exaltation, consolation in suffering, calm assurance, and a heart which is open to love of mankind, to all that is noble, to all that is great, not out of ambition, not through a desire for fame, but only because of Christ."³² Thus, even though atheistic Marxism in Russia and elsewhere was bolstered by concerns similar to those Quakers addressed—established churches too easily helped the poor and the disadvantaged cope with their dire situations rather than seeking to change them—the Quaker approach sought to challenge societal structures *in the name of Christian convictions* rather than denying them altogether. Bellers' contribution to socialism must therefore be seen as rooted in Christian concern, rather than against religion, although Bellers is also happy to challenge religious lethargy, distortions, and abuses in the name of authentic Christianity.

The link between Bellers and Marx is also due to the contributions of Christian socialism in Britain a century or more after Bellers' writings were published. Ironically, while Bellers' influence among Friends must be seen as indirect for the next two centuries, the 1817 discovery of his *Proposals for Raising a College of Industry* by the social reformer, Francis Place, is what launched it again into public view. Interestingly, Place discovered the pamphlet by Bellers when rearranging his library, and he brought it straightaway to Robert Owen, who had just published his own book on *A New View of Society*.³³ Owen then published 1000 copies of it so as to get it considered in public discussions, and nearly four decades later published it fully as an appendix in his life story, saying of his own work in relation to Bellers',³⁴

give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.

³²Written in August 1835, "The Union of Believers With Christ According to John 15:1–14, Showing its Basis and Essence, its Absolute Necessity, and its Effects" by Karl Marx argues that union with Christ is the basis of virtue and loving concern for the other—attested by the history of civilization from Plato to the modern era.

³³Robert Owen, *A New View of Society: Or, Essays on the Formation of the Human Character, Preparatory to the Development of a Plan for Gradually Ameliorating the Condition of Mankind* (1816; reprinted, Clifton, NY: Augustus M. Kelley, 1972).

³⁴Robert Owen, *The Life of Robert Owen* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1857) Vol. 1. A (reference, p. 76): Appendix L, "Proposals for a College of Industry of All Useful Trades and Husbandry," pp. 155–181.

None, I believe not one, of the principles, have the least claim to originality; they have been repeatedly advocated and recommended by superior minds, from the earliest period of history. I have no claim to priority, even in regard to the combinations of these principles in theory; this belongs, as far as I know, to John Bellers, who published them, and most ably recommended them to be adopted in practice in the year 1696. Without any aid from natural experience, he has most distinctly shown how they might be applied to the improvement of society, according to the facts then known to exist; thus evincing that his mind had the power to contemplate a point 120 years beyond his contemporaries. His work appeared to be so curious and valuable, that on discovering it, I have had it reprinted, verbatim, in order to bind up with the papers I have written on the same subject. Whatever merit can be due to an individual for the discovery of a plan that, in its consequences, is calculated to effect more substantial and permanent benefit to mankind than any ever yet contemplated by the human mind, it all belongs to John Bellers.

Noteworthy here are three points. First, while Bellers’ works remained uncited for a full century after they were published, their impact is still discernible within British, European, and American societies. This is either a factor of growing social consciousness of which Bellers was aware or a reflection of social consciousness which he may have influenced within society at large. Second, it is fallacious to assume that a valid critique of one set of religion-related ethical flaws means that all religion-related views and actions are equally flawed. There is huge diversity within every major religion, and the same would be true of Atheism or any other life-philosophy. Thus, critiques of religion within socialism need not, and should not, displace its religious origins, if one is to be intellectually honest. Third, while Bellers was addressing many of the issues that socialists and communist later addressed, it is wrong to see the Quaker movement as simply being a proletariat forerunner of communism. On this score, Vail Palmer challenges effectively Bernstein’s revisionist analysis, while still appreciating his treatments of Bellers’ contribution to social reform.³⁵

Along these lines, Marx takes note of some of Bellers’ work, but its overall religious thrust remains obscured in his treatment, as he references only two of Bellers’ 21 published works, yet over half of them relate directly or indirectly to his first pamphlet: *Proposals for Raising a College of Industry*. Nonetheless, here are the references to Bellers made by Marx in his magnum opus.³⁶

³⁵Christopher Hill commits this intellectual error in *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972), pp. 231–258, following the lead of Bernstein (1930). Vail Palmer, however, challenges Bernstein’s interpretation on several compelling grounds, especially noting the radically eschatological thrust of such early Quakers as Edward Burrows, George Fox, Francis Howgill, and others. T. Vail Palmer, “A Revisionist Revised: A New Look at Bernstein’s *Cromwell and Communism*,” *Practiced in the Presence: Essays in Honor of T. Canby Jones*, edited by D. Neil Snarr & Daniel L. Smith-Christopher (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1994), pp. 36–59.

