

**BASIC ENDOWMENT AND BASIC INCOME:  
SOME BELGIAN PRECURSORS\***

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the property theories of two contemporaries, Hippolyte Colins (1783-1859) and François Huet (1814-1869). Both had a French-Belgian background, and were heavily influenced by the French economic and socialist literature of the middle of the 19th century. We confine our analysis to the first major work of the one and the sole major work of the other. We do not claim to present an examination of the property theory of either writer *tout court* and we offer nothing more than an initial survey of their respective views.

The now almost forgotten baron Jean-Guillaume-César-Alexandre-Hippolyte de Colins de Ham, mostly referred to as Hippolyte (de) Colins, was born in Brussels, on December 24, 1783<sup>1</sup>. He spent a number of years in the army of Napoléon, practised agriculture and medicine for some time in the USA and Cuba, but returned to Europe around 1830, settling in Paris. He attended the courses of the university and began to work out the principles of his own doctrine, which he himself coined ‘rational socialism’. He died in Paris on November 12, 1859. François Huet was born on December 26, 1814, in the village of Villeau (Eure-et-Loire, France), into a poor family who moved to Paris in 1824.<sup>2</sup> He was appointed ‘professeur extraordinaire’ at the University of Ghent in Belgium in 1835 (at the age of 20!) where he taught philosophy. Following the February 1848 Revolution in France, he was accused of ‘socialism’ and of ‘republican propaganda’ in the local press. In 1850 he was forced to resign from his professorship (officially for reasons of health), and he returned to Paris. In 1863 he was put in charge of the education of Milan Obrénovitch, crown prince and future king of Serbia. Huet died in Paris, on July 1, 1869.

Colins published his first major work, *Du Pacte Social et de la Liberté Politique Considérée comme Complément Moral de l’Homme* (2 volumes), anonymously in Paris in

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<sup>11</sup> For details on Colins’ life and work, see e.g. Quack (1921-1923, vol. III, pp. 453-472), Nieuwenhuis (1901-1902, vol. II, pp. 315-323), and Cole (1953-1960, vol. II, p. 57-67); cf. also Rens (1965, 1967, 1968) and Cunliffe (1988, 1990).

1835.<sup>3</sup> Although that work cannot be taken as definitive of Colins' views on property and inheritance, it was the only one through which Huet might have become directly acquainted with those views before the publication of his major work *Le Règne Social du Christianisme* published in 1853.

The theories of Colins and Huet are not only of historical interest to those concerned with the complex and unduly neglected intellectual tradition of 'liberal socialism' in the early nineteenth-century. Their theories also acutely address controversial issues which remain central to present-day analyses. The general affinity is with those 'left-libertarian' or 'liberal egalitarian' theorists (notably Steiner and Van Parijs) who present modernized versions of that tradition, with a particular resonance to recent intellectual justifications of basic entitlements or even 'basic income'. The controversial issues (then as now) are twofold: the composition of the common pool of resources potentially available for equal distribution, especially in the light of intergenerational concerns, and the preferred form of distribution of the common pool whether through individual endowments, the provision of public services, or some combination of both.<sup>4</sup>

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the received interpretation that Colins and Huet independently adopted a common intellectual position. In Sections 3 and 4 we consider their respective views on property and inheritance. Section 5 compares and contrasts those views, while Section 6 presents an initial review of the provenance of their theories. The conclusion draws attention to the historical and present-day significance of their

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<sup>2</sup> On Huet's life and work, see Hoffman (1913), Quack (1921-1923, vol. III, pp. 472-481), and Nieuwenhuis (1901-1902, vol. II, pp. 27-29); cf. also Cunliffe (1997).

<sup>3</sup> A list of his works is given by Rens (1965, pp. 352-353).

<sup>4</sup> This affinity is readily acknowledged by both authors. Steiner (1994, pp. 249-261) now includes the property of deceased persons in the common pool, and not only raw natural resources as in the familiar radical land reform tradition. Van Parijs (1995) also includes both elements but distinctively includes 'job assets' (pp. 89-132). He refers explicitly to Colins (note 13, p. 245) and to Huet (note 32, pp. 248-9 and note 22, pp. 262-263). Even Nozick (1989, pp. 30-31) now proposes (independently) a similar scheme to Huet's, arguing that inheritance taxes should be restructured to 'subtract from the possessions people can bequeath the value of what they themselves have received through bequest'. For a recent dispute over forms of distribution amongst other issues, see Barry (1996, pp. 242-276).

intellectual contribution to property theory. This paper is a continuation of our earlier work on Colins, Huet, and inheritance theories, and part of an ongoing collaboration on those themes.

