THE LAW VERSUS THE MARKETPLACE:
SPONTANEOUS ORDER IN JONSON'S BARTHOLOMEW FAIR

Paul A. Cantor

i.

At first glance, Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* may seem to be the *Seinfeld* of the English Renaissance--the comedy about nothing. One can imagine the befuddled looks Jonson got when he first pitched the concept to London theatre companies: "I've written a play about Bartholomew Fair--a bunch of people go to the fair, they mill around, and then they go home." Compared to Jonson's earlier comic masterpieces, *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, *Bartholomew Fair* seems unfocused and diffuse.[1] It lacks a pair of central characters around whom the play is organized and who appear to direct its action, like Volpone and Mosca in *Volpone* or Face and Subtle in *The Alchemist*.[2] The play is constantly threatening to veer off into irrelevance, incoherence, and even absurdity, as the characters get wrapped up in word games that fly in the face of normal dramatic logic. Just as in *Seinfeld*, the characters often appear to be talking merely to fill the time and not because they have anything in particular to talk about.

But *Bartholomew Fair* only appears to be about nothing. Again like *Seinfeld*, the play tells us something about its characters by showing them engaged in so much meaningless dialogue. And its apparent formlessness and lack of a center reflect a deeper order and sense of form. By liberating the dialogue from the normal constraints of dramatic action, Jonson

freed himself to put an unparalleled slice of Renaissance life on the stage. What may at first seem to be a weakness of Bartholomew Fair--its lack of focus--turns out to be its great strength--its ability to embrace a wide variety of human types and develop them in their full diversity, without imposing any narrowing artistic or moral conceptions upon them.

Jonson's play is thus deeply paradoxical. Though a highly artful play, it succeeds in concealing its artifice and may at first seem to be just thrown together on the stage like an improvisation.[3] Though seemingly the most formless of Jonson's plays, it actually obeys the unities of time and place as strictly as any of his other works.[4] Remarkably, in Bartholomew Fair Jonson found a way of remaining within the bounds of his neoclassical conception of dramatic form, while still imparting a feeling of spontaneity to the play. In short, the play obeys Jonson's cherished law of the unities, while appearing to be wholly free and above or beyond any formal law.[5]

The tension between law and spontaneity evident in the form of Bartholomew Fair turns out to be at work in the content as well. Despite ostensibly being about nothing, Bartholomew Fair is of course really about Bartholomew Fair, one of the great marketplaces of Renaissance London.[6] Throughout his career, Jonson was fascinated by the emerging market economy in Renaissance Europe. He was intrigued by the new categories of

human identity the market was creating (the roles of merchants, bankers, financiers, and entrepreneurs) and he was evidently troubled by the new forms of corruption and vice endemic to proto-capitalist life. Bartholomew Fair gave Jonson a chance to anatomize the lawlessness of the marketplace. Through the comments of his Puritan characters, Jonson shows how the fair violates religious law, and he uses Adam Overdo, a Justice of the Peace, to rail against the ways the merchants continually violate the criminal law as well. As Jonson presents it, Bartholomew Fair is the original home and headquarters of all the charlatans, cheaters, and thieves in London.

And yet, strangely enough, for all his criticism of the marketplace in Bartholomew Fair, Jonson ends up being more critical of its critics.[7] From the standpoint of traditional religion and politics, the market may look lawless, but Jonson at least explores the possibility that it may obey laws of its own. In a remarkable anticipation of free market economics, he appears to sense that the market may be a self-regulating mechanism, capable of bringing peace to a society that seems otherwise to be tearing itself apart in religious and political conflicts. The characters who stand up for religious and political principles in Bartholomew Fair turn out to be the divisive forces in the play, while the seemingly lawless participants in the fair work to bring about a kind of civil

harmony, based on the satisfaction of basic economic needs and natural human desires. Jonson exposes all the faults of an unregulated marketplace, but he more profoundly subjects its would-be regulators to a withering critique. He reveals their self-interested motives for wanting to regulate the fair and, more importantly, he lays bare their sheer incompetence to manage the marketplace successfully.

In contrast to what happens in Jonson's earlier masterpieces, Volpone and The Alchemist, in Bartholomew Fair the apparent forces of disorder triumph at the end and frustrate the efforts of those who try to impose order on their economic activities.[8] As grave as Jonson's doubts about an unregulated market may be, in the end he seems to suggest that a regulated market would be a good deal worse, if only because the regulators are no better than the regulated. For all its faults, the market in Jonson's portrayal answers to deep-seated needs in human nature and he ultimately seems to recognize the value of the freedom it offers, as well as the fact that freedom is compatible with its own kind of order. In short, Jonson seems to have an inkling of the idea of spontaneous order as it was to be developed in the twentieth century by the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek. Bartholomew Fair offers an example in miniature of a community that is ordered, not by regulations imposed from above by an outside authority, but by self-regulating principles

generated from within, a system of checks and balances that relies on the common material interests of its participants to bring about their harmony. Bartholomew Fair may be the first portrait in literary history of how a free market operates.