³⁶The full title for the revised version is (original spelling used here; elsewhere, Bellers’ language has been rendered in modern English): *Proposals for Raising a College of Industry of all Useful Trades and Husbandry, with Profit for the Rich, A Plentiful Living for the Poor, and a Good Education for Youth. Which will be Advantage to the Government, by the Increase of the People, and their Riches*. The other work of Bellers cited by Marx is his 1699 essay, *Essays about the Poor, Manufacturers, Trade, Plantations, & Immorality, And of the Excellency and Divinity of Inward*

Citations of John Bellers by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*

- ‘Money . . . is a pledge.’ (insuring further trade and commodities, p. 97, n. 41)
- ‘The poor stand still, because the rich have no money to employ them, though they have the same land and hands to provide victuals and clothes, as ever they had; . . . which is the true riches of a nation, and not the money.’ (moving from credit to cash systems of financing heaps theoretical fright upon practical panic; p. 99, n. 50)
- ‘What money is more than of absolute necessity for a Home Trade, is dead stock . . . and brings no profit to that country it’s kept in, but as it is transported in trade, as well as imported.’ (money is as valuable as its demand; p. 102, n. 66)
- ‘The uncertainty of fashions does increase necessitous poor. It has two great mischiefs in it. First, The journeymen are miserable in winter for want of work, the mercers and master-weavers not daring to lay out their stocks to keep the journeymen employed before the spring comes, and they know what the fashion will then be; Secondly, In the spring the journeymen are not sufficient, but the master-weavers must draw in many prentices, that they may supply the trade of the kingdom in a quarter or half a year, which robs the plough of hands, drains the country of labourers, and in a great part stocks the city with beggars, and starves some in winter that are ashamed to beg.’ (pp. 352–353, n. 209)
- ‘An idle learning being little better than the learning of idleness. . . . Bodily labour, it’s a primitive institution of God. . . . Labour being as proper for the bodies’ health as eating is for its living; for what pains a man saves by ease, he will find in disease. . . . Labour adds oil to the lamp of life, when thinking inflames it. . . . A childish silly employ, leaves the children’s minds silly.’ (a challenge here to Basedow and those using play, versus work, as a means of furthering education; p. 355, n. 229)
- ‘For if one had a hundred thousand acres of land and as many pounds in money, and as many cattle, without a labourer, what would the rich man be, but a labourer? And as the labourers make men rich, so the more labourers there will be, the more rich men . . . the labour of the poor being the mines of the rich.’ (p. 435)

From this set of quotations, several things are clear about Bellers’ influence upon Marx and his overall theory. First, money (and thus, capital) is not the primary value within an industrious society; rather, labour is, and it should be valued accordingly. Second, rather than seeing the poor as a detriment to society, they should be seen as its greatest resource; if their energies could be yoked to productive ventures, all would be winners. Third, the greatest value of money is that it facilitates trade and enterprise—domestically and internationally—its value is not ultimate but facilitative. Fourth, there is great unevenness in terms of shifting fashion, supply of labour, and demand for labour; thus evening out these systems would facilitate prosperity

light Demonstrated from the Attributes of God, and the Nature of Mans Soul, as well as from the Testimony of the Holy Scriptures.

and wellbeing. Fifth, physical labour is productive for learning processes—not simply for entertainment reasons; thus, physical work and exercise should be drawn into ventures of industry, for the good of the labourer and that which is produced. Sixth, without labourers, landowners would be as poor as those without land—making husbandry and agriculture as important as owning land; thus, labourers in the field are what gives the landed classes economic buoyancy.

The practicality of these insights goes without saying, and much of the effectiveness of the Marxist ideal is indebted to the wisdom and insight of John Bellers. On the other hand, Marx misses the overall thrust of Bellers’ approach, even within the two essays he cites.³⁷ While Marx might be excused for not noting the clear Johannine references in his first letter to Friends,³⁸ Bellers introduces the two works Marx cites with three biblical passages:³⁹

- “The sluggard shall be clothed with rags.” (Prov 23:21)
- “He that will not work, shall not eat.” (2 Thes 3:10)
- “Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the Earth; and thou wilt not deliver him into the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.” (Psalm 41:1–3)

While the Christian bases for Bellers’ opening proposal are inescapable, they are even more explicit in his second proposal, *Essays about the Poor, Manufacturers, Trade, Plantations & Immorality*, as described in the subtitle: *And the Excellency and Divinity of the Inward Light: Demonstrated from the Attributes of God, and the Nature of Man’s Soul, as Well as from the Testimony of the Holy Scriptures*. While the Christian basis for this essay builds on John 1:9,⁴⁰ the biblical foundations for his concerns are laid out subtly and explicitly throughout the rest of these essays. After citing King William III’s address to Parliament in December of 1698, Bellers

³⁷According to Palmer, “A Revisionist Revised” (p. 56). “Marx’s own attitude toward Bellers seems to be one of surprise and wonderment that a thinker as early as the seventeenth century could have had such insight into a variety of points. The problem, which Bernstein tends to gloss over, is that these insights remain just that—isolated insights, not really tied together in a far-reaching theology, political theory, or philosophy of history.”