## 2. A COMMON VIEW

The received view is that Colins and Huet developed their theories independently of one another (we will return to this matter in Section 5). Yet it is striking that they seem to share a common view on social justice and the role of property rights. To the extent that such labels are helpful, both Colins and Huet might be best regarded as presenting a version of ‘liberal socialism’ which combined a ‘starting gate’ theory of equal initial endowments in external resources with more or less unqualified laissez-faire thereafter. Within a long and distinguished intellectual tradition, Colins and Huet endorsed the view that this starting gate should consist in the entitlement of all persons - irrespective of their temporal or spatial location - to an equal share of the pool of natural resources. In an apparently decisive departure from that tradition, nevertheless, both of them also insisted that this initial entitlement should also include in principle equal shares in the wealth inherited from previous generations. This proposed extension to the pool of external assets potentially available for equal distribution was justified, in their view, by considerations of equity between generations to which they were especially sensitive.

Seen from the viewpoint of equity between generations, succession practices which privileged the right of individual transmission were only conventional and subject to modification or rejection in the light of justice-based entitlements. Even so, for both Colins and Huet, considerations of efficiency favoured the retention of those practices in attenuated forms, in order not to destroy the incentives for the creation and conservation of property through time. In these forms the equal shares entitlement would be secured through taxation

systems which balanced the unequal holdings generated by individual transmission. Those who received more than an equal share would compensate those who obtained less than that share subject to efficiency constraints designed to maximise the tax yield. For Colins, such compensation would be provided indirectly by the free provision of public services for children, whereas for Huet it would be secured directly through individual endowments. In his later work, however, Huet too emphasised free education in place of or in addition to individual *dotations*, and, apparently, some such combination was also called for by Colins and his followers in their later works.<sup>5</sup>

Given the affinities between their intellectual positions, it is hardly surprising that in several studies produced in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, Colins and Huet were placed in the tradition of Henry George and the (early) Herbert Spencer, being designated as ‘agrarian socialists’ who called for the actual redistribution of property rights in land.<sup>6</sup> This designation, however, is seriously misleading. In the first place, it fails to capture the distinctive features of their intellectual positions which explicitly rejected any such immediate and sweeping redistribution, in favour of a gradualist compensatory strategy. Secondly, that strategy was focused on the total inherited stock of all resources whether natural or produced. Thirdly, the equal shares entitlement was derived from the liberal premisses of equal liberty or self-ownership; those premisses led to the explicit rejection of any socialist distribution according to need as a remedy for the admittedly exploitative features of capitalism. The institutional mechanism for realising a non-exploitative property regime consistent with those premisses consisted in an appropriate combination of collective and private ownership, not one based exclusively on either of those forms. None of this is typically associated with ‘agrarian socialism’.

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<sup>5</sup> For this combination, apparently advocated by the Colins-follower Agathon De Potter (1874), see Rens (1968, pp. 458-9). We will explore the history of *dotation* schemes in further works.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Langerock (1894, pp. 173-177), and Gutzeit (1907, pp. 46-49).

### 3. COLINS ON PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

The practice of individual inheritance is central to Colins' diagnosis in *Du Pacte Social* of the problems of modern society. Indeed, with some exaggeration, he condemned it as 'le péché originel politique' (Colins, 1834, vol. II, p. 221) or even as the 'seule cause de l'injustice sociale' (*ibid.*, p. 246). Despite that, in marked contrast to the Saint-Simonians, Colins rejected calls for the immediate and total abolition of the practice. On the one side, he strongly endorsed the 'socialist' case that this unjust practice perpetuated and reinforced inequalities in the distribution of property through time, which were unrelated to labour entitlement. On the other side, nevertheless, Colins just as strongly endorsed the 'liberal' case for the utility of the practice of individual inheritance as constituting an incentive to create and conserve property through time. Colins' general theoretical ambition was to devise a property regime which would balance these conflicting requirements of justice and utility.