If Jonson displays unusual sympathy for the nascent free markets of the Renaissance in Bartholomew Fair, the reason may be that he recognized that as a professional dramatist and actor he was a participant in a marketplace himself. Bartholomew Fair may be the headquarters of charlatans and thieves, but it is also the home of playwrights and actors. Jonson seems to have come to realize that if marketplaces are regulated, the theatre will always be among the first to come under government control and the results will not always be beneficial to the theatre and its public.[9] In Bartholomew Fair Jonson seems to allow his professional commitment to the theatre to overcome his longstanding aristocratic contempt for the world of commerce. He even seems to have tried to shape a new dramatic form in Bartholomew Fair that would mirror the freedom and spontaneity of the marketplace it represents. The apparent formlessness of the play actually answers to an inner law--the spontaneous order of the free market--and its artful artlessness suggests in aesthetic terms how the principles of order and freedom can be reconciled.[10] Bartholomew Fair thus explores the issue of law on several levels at once--religious law, political law, economic

law, and aesthetic law--and charts the complex interaction of these various legal domains.

ii.

At first sight, Bartholomew Fair seems to carry on vigorously the critique of the nascent market economy of the Renaissance Jonson had developed in earlier plays like Volpone and The Alchemist. Like many of his contemporaries, Jonson was particularly suspicious of the move in his day from a conception of wealth based on land to one based on money. In Volpone, he satirizes the way money begets money in the devious schemes of Volpone and Mosca, who appear to be utterly unproductive and living like parasites off the wealth of others. In The Alchemist, Jonson images the world of trade and finance as a giant con game, in which greedy and ambitious men on the make are seduced into a variety of get-rich-quick schemes by the charlatans Face and Subtle. To Jonson, the act of market exchange looks like alchemy, the fraudulent promise to create value out of nothing, to change something worthless into something precious, as the alchemist claims to transmute base metals into gold.

Jonson is thus a good illustration of Hayek's claim that the market economy looks like magic to people who do not understand the complexities of economic transactions. Ignorant of the genuine contributions entrepreneurs make to economic life by

their risk-taking and ferreting out knowledge of market conditions, many people picture the businessman as a kind of sorcerer. As Hayek writes:

> Such distrust and fear have, since antiquity and in many parts of the world, led ordinary people as well as socialist thinkers to regard trade not only as distinct from material production, not only as chaotic and superfluous in itself, . . . but also as suspicious, inferior, dishonest, and contemptible. . . . Activities that appear to add to available wealth, 'out of nothing', without physical creation and by merely rearranging what already exists, stink of sorcery. . . . That a mere change of hands should lead to a gain in value to all participants, that it need not mean gain to one at the expense of the others (or what has come to be called exploitation), was and is nonetheless intuitively difficult to grasp. . . . As a consequence of all these circumstances, many people continue to find the mental feats associated with trade easy to discount even when they do not attribute them to sorcery, or see them as depending on trick or fraud or cunning deceit.[11]

As Hayek points out, this kind of distrust of the businessman is particularly acute early in economic history, for example, during the Renaissance, when capitalist principles were just beginning to dissolve feudalist ways of doing business and many people were

confused and alienated by the initial results.

Jonson is an especially interesting example of early hostility to the market economy. He seems to have spent much of his career in reaction to and rebellion against what can be described as his lower middle-class origins.[12] His stepfather was a bricklayer, and by following in his footsteps, Jonson was exposed early in his life to the world of trade. Fortunately Jonson received an excellent education at the famous Westminster School in London, and when the opportunity presented itself, he pursued the typical middle-class path of rising in society by using his wits and learning.[13] Probably in 1594, he entered the world of the professional theatre, first as an actor and soon as a playwright. The theatre was one of the more advanced segments of the Elizabethan economy, employing financial and marketing techniques that were sophisticated for the time (for example, the theatres were early examples of joint-stock companies and were heavily capitalized by Renaissance standards). As the cases of Marlowe and Shakespeare had already shown, the Elizabethan theatre offered a marvelous opportunity for a talented young man to make money and a name for himself.[14]

Though Jonson prospered in the theatre world, he seems to have resented the source of his income and success. He repeatedly shows signs of believing that the conditions of the commercial theatres forced him to compromise his art to please

the debased taste of the public. He made fun of the way other playwrights (including Shakespeare) catered to their audience and he often got embroiled in controversy as a result. He sought to purge the theatre of what he perceived to be its vulgarity, conceiving of himself as the playwright who would restore classical dignity to drama, in part by consciously imitating Roman models in many of his plays. Jonson was the first English playwright to bring out a published edition of his plays (in 1616), no doubt with a view to proving that his works were not the mere ephemeral products of the entertainment marketplace but literature of lasting value.[15]

Throughout his literary career, Jonson did everything he could to escape the commercial theatre world, above all turning to aristocratic and royal patronage as an alternative to his bourgeois source of income in the entertainment business. He wrote poetry in quest of aristocratic patrons and even in his dramatic career, he alternated between writing for the public theatres and writing for the royal court.[16] He was the great master of the court masque, and was richly rewarded over the years by James I for his contribution to royal entertainments. Aside from the financial advantages of writing for the court, Jonson seems to have been attracted by the prospect of composing with aristocratic taste in mind, rather than the lower- and middle-class taste that prevailed in the commercial theatres.