³⁸Bellers opens his first communication citing the words of Jesus in John 12:36: “It’s the glorious title the great founder of Christianity hath given you that walk therein, when he said, ‘Whilst ye have the Light, walk ye in the Light, that ye may become the Children of the Light.’” He continues, citing John 13:34–35: “. . . show forth the more the Christianity of your faith, by the virtuous works that come from it, of which love and charity is the chief. . . by which love to one another, your Master and great doctor of the Christian religion, said, all men should know such were his disciples.” (Clarke, p. 48).

³⁹The first two introduce his *Proposal for a College of Industry*; the third passage introduces his *Essays about the Poor*, etc. (Clarke, pp. 50, 83).

⁴⁰The Quaker doctrine of the Inward Light, available to all persons—at least potentially, requiring people to mind the light and to walk in it—is rooted in a broad embrace of John 1:9: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (NRSV).

addresses these essays to both houses of Parliament: the Lords and the Commons, subtly referencing 1 Corinthians 6:9 (the bodies of the poor are temples of the Holy Ghost) and Mark 12:29–31 (the love of God and neighbour). More explicitly, he concludes the introduction to his essays by citing Proverbs 29:4 (“The righteous consider the cause of the poor, but the wicked regard not to know it.”) and 31:9 (“Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”).

Bellers then addresses a number of issues in several shorter essays:⁴¹

- “How the Poor’s Wants Will be Best Answered, and the Nation’s Strength and Riches Increased”
- “Essay to Show That 500 Labourers, Regularly Employed, are Capable of Earning £3000 More Than Will Keep Them”
- “Essay to Show How 500 Thousand Poor are Capable to Add 43 Millions Value to the Nation”
- “The Increase of Regular Labouring People is the Kingdom’s Greatest Treasure, Strength, and Honor”
- “Of Manufacturers: Employing the Poor Upon Any One Manufacture Constantly, Will Run Out the Stock They Are Employed With”
- “The Uncertainty of Fashions Doth Increase Necessitous Poor”
- “Of Trade”
- “Of Traders”
- “Of Foreign Trade”
- “Of Money”
- “Of English Plantations”
- “A Word to the Rich”
- “Essay for Abating Immoralities”
- “Some Reasons for Putting Felons to Death”
- “The Excellency and Divinity of Inward Light, Demonstrated From the Attributes of God, and the Nature of Man’s Soul: As Well As From the Testimony of the Holy Scriptures”
- “Of Christian Virtue”
- “Of Divine Worship”
- “A Cloud of Witnesses Recorded in the Holy Scripture”

As Bellers develops his arguments, Scripture references document the bases for his concerns (Psalm 127:1; Proverbs 13:23; 14:28, 34; 22:7; 28:2; Amos 8:4; Matthew 6:12; 18:33; 1 Peter 5:8), but it is really in his last four sections that he cites Scriptures most expansively. In his essay on the Inward Light, Bellers roots his argument that the human soul ‘is the most invisible, spiritual, and intellectual part of this creation’ in the eternal, infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and invisible power and wisdom of God. Because God is infinite and omnipresent, God is within the bodies of humans as well as outside them. In supporting the thesis that God’s revelatory light, spirit, and life are the source of human intellect and

⁴¹These titles are rendered in modern paraphrase (Clarke, pp. 88–112).

conscience (though not equally meted out), Bellers cites Acts 17: 23–28; Amos 4:13; Ephesians 5:13; and 1 John 1:5.