Colins' starting point was the conventional claim that each individual was entitled to a share of  $Z/n$  resources, where  $Z$  is the total stock of natural resources and  $n$  the population: 'la possession d'une propriété foncière plus considérable que la part due à chacun, eu regard à la population' was against the '*justice instinctive*' of man (*ibid.*, p. 21). But, in an ostensibly decisive departure from this familiar viewpoint, Colins' view of the relevant numerator extended beyond natural resources to those produced assets resulting from the labour of previous generations:

La richesse générale provenant de la nature et de l'acquis des générations passées appartient *en droit* à la génération nationale existante, pour en jouir comme usufruitière, et non pour l'aliéner comme possesseur absolu. (*ibid.*, p. 96)

Whether that extension held for *all* produced assets or only productive ones is a moot point.

In either case, however, there would be a marked increase in the size of the pool available (in

principle) for equal distribution. The specific arguments adduced by Colins for this sweeping extension are peculiarly opaque. The first such argument is that the intentions of present owners that their property be transmitted to their descendants, through individual bequest, had been constantly violated throughout history. Given the uncertainty of the outcome of individual transmission, the only just interpretation of the intentions of previous generations was to ‘assurer à la génération existante, sans distinction de familles, la jouissance des produits qu’elles destinaient à leur posterité’ (*ibid.*, p. 149). The second argument was that this collective inheritance ‘ne pouvant se conserver que par le concours de tous, appartient par conséquent à tous’ (*ibid.*, p. 150). At the very least, even these singularly obscure arguments call into question the status of unqualified rights of individual succession. Other and more compelling justifications for this radical extension were available to Colins, however, in the light of his general theoretical position. One such justification would be that later generations were entitled to *some* compensatory capital as a substitute for that portion of natural resources depleted by earlier ones. Another, and more sweeping, justification would be that *everything* received from previous generations was potentially available for equal distribution, because it was all derived ultimately from natural resources over which the human community had a continuing collective claim.<sup>7</sup>

On efficiency grounds, nevertheless, Colins backed away considerably from this dramatic extension to the common pool. In terms of justice, each successive generation was to be considered as collectively possessing if only as a usufruct all of the wealth generated by its predecessors, with the duty to pass it on in at least an undiminished form. Within each generation, every individual was entitled to an equal share of that wealth proportional to the population, unencumbered by any differential entitlements resulting from the practice of

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Cunliffe (1988) for details. In that article, however, I attributed the first justification to Colins, but we now consider the second the more plausible interpretation of his views.

individual inheritance. Insofar as that practice constituted an incentive to the conservation of property through time, those differential entitlements were nevertheless crucial to the realisation of the intergenerational ethic. The conflicting demands of justice and utility could be reconciled for Colins only through a taxation system which equalized inherited shares in both natural and produced assets by balancing the ‘privilege’ of those who received more than that share by a counter-privilege to those who received less. Taxation would penalise the former and compensate the latter, at least insofar as the redistribution was compatible with the incentive effect. It would be levied accordingly on capital before current labour, and on collective capital (especially land) before individual capital. The proceeds would be used to the greatest benefit of the proletariat which comprised all of those who had received less than an equal share of personal capital through individual bequest or inheritance and who were therefore more or less fully dependent for subsistence on their labour.

C’est ce privilège accordé sur l’impôt à ceux qui n’ont rien que nous nommons PRIVILÈGE DU PROLETARIAT, et que nous disons être NÉCESSAIRE pour faire équilibre au privilège NÉCESSAIRE de l’hérité. (*ibid.*, p. 219)

On the one side, the proletariat would be exempt from all forms of direct or indirect taxation - ‘Il faut que ceux qui n’ont rien ne paient rien’ (*ibid.*, p. 218) - but on the other, the state would assume total responsibility for meeting all the material and educational needs of its children:

Les enfants des prolétaires, depuis l’âge de trois ans jusqu’à celui de vingt-un ans, sont élevés, nourris et entretenus aux frais de la société. Elle leur assure **gratis** l’éducation physique, industrielle, morale, religieuse. (*ibid.*, p. 210)

Although the entitlement was to an equal share of inherited wealth, therefore, it would be recognised not directly through individual *dotations*, but indirectly through tax exemptions for adults who had received less than that share and through free public provision of a wide range of goods for their children.