The stage history of Bartholomew Fair encapsulates Jonson's theatrical career in miniature. The play was first staged on October 31, 1614 at one of the public theatres, the Hope, and then the following evening it was performed at the court before James I.[17] In the published version of the play, both the prologue and the epilogue are addressed to James, and Jonson shamelessly flatters the king for having taste superior to the mob's. In this one play, Jonson for once seems to have it both ways.[18] He gives his popular audience the kind of vulgar spectacle it craves and then he repackages the same material for a royal audience, presenting it in a condescending fashion and implying that he and his aristocratic patrons are above this sort of foolery and derive their enjoyment from looking down upon it.[19]

In that sense, Bartholomew Fair seems to embody everything that was conservative and backward-looking in Jonson's drama. He seems to side with the aristocracy and its world of feudal privilege against the rising middle class and its world of money and commerce.[20] For critics with socialist leanings, it is tempting to read Bartholomew Fair as a proto-Brechtian work, as if Jonson were criticizing the early signs of capitalism from the left. But insofar as the play satirizes the commercial world, it does so from the right. One must remember that even (and especially) in Marxist terms, capitalism was the progressive

force in Jonson's day, working to dissolve centuries of antiquated feudal privilege and unleash unprecedentedly productive forces. At first glance, Jonson's view of capitalism in Bartholomew Fair thus seems reactionary. Turning his back on his own class origins, and scorning the original source of his theatrical success, he identifies with an aristocracy we now know to have been dying. In fact, Bartholomew Fair does a remarkable job of showing how chaotic and morally dubious the new world of trade and money looked to the old order it was displacing.

Jonson seems to give a very negative portrait of the proto-capitalist world in Bartholomew Fair. The marketplace apparently flouts all conventional notions of morality, decency, and fair play. Jonson portrays the fair as basically a den of thieves. Ezekiel Edgworth is a professional cutpurse, but Jonson does not present him as the one criminal among a group of honest tradespeople. On the contrary, the seemingly honest merchants at the fair work hand in hand with Edgworth, identifying victims for him, setting them up for the actual robberies, and helping him to dispose of the stolen goods.

Even when the merchants of Bartholomew Fair are not participating in outright thievery, Jonson presents them as looking to cheat their customers. He makes the familiar charge that the merchants adulterate their products to increase their profits. Many of the tradespeople deal in suspicious merchandise

(see, for example, II.ii.3-9), but the prize for adulteration at the fair goes to Ursula the pig-woman. She also does a thriving business in alcohol and tobacco on the side, and instructs her assistant Mooncalf on how to stretch their supplies and increase their sales:

> But look to't, sirrah, you were best; threepence a pipeful I will ha' made of all my whole pound of tobacco, and a quarter of a pound of coltsfoot mixed with it too, to eke it out. . . . Then six and twenty shillings a barrel I will advance o' my beer, and fifty shillings a hundred o' my bottle-ale; I ha' told you the ways how to raise it. Froth your cans well i' the filling, at length, rogue, and jog your bottles o' the buttock, sirrah, then skink out the first glass, ever, and drink with all companies, though you be sure to be drunk; you'll misreckon the better, and be less ashamed on't. (II.ii.86-95)

The density of detail in this passage suggests that Jonson was uncannily familiar with the dark side of Renaissance commerce. Perhaps in his apprentice days in the theatre, he helped run a food concession during intermission.

But Jonson's critique of the marketplace goes deeper than simple charges of thievery and cheating. He is not interested only in aberrations of the market principle, moments when unscrupulous individuals might be said to depart from the decent

norms of business as usual. Jonson's satire goes right to the heart of the market principle itself. He is extremely skeptical about the way products are merchandised, and displays a surprisingly sophisticated understanding of how tradespeople are able to prey upon the desires of potential customers. Jonson's portrait of the fair suggests a world that has gone mad with consumerism and the young gallant Bartholomew Cokes is the maddest of them all, Jonson's image of everything that can go wrong when a market liberates the desires of its customers.[21] Jonson is particularly struck by the power of what we would call advertising. He shows the customers at the fair continuously bombarded by the din of the merchants hawking their wares: "What do you lack? What is't you buy? What do you lack? Rattles, drums, halberts, horses, babies o' the best? Fiddles of the finest?" (II.ii. 28-30).