On the source of Christian virtue, Bellers advocates putting on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10–18) and taking every thought captive in obedience to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5). On the character of divine worship, he cites John 4:21–24, where authentic worship is independent of form or place; it is in spirit and in truth. In his final section, Bellers argues for the manifestation of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit within the lives of humans on the basis of biblical teachings, addressing also the problem of those who reproach the light.⁴²

- *Of God’s Manifestation in Humans*: Proverbs 20:27; Job 32:8; Isaiah 2:5; 57:15–16; 60:19; Romans 1:19; 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 4:5, 7; Ephesians 4:6; 5:8; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:7
- *Of Christ’s Manifestation in Humans*: Luke 2:30–32; John 1:4; 14:16–17, 23; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:11; 2 Corinthians 3:11; 13:3, 5; Galatians 1:12; Ephesians 3:19; 4:7–13; 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; Colossians 1:12–13, 26–27; 1 Peter 1:11; Revelation 3:20
- *Of the Holy Spirit’s Manifestation in Humans*: John 7:38–39; 14:26; Acts 2:4, 17; Romans 8:11, 15–16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 12:3–6, 132 Corinthians 3:7–8, 17–18; 5:5; Galatians 5:16; 6:8; Ephesians 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 2:20, 27; 4:13
- *Some Considerations for Them that Reproach the Light*: Job 24:13; John 1:5; 3:19–21; 5:38–47; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 4:3; 2 Peter 3:3–4; Jude 1:4, 10–11, 16–19

As is obvious by the above facts, Bellers not only argues his concerns for the poor by means of appealing to reason, realities, and biblical texts, but his concerns themselves are rooted in biblical understandings of what it means to be human and what the Creator expects of humanity. Therefore, while Marx drew from these two writings of Bellers, he failed to acknowledge the thoroughly Christian and biblical bases for Bellers’ vision for society, as well as the religious character of his social concerns. Of course, neither socialism nor communism need be atheistic for their programs to be successful, and both Christian socialism and liberation theology have clear biblical roots. What has been misrepresented, however, in the name of realism, is a partial and skewed image of what Bellers and the early Friends stood for, including the thoroughly Christian center of their realism concerns and motivations. Bellers thus begins and concludes his introduction to his first proposal with these words:

Christianity mends, but mars no person’s good nature; it binds us to love our neighbor, and [by] that love, to desire our country’s prosperity. . . . And it’s as much more charity to put the

⁴²I have rendered “Men” as “Humans” in the inclusive sense, and the biblical texts have been reordered canonically.

poor in a way to live by honest labour, then to maintain them idle; as it would be to set a man's broken leg, that he might go himself, rather than always to carry him.⁴³

5 Additional Proposals by John Bellers

While John Bellers is best known for his influences upon political and economic theories, his overall vision for the betterment of society and humanity at large must be taken into consideration before his contribution to be appreciated fully. Given that Bellers was seeking to further something of a realized eschatology in the modern era—carrying out the Divine Will on earth as it is in heaven—taking note of his additional concerns and proposals is essential for appreciating the comprehensive scope of his vision. Again, the thoroughly biblical character of his vision must be taken into consideration, as ignoring this feature would be intellectually dishonest.

5.1 *The Education of Children*

Central to his Proposal for a College of Industry is a vision for the education of children. After all, if adults are going to contribute meaningfully to society, they must be educated and trained, and the best time for that to happen is during their developing years. This concern comes through several times in Bellers' writings, but it is laid out most explicitly in the revised edition of his Proposal on a College of Industry, where he concludes his treatise in 1697 with "An Epistle to Friends concerning the Education of Children" (Clarke, pp. 77–79; cf. 51, 54, 223–225, 247–249, 256). Within this proposal and elsewhere in his writings, Bellers argues for teaching children vocabulary, the elements of grammar, virtue, and skills needed to work meaningfully and productively. Long term, this is the most efficient and productive means of building a stable and prosperous society: to educate children so that they will be productive and law abiding the rest of their lives. It is far less costly to educate people as to the virtues and values that society holds dear than to incarcerate them in prisons and to pay the cost of their unemployment and aimlessness otherwise.

⁴³Clarke, pp. 52, 55. With these two sentences Bellers opens and concludes the introduction to his 1696 proposal for a College of Industry.

5.2 *Concerns Over Penal Injustices: Imprisonment, Corporal Punishment, Capital Punishment*

In becoming aware of the conditions of prisoners, John Bellers raised several concerns regarding injustices of penal systems. First, he sought to ameliorate the conditions of prisoners themselves, organizing productive things for them to do in prison, including providing sewing and embroidery materials so that inmates good make good uses of their time and even earn a bit of money (Clarke, pp. 274, 278). He also sought to provide reading materials, such as Bibles and other literature, so that inmates could learn and grow personally. Second, Bellers spoke out against corporal punishment, arguing for positive reinforcement instead of “stripes” and whipping (Clarke, pp. 102–103). Third, Bellers called for an abolishment of the death penalty, as lawbreakers were often sentenced to death, even for minor infractions (Clarke, pp. 102–103). After all, Christ calls us to forgive as we would want to be forgiven (Matthew 6:12; 18:33), and society ought to value the lives of individuals more fully. While Cesare Beccaria is often credited with being the first in Europe to advocate for the abolition of capital punishment, ‘Bellers predates him by 65 years.’⁴⁴ According to Helmuth, ‘his argument against the death penalty was without precedent. He was the first social thinker in history to reason his way to the abolition of this moral and legal custom. His argument was a seamless blend of social psychology, economics, and moral advancement.’⁴⁵