Colins claimed that this attempt to strike a balance between the conflicting demands of justice and efficiency contrasted directly with the Saint-Simonians who refused to take into account the practicality of their proposals for the total abolition of the right of inheritance (*ibid.*, p. 145). Even in the case of land, the desire to establish an ‘égalité absolue’ (*ibid.*, p. 370) was a desire for the impossible; and ‘la communauté de la richesse mobilière est toujours une utopie’ (*ibid.*, p.145) because of the ‘necessity’ for retaining that right as the crucial incentive to the production and conservation of assets. In terms of utility, private rather than collective ownership of produced assets had to be accepted on a permanent basis, and, in relation to land itself, only a gradual move toward common ownership was practicable. In striking the balance between justice and utility, due regard had to be paid to current legal titles and to the continuing welfare of all, by retaining the incentive effect of individual ownership (*ibid.*, p. 220). The compensatory strategy developed by Colins claimed to meet these disparate requirements by guaranteeing to each person the equivalent of the entitlement to an equal share of natural and inherited wealth.

This strategy could be considered either as a scheme for alleviating poverty under existing regimes, or, alternatively, as providing a means of gradual transition to a replacement property regime which would better satisfy natural right entitlements. In the immediate future, Colins anticipated at most alleviation<sup>8</sup>; but, in the distant future, he envisaged replacement. In return for the continuation of full liberal property rights in land, individual owners would be subject to a rent-tax and death duties which would mitigate the ‘vice fondamental’ (*ibid.*, p. 345) of such ownership.<sup>9</sup> Over time, the proceeds of that taxation might be used to re-establish joint ownership of land, through its purchase by the state from existing owners (presumably on the basis of competitive prices). Such land would not be subject to common

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<sup>8</sup> Note that in 1871 Adolphe Hugentobler published the Colins-inspired book *Extinction du Paupérisme*.

use but allocated to individual producers or groups of producers on the basis of competitive bidding for leases. Even in this case the incentive effect of the individual right of transmission would be retained because those leases could be transferred between generations, apparently subject to a valuation in which beneficiaries would be charged for any dilapidation but rewarded for any increase (*ibid.*, pp. 235-6). With produced resources, by contrast, there was no such distinction between the immediate and longer term objectives. Despite the justice-based entitlement to equal inherited shares, those resources were subject irrevocably to the incentive effect of individual transmission in the absence of which, on his view, production would cease and the ‘traditional’ family be destroyed:

En effet, dès que la richesse mobilière devient commune, la production s’arrête. La paresse, comme passion, est naturelle à l’homme; le besoin seul le fait travailler. Quel sera le but de travail? quels seront les liens des familles! (*ibid.*, p. 145)

#### 4. HUET ON PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

The inheritance question occupies a central part of Huet’s book *Le Règne Social du Christianisme*. The subject is imbedded in a general theory of property, which leads Huet to determine the ‘rational law of successions’ (Huet, 1853, p. 265). This theory of property is meant to illustrate that the ideals of Christianity can be harmonized with the ideals of the French Revolution.

Huet makes a distinction between two kinds of capital: natural resources (the ‘primitive and divine patrimony’) and produced goods (the ‘hereditary capital’), which together constitute the ‘general patrimony’ of mankind. Given that every human being has the right to live, each person has a right to the general patrimony, both to the primitive component (since everyone is an image of God) and to the hereditary one (since everyone is a member of one of

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<sup>9</sup> In practical terms, a tax of 25% on all bequests seemed reasonable to him. He also proposed that in cases of intestacy,

the series of human generations) (*ibid.*, p. 244). This right must be organised in such a way that an equilibrium is reached between private property, which is essential for the realisation of the principle of liberty, and common property, which corresponds to the principles of equality and fraternity. Huet stressed that property rights are not exclusively based upon labour or occupation; he maintained that there exists a ‘truly natural and primitive property right’ which precedes the right based upon labour and which guarantees liberty (*ibid.*, p. 253).

To say that everyone has a right to (private) property is one thing, to determine how much property everyone is entitled to is another. To tackle this question, Huet imagined a group of shipwrecked colonists landing upon a previously inhabited, but now deserted island; how would they divide the natural and inherited patrimonium suddenly available to them? According to Huet, the colonists would aim at ‘absolute equality’, with each receiving an equal share of the common pool of resources. First they would divide the patrimonium in lots of equal value, and then a lottery would assign a particular lot to each and everyone (*ibid.*, p. 259). Once the lottery had taken place there would be exchanges of property to ‘correct the errors of fate’, and after a while the instruments of labour would find their best destination.