Cokes's tutor, Humphrey Wasp, describes him as mesmerized by the power of advertising, the many signs displayed at the fair:

> Why, we could not meet that heathen thing, all day, but stayed him; he would name you all the signs over, as he went, aloud; and where he spied a parrot or a monkey, there he was pitched, with all the little long-coats about him, male and female; no getting him away! (I.iv.102-6)

As a result of being bombarded with advertising, Cokes has his desires awakened and he cannot control his appetites:

> If he go to the Fair, he will buy of everything to a baby there; and household-stuff for that too. . . . And then he is such a ravener after fruit! You will not believe what a coil I had t'other day to compound a business between a Catherine-pear woman and him about snatching! (I.v.100-106)

In Cokes, Jonson creates an unforgettable portrait of the helpless consumer, caught in the webs of advertising and overwhelmed by the wealth of goods now available in the Renaissance marketplace:

> And the three Jew's trumps; and half a dozen o' birds, and that drum (I have one drum already) and your smiths (I like that device o' your smiths very pretty well) and four halberts--and (le'me see) that fine painted great lady, and her three women for state, I'll have. (III.iv.67-71)

Wasp sees the logical conclusion of Cokes's infinite desire: "No, the shop; buy the whole shop, it will be best, the shop, the shop!" (III.iv.72-73). Cokes recognizes the truth of Wasp's charge--"I do want such a number o' things" (III.iv.82)--and finally asks one merchant: "What's the price, at a word, o' thy whole shop, case and all, as it stands" (III.iv.129-30). Without skipping a beat, Leatherhead calculates the sum: "Sir, it stands me in six and twenty shillings sevenpence halfpenny, besides three shillings for my ground" (III.iv.131-32). This is Jonson's image of the new world of capitalism--everything has its

price in money and everything is up for sale. To emphasize the point, and suggest that even human flesh can be bought in the marketplace, Jonson makes prostitution an integral part of the fair. He presents the marketplace as a deeply confused and confusing realm, a topsy-turvy world in which moral values are inverted and characters lose their bearings. As the consumer *par excellence*, Cokes ends up completely bewildered and disoriented by his experience at the fair: "By this light, I cannot find my gingerbread-wife nor my hobby-horse man in all the Fair, now, to ha' my money again. And I do not know the way out on't, to go home for more. . . . Dost thou know where I dwell?" (IV.ii.20-22, 25). Assaulted from all sides by thieves, charlatans, and advertisers, Cokes utterly loses all sense of his own identity: "Friend, do you know who I am?" (IV.ii.71).

iii.

Jonson develops a strong case against the market in *Bartholomew Fair*. He shows the amorality, venality, lawlessness, and even the criminality of the unregulated marketplace, thus portraying a world that seems to cry out for some form of economic regulation. And he includes in the play characters who vehemently condemn the fair and call for its regulation. But for once Jonson asks the follow-up question: who are these would-be regulators and are they fit to impose law and order on the sprawling marketplace they profess to despise? This is not a

trivial question, and just by posing it, Jonson takes a significant step toward arguments that eventually were to be developed by economists like Adam Smith in favor of free markets. The fact that an unregulated market may have its faults and disadvantages does not in itself prove that a regulated market will not have its faults and disadvantages as well, and perhaps end up producing an even worse situation. In Bartholomew Fair Jonson finally gets around to scrutinizing the proponents of law and order, to see if they really are capable of living up to their promise of improving the world.

The simplest case Jonson examines is Humphrey Wasp, who is devoted to restraining the appetites of his charge Cokes. Given how freely young Bartholomew spends his money, one can sympathize with Humphrey's attempts to be strict with him. But Wasp responds to Cokes's excesses with moral indignation. As his name indicates, Humphrey is waspish, always ready to fly off into fits of anger and quarrel with anyone in sight. It is thus by no means clear that his disposition is preferable to Cokes's or any less passionate and excessive. Bartholomew is a fool but he is a relatively harmless fool, and unlikely to cause much trouble for others. By contrast, Wasp is always provoking conflict and getting himself and others into difficulties. Mistress Overdo views him as an enemy of the "conservation of the peace" (I.v.12) and instructs him: "do you show discretion" (I.v.10-11),

eventually pleading with him: "govern your passions" (I.v.21). Here is the irony of Wasp's role in the play: he sets himself up as the governor of his charge's passions, and yet he cannot govern his own. He presents himself as the champion of law and order, and yet he is in fact one of the chief forces for disorder in the play.