5.3 *Advocacy for Just and Free-Market Enterprise*

As a contemporary of Adam Smith, Bellers called for the freedom of trade within the nation and between nations. He believed this would be the surest way to increase prosperity, as goods could provide income more effectively if markets were free and unrestricted. According to Philip Belasco, Bellers’ insights developed in ways independent of France, as they reflect his own impressions and observations from how things actually work in society at large: ‘The eloquence of Bellers himself has been deemed sufficient in justifying some mention or recognition of the part he played in the history of economic thought.’⁴⁶ Bellers advocates the advancement of trade, as it improves the economic conditions of all involved (Clarke, pp. 84, 232–234, 239). It improves conditions locally and abroad, distributing wealth for all involved, and it should not be limited unnecessarily (Clarke, pp. 86, 94–97).

⁴⁴Clarke, p. 82, n. 1, citing the work of J. A. Farrer, *Crimes and Punishment* (London 1880).

⁴⁵Keith Helmuth, “John Bellers and the Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism,” p. 270.

⁴⁶Belasco, “John Bellers,” p. 174. See also Mark Neocleous, “War on Waste: Law, Original Accumulation, and the Violence of Capital,” *Science & Society* 75.4 (2011), pp. 506–528 (esp. pp. 514–515).

5.4 *Cautions Against Anger and Violence*

In his essay against anger, Bellers argued that unbridled emotions too easily lead to uncontrolled violence. ‘Anger is the parent of murder, as lust is the parent of adultery, and the root of it, as an acorn is of an oak.’ (Clarke, p. 117) Thus, rather than deal with the violent and destructive consequences of anger, it is more efficient and effective to address the root (Clarke, pp. 117–122). Citing some forty New Testament passages regarding “the Duty and Necessity of Love,” Bellers reminds his readers that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8); one should not sin in one’s anger nor let the sun go down on one’s wrath (Ephesians 4:26); one cannot claim to love God, whom one has not seen, if one does not love one’s brother, whom one has seen (1 John 4:7–21). After all, the Kingdom of God is not one of anger, trouble, or torment; but it is one of peace, joy, and the Holy Spirit (Clarke, p. 116). Many economic setbacks and societal distress—including crime, punishment, and suffering—can be alleviated if individuals would act more lovingly and less abrasively toward one another, and anger management along those lines (dealing with such “perturbations”) is key.

5.5 *Watch unto Prayer*

In addition to arguing for programmatic reform and advances, John Bellers also called for personal transformation, rooted in a vital life of watchful prayer. It is not enough to simply try to address anger and its disruptive consequences behaviorally; those who profess to “believe in the Light” must also “walk in the Light,” which is how they become Children of the Light, overcoming deeds of darkness (1 John 1:7).⁴⁷ Thus, ‘Watchfulness is the great preparation of the soul, in order to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (1 Cor. 10:5), and he that thinks no evil will be sure to act none.’ (Clarke, p. 124) The transformative power of true and authentic worship—the essential key to holiness and Christian virtue—lies not in the hearing of the best preachers, but in prayerful watchfulness and ‘the quickening of the soul to God’ (Clarke, pp. 106–107, 124–125). Thus, one must prepare for the meeting for worship by cultivating a spirit of watchfulness and prayer beforehand, and such is the key to entering into the *New Jerusalem*, as envisioned in Scripture.⁴⁸

⁴⁷The full title of this 1703 essay, following the essay on anger (1702) is: “Watch Unto Prayer: Or Considerations for All Who Profess They Believe in the Light” (Clarke, pp. 123–126). Clarke thus rightly connects these two essays together.

⁴⁸Bellers builds his case citing nearly a dozen additional Scripture passages: Isaiah 55:7; Matthew 24:42; 26:41; Mark 13:37; Luke 12:37; 21:36; Galatians 6:15–16; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians, 4:2; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 3:2–3.

5.6 *The Care of Refugees*

In addition to purchasing a tract of land in Pennsylvania to which French Huguenots were able to travel and develop new lives, Bellers also proposed to Queen Anne and Parliament that a welfare system be set up in England to care for ‘the poor Palatines’ (1709, Clarke, pp. 129–131). Given that some 15,000 French Protestants were emigrating to Britain as a result of their ethno-religious persecution in France, Bellers once more proposed an adaptation of his College of Industry model, in which communities of industry, education, and housing could be set up as a means of both making a profit for founders and bringing in a living wage for the collegians. Rather than see immigrants be regarded as a burden upon society, Bellers advocated their being organized into productive systems of labour, whereby they would make a profitable contribution to their new homeland. In putting forth his thesis, Bellers shows how such a scheme might even make a profit for the founders, estimating potential income and salutary outcomes. While some communities were established in England, others relocated in Ireland, and some were resettled in New York. Along these lines, Bellers wrote an additional appeal to Parliament in 1723, calling for ‘Employing the Poor to Profit’ (Clarke, pp. 238–244).