But what happens if new people are born and some of the original colonists die? It is at this point that the ‘rational law of successions’ comes into operation. Huet first derived the property rights with respect to inherited goods, i.e. goods that people possess as a result of a free gift. Everyone has the right to receive a share of the patrimony of mankind (natural and man-made) which allows her to make a living, but this is not an unrestricted right; it is limited by the rights of future generations. In other words, the right to inherit a part of the global patrimony is balanced by the obligation to transmit it to the next generations. This is in the first place a moral obligation; if necessary, the law will punish abuses (*ibid.*, p. 265). So

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the right of inheritance should be given only to the *direct* descendants by blood line of the deceased (Colins, 1857, vol. V, pp. 320-322).

the first principle is that a person has the right to use her share of inherited resources, but is not allowed to squander it. As a consequence, she cannot dispose of her share by gifts *inter vivos* or by will; after her death, her share must return to the general patrimony.

There exists also a second type of goods, however, and the property rights with respect to these goods are of a different nature. The second type of goods, the acquired goods, are those which people possess as a result of their own efforts, in the shape of labour or frugality. They are the personal creations of their possessors. Those who created them have the right to do with them whatever they please; in particular, there is no obligation to transmit them to the next generation. This implies that with regard to these goods the right of bequest is complete:

Fruits personnels du travail et de l'épargne, les biens acquis diffèrent des autres par leur destination autant que par leur origine. Celui qui les a créés a droit de les consommer, et généralement c'est pour cela qu'il les crée. Mais s'il peut les consommer lui-même, ne pourrait-il pas s'en dépouiller en faveur d'autrui? Le plus bel usage de la richesse lui serait-il interdit? A l'égard des biens acquis, on ne voit pas sur quel fondement on contesterait la faculté d'en disposer à titre gratuit, par acte entre-vifs ou testamentaire (*ibid.*, p. 268).

The second principle is therefore that a person can freely bequeath the goods he has acquired through his own efforts. Summarizing, in Huet's ideal world control over the flow of newly created goods belongs to individuals, whereas control over the stock of common resources, which rises over the years, belongs to the community.

How would the right to the common patrimony be translated in practical terms? Huet's proposition is that every person receives a capital endowment or *dotation* corresponding to his or her share in the common pool of resources; 1/3 of this share would be given at the age of 14, 2/3 at the age of 25 (*ibid.*, p. 274). This share in the common patrimony can be supplemented by goods coming from gifts and bequests, depending upon the 'liberality' of parents and others; all these goods are treated as 'inherited goods'. The advantages of such a system would be considerable, according to Huet:

Plus de place à l'envie: la richesse même est amnistiée, parce qu'elle est contrainte de servir au bien des races futures. Nulle entrave ne gêne la bienfaisance, et cependant l'oisiveté héréditaire devient impossible. Chaque père a droit de transmettre en totalité à ses enfants le fruit de son labeur et de ses épargnes; tous les nobles mobiles qui peuvent exciter l'homme au travail sont conservés, et cependant le fils du pauvre est toujours assuré d'un héritage. Que peut-on faire de plus pour la famille? (*ibid.*, pp. 274-275)

Huet nevertheless realized that the system could have some disadvantages, too. For instance, retired people might be tempted to consume their inherited goods, or to convert them into easily transferable values and secretly hand them over to friends and relatives, so that when they die nothing will be left (*ibid.*, p. 278). Although one should not underestimate the influence of religion, ethics and honour, Huet argued, in such cases the law could intervene and impose additional measures, such as giving wide publicity to transactions and putting property of older people under surveillance (*ibid.*, pp. 279-280). To prepare the minds for the new system one could begin by imposing sharply progressive inheritance taxes, provided that the receipts of the taxes are used entirely for the benefit of the poor classes (*ibid.*, p. 276).