The game of vapours that breaks out in Act IV is very funny and borders on absurdity, but it may reflect a serious threat Jonson sensed in his world. In his image of people contradicting each other merely for the sake of contradicting each other, Jonson offers a comic reflection of Elizabethan and Jacobean society--a nation riven by all sorts of competing claims and authorities, political and religious. With the benefit of historical hindsight, we can read Bartholomew Fair today and see the forces at work in the London of the play that were in a few decades to plunge Britain into civil war. But Jonson himself evidently saw the Puritan Revolution coming, or at least had an inkling of what might spark it. As the game of vapours gets out of hand and starts to become dangerous, Mistress Overdo once again tries to rein in Wasp and his quarrelsome companions: "conserve the peace" (IV.iv.101). She sees the direction in which his waspishness is leading: "Are you rebels? Gentlemen? Shall I send out a sergeant-at-arms or a writ o' rebellion against you?" (IV.iv.128-29). The threat of revolution does seem

to be hovering in the background of Bartholomew Fair, and Jonson traces it not to the childish appetites of a Bartholomew Cokes but to the fiery indignation of a Humphrey Wasp.

In fact, the only way to contain Wasp's rebellious anger turns out to be to place him in the stocks. In another ironic twist, the would-be restrainer ends up in restraint. The irony is not lost even on the dim-witted Bartholomew; learning of his tutor's disgrace, Cokes is no longer disposed to honor his authority: "Hold your peace, Numps; you ha' been i' the stocks, I hear" (V.iv.88). Wasp immediately recognizes the implications for his continued rule over his charge: "Does he know that? Nay, then the date of my authority is out; I must think no longer to reign, my government is at an end. He that will correct another must want fault in himself" (V.iv.90-91). Wasp's last statement may represent Jonson's great discovery in the course of thinking through and writing Bartholomew Fair.[22] The principle that only a superior, indeed a perfect, person has the right to regulate others does not apply just to Wasp in the play. In fact it is the governing principle of Jonson's critique of all the would-be forces of law and order in the play, and especially Zeal-of-the-Land Busy.[23]

iv.

The fact that a fanatical Puritan is one of the chief critics of the marketplace in Bartholomew Fair suggests that

Jonson may well be reconsidering his earlier attacks on the new economic freedom of his era.[24] Jonson's portrayal of Busy makes it clear that arguments against the free market are often ultimately based in religion, not economics. Busy's objections to advertising and to the products displayed at the fair are rooted in his Puritanism and specifically his hatred of idolatry:

> For long hair, it is an ensign of pride, a banner, and the world is full of those banners, very full of banners. And bottle-ale is a drink of Satan's, a diet-drink of Satan's, devised to puff us up and make us swell in this latter age of vanity, as the smoke of tobacco to keep us in mist and error. But the fleshly woman which you call Ursula is above all to be avoided, having the marks upon her of the three enemies of man: the world, as being in the Fair; the devil, as being in the fire; and the flesh, as being herself. (III.vi.27-35)

Busy is convinced that the economic activity at the fair is not merely disordered and unregulated but sinful and evil. For him the fair is "wicked and foul" and "fitter may it be called a foul than a Fair" (III.vi.79-80). He claims to know what is good for his fellow human beings and what is bad for them. Indeed he thinks he knows better than they themselves what is in their interest. Thus he arrogates to himself the right to tell people what they can and cannot do in the marketplace. Jonson himself

had a strong streak of moralism and in many of his plays he sets himself up as the arbiter of good and evil. But his creation of the character of Busy seems to reflect a growing doubt about the social consequences of moralistic attitudes.

Busy is a busy-body, constantly meddling in other people's affairs and trying to reorder their lives. He criticizes pride but he is exceedingly proud himself, and enjoys lording it over others. It surely was not lost on Jonson that it was people like Busy who were attacking the London theatres and constantly trying to shut them down. Anyone who condemns attempts to please consumers is eventually going to get around to condemning the theatre. In short, if the Puritans were enemies of the marketplace, Jonson may have begun to wonder if the marketplace was his friend. The way Jonson sets up the terms of Bartholomew Fair, economic freedom is pitted against religious tyranny.

Jonson portrays Busy as an overreacher, a man who sets himself up as a god over his fellow human beings and fails to live up to his inflated self-image. But he also shows that Busy is a hypocrite. He condemns the money-making activities of the marketplace and yet he is obsessed with money-making himself.[25] In general, as if he were anticipating Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Jonson shows the Puritans devoting themselves quasi-religiously to the acquisition of wealth. In the fifth act, Dame Purecraft finally reveals that

she is "worth six thousand pound" (V.ii.46)--a huge sum in those days--and she goes on to explain the devious means by which she accumulated the money:[26]

> These seven years I have been a willful holy widow, only to draw feasts and gifts from my entangled suitors. I am also by office an assisting sister of the deacons, and a devourer, instead of a distributor, of the alms. I am a special maker of marriages for our decayed brethren with rich widows, for a third part of their wealth, when they are married, for the relief of the poor elect; as also our poor handsome young virgins with our wealthy bachelors or widowers to make them steal from their husbands when I have confirmed them in the faith, and got all put into their custodies. (V.ii.48-57)

Here the Puritan Dame Purecraft begins to sound a good deal like one of Jonson's conmen in earlier plays.