5.7 *Some Reasons for a European State*

Following the important essay by William Penn regarding ways forward in furthering the Peace of Europe, Bellers put forward his own proposal in 1710, calling for a unified state of Europe. Given that much suffering as a result of the many of the wars in Europe had been caused by one state making war against another (Clarke, pp. 67, 136–137, 146), Bellers argued that nations should settle their differences politically and in direct conversation with one another, rather than resorting to military settlements of disputes. Given the huge economic losses, waste, and suffering caused by war (Clarke, pp. 85, 143–145, 168), alternatives to violence must be explored comprehensively. According to Peter van den Dungen, ‘What was particularly revolutionary in the original Quaker doctrine is the commitment to nonviolence. This found expression as early as 1660 in a declaration signed by Fox and 11 other Quakers which has become known as ‘The Peace Testimony’. Around 1700 two prominent Quakers, William Penn and John Bellers, put forward two designs for ridding the continent of the great scourge of war.’ Thus, the contributions of Penn and Bellers influenced the quest for nonviolent approaches to problem solving in the Age of the Enlightenment, and according to Clarke, they ‘predate the more widely known proposal of Abbé St Pierre, who greatly influenced Rousseau and Kant.’⁴⁹

⁴⁹Clarke, p. 132. For a fuller treatment of Penn’s and Bellers’ impact upon St Pierre, see Peter van den Dungen, ‘The Plans for European Peace by Quaker Authors William Penn (1693) and John

Rather than see religion as the a propagative cause of war, Bellers argues that war is the enemy of religion, and he calls for religious leaders to stand for nonviolent ways of addressing conflicts, as such would be a powerful Christian witness in keeping with the peaceable way of Christ.⁵⁰

5.8 *Religious Cooperation and Ecumenism*

Bellers continues his appeal to religious leaders the following year (1711) by writing a proposal to the Archbishop, bishops, and clergy in the Province of Canterbury, calling for a convention and congress as a means of settling disputes between religious parties and groups. He believes England could set an example for the rest of Europe to follow, thus minimizing the likelihood of conflict and violence among the churches and states more universally, as well. He called for dialogue and mutual support between ‘high churches’ and ‘low churches,’ serving as ‘good neighbors’ though differing in religious forms (Clarke, pp. 155–156). He also believes that Christian unity would make a powerful witness to the world, and he calls for interfaith dialogue between persons of faith—Christian’s, Jews, and Muslims. In that sense, he not only advocates bases upon which the World Council of Churches was founded in 1947; he also anticipates the interfaith dialogues of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Before citing the poem, *Of Divine Love*, by the celebrated poet, Edmund Waller (Clarke, pp. 157–158), Bellers concludes his treatise with this prayer:

God who is Light, most excellent and glorious in majesty, and omnipresent, filling all places; and therefore enlightening all men, suitable to their capacities of receiving it, sanctify your souls, that in his brightness, receiving counsel and wisdom, you may shine as lights to the world, in purity, charity, and meekness, possessing in your spirits, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, *Amen*.

5.9 *Addressing Political Corruptions*

Lest it be assumed that political divisiveness and violence were a factor of conflicts between states and faiths alone, Bellers addresses pointedly the political corruption and ills inherent to partisan tensions within Britain itself. Given that bribery and dishonesty were especially rife within parliamentary elections and transactions during the first decade of eighteenth century Britain, Bellers published “A Essay

Bellers (1710),” *Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades* 16.32 (2014), pp. 53–67.

⁵⁰Clarke, pp. 145–153. Thus, “Imposing religion, without reaching the understanding, is not leading men to heaven.” (Clarke, p. 147) See also Philip S. Belasco, *Authority in Church and State* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928), pp. 96–107.