## 5. COMPARING COLINS AND HUET

The intellectual positions of Colins and Huet were similar, therefore, in a number of most significant ways. Schematically, we can say that both of them:

- (i) wished to design property regimes which would meet natural right entitlements;
- (ii) agreed that those entitlements related uncontroversially to natural resources;
- (iii) argued that in the absence of any further considerations, these entitlements should be extended in principle to produced assets because of a number of intergenerational concerns;
- (iv) attempted to balance considerations of intergenerational equity with the idea that attenuated rights of individual transmission should be retained on incentive grounds;

(v) concluded that the way to balance the demands of justice and the requirements of efficiency consisted in the recognition of natural right entitlements in surrogate forms; and

(vi) claimed that the inclusion of produced assets in the common pool was necessary to secure the consistent universalisability of 'liberal' commitments to equal liberty and self-ownership.

There are, nevertheless, significant variations on most of these common themes. In relation to (iii), the explicit arguments advanced in support of the decisive extension from natural resources to produced assets seem obscure in both Colins and Huet. The underlying logic in both cases seems to hesitate between two rather different claims about the scope of the common inheritance. First, that later generations are entitled collectively to a limited amount of produced capital to compensate for the unavoidable depletion of natural resources by earlier ones. Or, second, that all of the wealth produced by previous generations - or at least all of the productive wealth - should be considered as a collective inheritance potentially available for equal distribution. Clearly, the second claim would generate a larger pool of common resources, and arguably both Colins and Huet advanced this stronger version. For both of them, nevertheless, and especially Colins, this view of a collective intergenerational inheritance was balanced by an endorsement of the familiar justification of the incentive effect of individual inheritance on the conservation of property through time. Consequently, in relation to (iv), they sought to balance their commitment to (roughly) equal starting points within and between generations by forms of inheritance taxes which retained that incentive. The distinctive and novel feature of Huet's proposal was that these taxes would be progressive through time according to the number of intergenerational transfers.

These different emphases on the composition of the common pool were combined in connection to (v) with most significant distinctions over its distribution. Three main

possibilities were presented: first, the equal and unconditional individual *dotation* called for by Huet in *Le Règne*; second, the free provision of a greater or smaller range of public services for children called for by Colins in *Du Pacte Social*; and, thirdly, the combination of *dotation* and public services, apparently favoured later by Colins' and some of his followers, and perhaps even by Huet himself.

Although the respective derivations of the equal shares entitlement are utterly elusive, both Colins and Huet appealed to a right of subsistence and to at least something approaching an equal (positive) liberty principle. To the extent that the entitlement expressed the former, then clearly the concern was that these equal shares might become insufficient to secure subsistence if (and possibly when) population increased beyond a certain level. In contrast to Colins' optimism, Huet was more pessimistic about the ratios between resources/population, explicitly confronting the spectre of Malthus. In each case, however, the entitlement to equal shares was accompanied by and combined with a strong liberty based claim to the universalisation of the independence realised by 'private' property. One's right to subsistence should not be realised by living at the expense of others, but neither should its realisation depend on the benevolence of others.

## 6. PEDIGREE ISSUES<sup>10</sup>

Given these relatively minor variations on significant common themes, we have to raise the issue of the provenance of their ideas. Three main hypotheses might be suggested.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Some of these pedigree issues have been examined in Cunliffe & Erreygers (1998), and will be the object of further research.

<sup>11</sup> Given the date of publication, Colins' *Du Pacte Social* cannot have been written under the influence of Huet, so we need not consider the hypothesis of an influence of Huet upon the early work of Colins. In later works, however, Colins did refer to Huet. In his *L'Economie Politique, Source des Révolutions et des Utopies Prétendues Socialistes* Colins quoted

*Hypothesis I: Colins and Huet independently derived their theories from a common source*

X.

The immediate temptation is to point to the Saint-Simonians (rather than Saint-Simon himself) as the common source. In contrast to other social critics who accepted with greater or lesser reservations the practice of individual inheritance, that school was characterised uniquely by its uncompromising opposition to it together with a prescription for its complete abolition.<sup>12</sup> Both Colins in *Du Pacte Social* and Huet in *Le Règne* referred explicitly to the Saint-Simonians, endorsing their concern with the cumulative inequalities generated by unrestricted individual inheritance. Despite that common concern, however, the Saint-Simonian prescription for the complete abolition of the practice was rejected precisely because it would destroy the incentive to conserve and transmit property between generations. This negative attitude toward the Saint-Simonian doctrine, which was shared by many early socialist writers, is not in itself a sufficient explanation for the similarity of Colins' and Huet's positions. Besides the general fact that both Huet and Colins drew on a common pool of mainly French social critics at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, no specific common source X can be identified.