But Purecraft defers to Busy as the chief money-maker of them all:

> Our elder, Zeal-of-the-Land, would have had me, but I know him to be the capital knave of the land, making himself rich by being made feoffee in trust to deceased brethren, and cozening their heirs by swearing the absolute gift of their inheritance. (V.ii.59-63)

Jonson gives Busy mercantile origins; the fact that he began as a

baker (I.iii.107-112) stresses his kinship to the tradespeople he later condemns. Toward the end of the play, in Busy's debate at the puppet show, the Puppet Dionysius points out that the Puritans are heavily involved in the clothing trade and thus implicated in the very luxuries they rail against (V.v.75-84).[27]

By revealing the Puritans to be hypocrites, Jonson undermines their authority as advocates of law and order. He further shows that Busy is willing to bend the law to suit his own purposes.[28] Despite their claim to adhere strictly to religious law, the Puritans turn out to be extremely flexible when it comes to interpreting the law in accord with their own desires. When Win Littlewit expresses her deep longing for roast pig at the fair, her mother at first urges her to resist the temptation, but soon is willing to endorse the desire "if it can be any way made or found lawful" (I.vi.27-28). Dame Purecraft enlists her spiritual advisor Busy to find a way of pronouncing Win's appetite lawful. Busy sets to work interpreting the law, but it is a difficult case:

> Verily, for the disease of longing, it is a disease, a carnal disease, or appetite, incident to women; and as it is carnal, and incident, it is natural, very natural. Now pig, it is a meat, and a meat that is nourishing, and may be longed for, and so consequently eaten; it may be eaten; very exceeding well eaten. But in the Fair, and as a Bartholomew

> pig, it cannot be eaten, for the very calling it a Bartholomew pig, and to eat it so, is a spice of idolatry. (I.vi.43-49)

Purecraft urges a liberal understanding of the law on her fellow Puritan: "Good Brother Zeal-of-the-Land, think to make it as lawful as you can" (I.vi.54-55). Busy proves equal to the task:

> It may be eaten, and in the Fair, I take it, in a booth, the tents of the wicked. The place is not much, not very much, we may be religious in midst of the profane, so it be eaten with a reformed mouth, with sobriety, and humbleness; not gorged in with gluttony or greediness. (I.vi.63-67)

The ease with which Busy is able to interpret the law to legitimate desire raises doubts about the whole status of law in the play. The advocates of the law present it as the moral alternative to the marketplace. The law is supposed to be immutable and incorruptible, as opposed to the mutable and corrupt marketplace, where everyone is on the make and values and prices change from minute to minute. But Jonson shows the Puritan characters making and remaking the law before our eyes. The law loses much of its prestige when it is revealed to be changeble and even pervertible according to the dictates of desire. In the puppet show debate, lawfulness turns out to be a matter of semantics, the product of mere wordplay and not of any fundamental principle. The puppet has an easy answer to Busy's

charge that the theatre lacks lawfulness:

> BUSY I mean no vocation, idol, no present lawful calling.
>
> PUPPET DIONYSIUS Is yours a lawful calling? . . .
>
> BUSY Yes, mine is of the spirit.
>
> PUPPET DIONYSIUS Then idol is a lawful calling.
>
> LEATHERHEAD He says, then idol is a lawful calling! For you called him idol, and your calling is of the spirit.
>
> (V.v.49-50, 52-55)

By the time Jonson is through ringing changes on the word law in Bartholomew Fair, the term has become virtually meaningless. The law no longer appears to stand majestically above the marketplace and hence entitled to regulate it. Rather the law is negotiated and renegotiated just like any other item at the fair.

Jonson's antipathy to the Puritans led him to probe deeper into their hostility to the marketplace. The gamester Quarlous notes that Busy, as a Puritan, rejects all tradition and claims to remain true to a purified notion of an original faith: "By his profession, he will ever be i' the state of innocence, though, and childhood; derides all antiquity; defies any other learning than inspiration; and what discretion soever years should afford him, it is all prevented in original ignorance" (I.iii.129-33). Busy's hatred for the marketplace grows out of his Puritan hostility to tradition. For Busy the marketplace is the locus of business as usual, where men and women go about satisfying the

desires they have always had. By catering to what people want, the market stands in the way of the moral reformation Busy is striving for. Unlike the merchants of Bartholomew Fair, he will not accept human beings as he finds them, but rather wants to remake them in one grand revolutionary effort. That is why Busy images the moral reformation of the world in terms of an apocalyptic abolition of the marketplace. He defines himself as: "one that rejoiceth in his affliction, and sitteth here to prophesy the destruction of fairs and May-games, wakes and Whitsun ales, and doth sigh and groan for the reformation of these abuses" (IV.vi.78-80). Jonson understands that Busy rejects the world as such and wants to see it fundamentally remade. His hostility to life as usual dictates his hostility to business as usual, and hence demands the overthrow of the marketplace as the center of existing abuses. Jonson saw how deeply revolutionary the Puritan mentality was, and events in a few decades were to prove him right.