Towards the Ease of Elections of Members of Parliament” in 1712, calling for bipartisan reform (Clarke, pp. 161–164). In so doing, Bellers addresses several ills related to parliamentary elections. First, in combatting excessive drinking that accompanied voting, Bellers argues that those selling liquor abruptly before voting (thus, seeking to impact election outcomes, not having done so previously) should be denied voting privileges. Second, Bellers proposes that those succumbing to bribes related to voting should be fined, making elections themselves less quarrelsome. Third, qualified electors should be clarified, alleviating the need to resort to oaths and swearing of veracity and reducing charges of perjury. Bellers follows this essay with two others, seeking to reduce tensions between Whigs and Tories (1712)⁵¹ and opposing the Schism Bill, which was never enacted (1714).⁵²

5.10 The Institutionalization and Improvement of Medical Care

In addition to his proposals for a College of Industry and the education of children, one of Bellers’ most influential contributions was *An Essay Towards the Improvement of Physick*. In his 1714 letter to Parliament, Bellers proposed 12 ways forward in the improvement of medical services throughout Britain. According to Bellers, (1) hospitals should be built in or near London for the poor; (2) that hospital should be under the direct care of the Queen’s physicians; (3) there should be one hospital for the blind; (4) one hospital should be for the incurable; (5) a public laboratory should be organized to experiment with curative chemicals, vegetables, and minerals so that advances in medications could be furthered; (6) at least one hospital should be established in ‘each of our two Universities’ (Oxford and Cambridge) with individuated wards for particular distempers; (7) at least one doctor should be appointed to care for the sick and the poor in each city or parish, visiting at least once a week and paid for by the Overseers of the Poor; (8) daily reports of extraordinary medicines should be published in order to distinguish effective medicines from poor ones; (9) physicians and surgeons should be sent to the East, the West Indies, and America to benefit from the knowledge of effective medical treatments internationally and cross-culturally; (10) a College of Physicians and a Company of Surgeons should be established by the state, so as to ascertain and educate regarding best practices in medicine; (11) the Royal Society should award an annual prize in medicine; (12) both Houses of Parliament should appoint a committee each session, receiving a report on the state of medicine and medical discoveries, so as to support such advances properly (Clarke, pp. 177–220). Along these lines, John Bellers was a

⁵¹*Some Considerations as an Essay Towards Reconciling the Old and New Ministry* (citing Matthew 12:25 as a biblical basis for political unity and cooperation: “Every kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.” Clarke, pp. 165–171).

⁵²This essay by Bellers is lost (Clarke, pp. 172–173).

forerunner of national health care systems and the advance of modern medical care over the following three centuries.⁵³

5.11 *Epistles to Friends*

In addition to sending public missives to Parliament, the Queen, and religious leaders, John Bellers wrote a plurality of his public letters to Friends.⁵⁴ His admonitions echoed the rest of his concerns, especially advocating endeavors to design systems of employment, care, and housing for the poor, the sick, and the disenfranchised. Reflecting something of a pastoral concern, his admonitions against anger and for an active prayer life were designed to further personal and spiritual transformation among those claiming to be Children of Light, and in that sense, his calls for repentance were levied more internally than externally.

5.12 *Advocacy of Prison Reform and Hope for Criminals*

As Friends, had spent inordinate time in England's prisons, Bellers not only advocated prison reform, but he also sought to encourage prisoners directly in writing to them at the close of his life. Acknowledging the deplorable conditions of prisons in his earlier writings (1699, Clarke, pp. 102–103), in his last publication before he passed away, Bellers wrote an epistle *To the Criminals in Prison*. In that pastoral letter, Bellers cites 20 biblical passages reminding his audience that Christ is present as the Inward Light (John 1:9), promising to commune with them if they open their hearts to him (Revelation 3:20), leading and guiding through the Comforter—the Spirit of Truth—who will guide them into all truth (John 14:26; 16:8:13), leading them to watch and pray at all times (Mark 13:33, 37). It is the God of Light in whom we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28)—the Creator of the universe, who reveals his thoughts to humanity (Amos 4:13; Romans 1:19). He goes on to speak of repentance, penance, and redemption and concludes with pastoral counsel,

⁵³Martin Boom, “Editorial—Primary Prevention in the Eighteenth Century England: An Historical Note on John Bellers,” *Journal of Primary Prevention* 21.4 (2000), pp. 425–429; Wendy Moore, “Two Hundred and Thirty Years Before Beveridge,” *British Medical Journal* (2008), p. 571; George Rosen, “An Eighteenth Century Plan for a National Health Service,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 16 (1944), pp. 429–436; Mary E. Fissell, *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 67–68.

⁵⁴Bellers' first proposal of a College of Industry was sent to Friends in 1695 (Clarke, pp. 47–79); his essays on anger and prayer were addressed to Friends in 1702 and 1703 (Clarke, pp. 115–126); and Bellers wrote epistles to Friends in 1718, 1723, and 1724 (Clarke, pp. 223–235; 247–251, 255–269). His final letter *To the Criminals in Prison* in 1724 was also sent to Friends, who distributed it among prisoners as they visited and ministered to them (Clarke, pp. 272–279).

encouraging inmates to read the Scriptures often, and a prayer that God will keep them and their families and lead them in paths of virtue and righteousness. This pamphlet would be given to prisoners for their edification as Friends visited them in prison.