*Hypothesis II: Huet drew upon the (early) work of Colins.*

Given the date of publication of *Du Pacte Social*, it is not impossible that Huet became acquainted with Colins' work, either directly or indirectly, before the publication of *Le Règne*. Yet no trace of such an influence can be found in *Le Règne* (neither the book nor its author are referred to). We have also been unable to find a single indication of Colinsian inspiration

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Huet *passim* in the first volume (Colins, 1856-1857, vol. I, pp. 15, 86-87, 120) and more extensively in the third volume, devoting the entire appendix II of *Etude VII* to a comment on Huet's *Le Règne* (*ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 293-330).

<sup>12</sup> On that contrast, see Erreygers (1996).

in the notebooks and minutes of the Huet Society<sup>13</sup>, where the central ideas of *Le Règne* were conceived and discussed. We therefore conclude that it is most implausible that Huet was aware of Colins' work when he was writing *Le Règne* at the University of Ghent.

*Hypothesis III: Colins and Huet developed their theories independently from each other.*

The possibility of a common but not shared intellectual project seems to have been advanced first by the Belgian economist Emile De Laveleye in his book *Le Socialisme Contemporain*, originally published in 1881. There, he pointed to the similarity between these two theories, but maintained that Huet's ideas were developed independently from those of Colins, being drawn directly from the inspiration of Platonism and Christianity (De Laveleye, 1892, p. 296). As a former member of the Huet Society, De Laveleye was presumably very familiar with Huet's thought and its intellectual provenance. Although his account might be contested in the light of more recent work, and his recollection of its provenance in terms of those remote antecedents might also be regarded with some scepticism, we think that this hypothesis is the most plausible of all those that we have considered.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The general conclusion is that singly and jointly both theorists made significant and unduly neglected contributions to the long intellectual history of proposals for a basic entitlements if not precisely a 'basic income' in a modern sense. In broad terms, that history consists in two different and putatively opposed traditions, one basing the entitlement on an individual right

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<sup>13</sup> The 'Huet Society' was a group of students and followers of Huet who gathered regularly, under Huet's direction, to discuss various social questions. It was founded in 1846 and lasted until 1851. The minutes and notebooks of the society are conserved in the archives of the University of Ghent (Voituron, 1846-51), allowing us to trace how Huet's ideas on social questions took shape. Cf. Coppens (1972) and Dujardin (1983) for more details on the Huet Society, and Cunliffe & Erreygers (1998) for an analysis of how Huet's ideas on property were formed.

to an equal share of the competitive value of only natural resources, the other on an entitlement to an equal share of all inherited wealth (or at the very least all *productive* wealth). The distinctive feature of their contributions consisted in the claim that once intergenerational considerations were admitted, the second position was not opposed to the first but only an extension of it. Unless that extension were made, later generations would be disadvantaged if they received only successively fewer raw natural resources as their potentially common inheritance. The obvious tactic to counter that morally irrelevant temporal difference was to stipulate that all external assets should be regarded in principle as a common inheritance because produced assets were merely transformed natural resources. The familiar intergenerational ethic that each generation as a group should pass on (at least) an undiminished set of resources to its successor as a group could be realised only when that set consisted in both natural and produced assets. From the perspective of intragenerational equity, the requirement was that this common inheritance should be distributed on an initially equal basis through a *dotation*, or alternatively or additionally be realised through the provision of public services. The practice of individual inheritance was to be accepted insofar as it was the crucial incentive to the promotion of the intergenerational ethic of the conservation of property through time. It was to be rejected because it generated differential entitlements within and between generations. The search for the appropriate balance between uncompromising acceptance or rejection was the core of their project.

Their common positions made an important but neglected contribution to a 'liberal-socialist' tradition of thought which has concerned itself with just property institutions in general, and justifiable intergenerational arrangements in particular. That tradition is defined not so much by an easily identifiable transmission of intellectual influence, but more by the nature of the problems it addresses and the kinds of solutions proposed. We have suggested at various points how their concerns are related to those of present-day theorists, especially

those who advocate some form of 'basic income'. Contemporary discussion can be enriched by attention to their efforts on both the key points of the composition of the common pool of resources and on the preferred form of its distribution.

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