The Puritan revolutionary impulse manifests itself even on the level of language. Refusing to accept the common names of things, the Puritans become involved in a laughable process of trying to rename everything, including themselves: "O, they have all such names, sir; he was witness for Win here--they will not be called godfathers--and named her Win-the-fight. You thought her name had been Winifred, did you not?" (I.iii.116-19). In a

play in which signs are often more important than substance, the impulse to rename things is tantamount to the impulse to remake them. Thus, although Busy appears to be an advocate of law and order, like Wasp he turns out to be a force for disorder. Again like Wasp, he is guity of incivility, as Quarlous makes clear in his final summary of the Puritan character: "Away, you are a herd of hypocritical proud ignorants, rather wild than mad, fitter for woods and the society of beasts than houses and the congregation of men. You are. . . outlaws to order and discipline" (V.ii.38-41).

v.

Adam Overdo is Jonson's most interesting example of the need to tame the regulatory spirit. Like Wasp and Busy, he claims to devote himself to repressing passions and correcting excesses in others, and yet he is in the grip of passion himself and goes from one excess to another.[29] Though he presents himself as a disinterested servant of "the public good" (II.i.9; see also V.ii.84), Jonson suggests that he may be just a social climber, using his office to advance his own cause. Wasp reproaches Mistress Overdo: "Why mistress, I knew Adam, the clerk, your husband, when he was Adam scrivener, and writ for twopence a sheet, as high as he bears his head now, or you your hood, dame" (IV.iv.141-43). Overdo is a little man who puffs himself up with the thought that he is better than his fellow human beings and

seeks to prove it by imposing order on their lives.

Unfortunately for Overdo, he is not equal to the task he sets himself as the overseer of law and order. He prides himself on his judgment of human nature and his ability to spy into the souls of men. But Jonson shows him making one mistake after another.[30] He thinks that the robber Edgworth is in fact a "civil" young man and tries to become his patron (II.iv.30). Overdo is particularly susceptible to anyone who will flatter his ego, as becomes evident in his encounter with Trouble-All, a man who went mad when Overdo dismissed him from his position in the Court of Piepowders at the fair. Trouble-All is unwilling to do anything without a written warrant from Overdo, a form of madness that initally strikes the Justice as evidence of Trouble-All's wisdom: "What should he be, that doth so esteem and advance my warrant? He seems a sober and discreet person!" (IV.i.23-24). Overdo's continuing misjudgment of the other characters in the play makes him a laughing-stock and ultimately undermines his authority. As Quarlous points out to him at the end of the play: "your 'innocent young man' you have ta'en care of all this day, is a cutpurse that hath got all your brother Cokes his things, and helped you to your beating and the stocks" (V.vi.72-75). Overdo claims to be able to bring moral order to the world, and yet he cannot tell good from evil, as he mistakes criminals and madmen for model citizens. The complete collapse of his regime

occurs when he goes to punish a group of prostitutes and discovers that one of them is his own wife in disguise.

When Overdo speaks out against the fair's merchandise, chiefly alcohol and tobacco, one might be tempted to sympathize with his criticism, but Jonson goes out of his way to caricature Overdo's complaints and make them sound foolish. Busy inveighs against the products of the fair because he is trying to save the souls of its customers; Overdo is trying to save their bodies. He cautions against alcoholic beverages: "Thirst not after that frothy liquor, ale; for who knows when he openeth the stopple what may be in the bottle? Hath not a snail, a spider, yea, a newt been found there?" (II.vi.11-14). Overdo is also on an anti-smoking crusade: "Neither do thou lust after that tawny weed, tobacco. . . Whose complexion is like the Indian's that vents it! . . . And who can tell, if, before the gathering and making up thereof, the alligator hath not pissed thereon?" (II.vi.21-26). Overdo may be raising slightly different doubts about the safety of alcohol and tobacco products than we hear today, but the basic principle is the same. He distrusts anything exotic and loves to dwell on the worst-case scenario. He goes on to lament the amount of money he thinks is wasted on these luxury products: "Thirty pound a week in bottle-ale! Forty in tobacco! And ten more in ale again" (II.vi.77-78). At times Overdo sounds much like a contemporary campaign against smoking:

"Hence it is that the lungs of the tobacconist are rotted, the liver spotted, the brain smoked like the backside of the pig-woman's booth here" (II.vi.39-41).