6 Conclusion: On Veritable Phenomena and Epitomes of the World

While Karl Marx’s referred to John Bellers as ‘a veritable phenomenon’ and ‘a phenomenal figure in the history of political economy’ in 1867,⁵⁵ the spiritual basis of his concerns went unacknowledged by Marx, despite possessing impressive similarities with Marx’s pre-university essay on abiding in Christ (John 15:1–14). As Bellers’ platform was deeply rooted in Christian concern, one wonders if Marxist socialism would have been more robust and effective if its religious heritage had been explored and considered more seriously. It is also wrong to see Bellers as too far removed from the first generation of Friends, as he saw himself carrying for the vision of George Fox and other early Friends, furthering the ideals of what William Penn described as “Primitive Christianity Revived.” As Braithwaite points out, ‘the beginnings of Quaker organization were bound up, as in the early Church, with the needs of the poor and of travelling ministers.’⁵⁶

Finally, while the main thrust of Bellers’ lifelong pursuit involved establishing Colleges of Industry, whereby the lives of the poor and unemployed could be turned around by providing training, employment, and a place to live, it must be viewed within his overall set of concerns. The comprehensive scope of Bellers’ vision for a new society involved nothing short of a holistic strategy for addressing human needs in just, organized, and profitable ways. As an “epitome of the world,” Bellers’ proposals of a College of Industry were but a part of a larger vision of what it would look like to carry forth the divine will on earth as it is in heaven. Thus, the spiritual basis and core of this and other “veritable phenomena” deserve consideration as societal engineers seek to identify and address human needs with the best resources possible. Along these lines, the life and work of John Bellers points the way forward, as a veritable phenomenon, not despite its religious foundations, but precisely because of them.

⁵⁵Karl Marx, *Capital*, Eden and Cedar Paul, trans., Everyman’s Library 848 and 849 (London: J. M. Dent & Sons), Vol. 1, 527, n. 1—cited by Vail Palmer, “Religion and Ethics in the Thought of John Bellers,” p. 61.

⁵⁶Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, p. 560.

The Publications of John Bellers⁵⁷

I

1. "Proposals for Raising a COLLEDGE OF INDUSTRY (first edition)" (pp. 42–47)
2. "TO THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT" (pp. 48–49)
3. "Proposals for Raising a COLLEDGE OF INDUSTRY (revised edition) (pp. 50–73)
4. "To THE LORDS & COMMONS In Parliament Assembled" (pp. 74–76)
5. "An Epistle to Friends concerning the EDUCATION OF CHILDREN" (pp. 77–79)

II

6. "Essays about the Poor, Manufacturers, Trade, Plantations, & Immorality, etc." (pp. 80–112)

III

7. "A CAUTION Against all PERTURBATIONS, etc." (pp. 113–123)
8. "WATCH unto PRAYER" (pp. 124–126)

IV

9. "To the Lords and other Commissioners, appointed by the QUEEN to take Care of the Poor PALATINES" (pp. 127–131)

V

10. "Some REASONS For an European State" (pp. 132–153)

VI

11. "To the Archbishop, Bishops and Clergy, of the Province of Canterbury, etc." (pp. 154–158)

VII

12. "An ESSAY Towards the Ease of Election of MEMBERS of PARLIAMENT" 159–165;
13. "Some CONSIDERATIONS as an ESSAY towards RECONCILING the OLD and NEW MINISTRY" (pp. 166–171)

VIII

14. "Considerations on the Schism Bill" (pp. 172–173)

IX

15. "An ESSAY Towards the improvement of PHYSICK" (pp. 174–220)

X

⁵⁷These are the publications of John Bellers, as arranged chronologically and to some degree thematically, by George Clarke—his spelling and page numbers, here.

16. “An Epistle to the Quarterly Meeting of LONDON and MIDDLESEX”
(pp. 221–236)

XI

17. “AN ESSAY FOR Employing the Poor to Profit” (pp. 236–244)

XII

18. “To the Yearly, Quarterly, and Monthly Meetings of Great Britain and Elsewhere”
(pp. 245–251)

XIII

19. “AN ABSTRACT OF George Fox’s Advice and Warning TO the Magistrates of
London, in the Year 1657 CONCERNING THE POOR” (pp. 252–269)

XIV

20. “An EPISTLE to Friends of the Yearly, Quarterly, and Monthly Meetings;
Concerning the Prisoners, and Sick, in the Prisons, and Hospitals of Great
Britain” (pp. 270–275)

21. “To the Criminals in Prison” (pp. 276–279)

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