Overdo thus offers a puritanism of the body to correspond to Busy's puritanism of the soul. In either case, the result is the same: strict government control over the everyday activities of ordinary people, with prohibition as the ultimate goal. If it is not clear from the way Jonson has the Justice characteristically overdo his tirade against alcohol and tobacco that he is making fun of this health-conscious puritanism,[31] one might recall that Overdo's attack on drinking and smoking is identical to Puritan strictures against theatre-going ("it's bad for you," "it wastes your money," and so on). Evidently by the time of writing Bartholomew Fair, Jonson had begun to wonder whether concern for saving souls and bodies would result in the end of the entertainment business as he knew it.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Jonson's critique of authority in Bartholomew Fair is his anticipation of Hayek's theory about the benefits of dispersing knowledge in society. Overdo's scheme to disguise himself and spy out enormities at the fair is an attempt to gain the knowledge he would actually need to regulate the marketplace. Modelling himself on "a worthy worshipful man" (II.i.11-12), probably "Thomas Middleton, the reforming Lord Mayor of London in 1613-14,"[32] Overdo uses his

masquerade to seek out a synoptic, even a panoptical view of the economic world of London:

> Marry, go you into every alehouse, and down into every cellar; measure the length of puddings, take the gauge of black pots and cans, aye, and custards with a stick; and their circumference with a thread; weigh the loaves of bread on his middle finger; then would he send for 'em, home; give the puddings to the poor, the bread to the hungry, the custards to his children; break the pots and burn the cans himself; he would not trust his corrupt officers; he would do't himself. (II.i.16-24)

As Overdo describes the Mayor's procedures, they seem a model of regulating the economy. He oversees all economic activity in the city, down to the last detail, and he uses his comprehensive knowledge to correct all injustices, with a particular care to redistributing goods to the poor and needy. The actions of Overdo's model are in fact what most people have in mind when they talk about correcting the failures of the market.

But Bartholomew Fair is a comedy and Overdo is one of the chief targets of its satire, not a model of enlightened rule in Jonson's eyes. There is more than something faintly absurd about the Justice's view of a centrally planned economy. Indeed he inadvertently reveals the impossibility of the task. For a government to regulate the economy successfully, it would need

knowledge of every detail of its working, all the way down to weighing every single loaf of bread to the ounce. But in fact this knowledge in all its complexity of detail is never available to any one person or centralized authority, as Jonson's example suggests. The mayor's idea of regulating the economy is to do every job himself, a telling image for the ultimate consequences of government intervention in the economy. The mayor violates the principle of the division of labor, which is the foundation of any advanced economy. In fact, the market works precisely by dispersing knowledge of economic phenomena among a myriad of people and using the pricing mechanism to coordinate their efforts.[33] The central thrust of entrepreneurial activity is the creation, or at least the ferreting out, of knowledge, and this process works best precisely when it is not centralized, but pits many individuals against each other, in active competition (with success rewarded and failure punished in financial terms).

Recognizing this point was Hayek's great contribution to the so-called economic calculation debate concerning socialism, inaugurated by his teacher, Ludwig von Mises, in the 1920s.[34] Without going into the details of this debate, one may say that events in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the formerly communist world would appear to have vindicated the Austrian economists Mises and Hayek in their claim that true economic calculation is impossible in the absence of open markets and the

monetary accounting they make possible. The Soviet economy eventually collapsed precisely because its central planning proved unable to coordinate, or even just to ascertain, all the economic data involved in a modern system of production and distribution. As the Russian economist Yuri Maltsev writes: "When the Soviet government set 22 million prices, 460,000 wage rates, and over 90 million work quotas for 110 million government employees, chaos and shortages were the inevitable result."[35] Jonson surely could not have anticipated the economic calculation debate concerning socialism; he would not even have known what socialism is. But he does look forward to the core of the Mises-Hayek argument, that would-be government regulators are simply inadequate to the task of overseeing the complex division of labor in a modern economy.

Jonson specifically presents the problem of government regulation of the economy as a problem of knowledge. Overdo's model mayor has ambitious plans for restructuring the economy, and yet he himself does not "trust his corrupt officers"; hence he gets involved in the hopeless task of doing everything in the economy by himself. Overdo realizes the limitations of his knowledge as a government official:

> For (alas) as we are public persons, what do we know? Nay, what can we know? We hear with other men's ears; we see with other men's eyes; a foolish constable or a sleepy

> watchman is all our information; he slanders a gentleman by virtue of his place, as he calls it, and we by the vice of ours, must believe him. . . . This we are subject to, that live in high place; all our intelligence is idle, and most of our intelligencers, knaves; and by your leave, ourselves thought little better, if not arrant fools, for believing 'em. (II.i.24-34)

By impeaching his sources of knowledge, Overdo undermines his authority to regulate the marketplace. He points out all the reasons why government officials are not in a position to know the relevant economic facts, and his scheme to gain access to that knowledge proves to be a complete and humiliating failure for him. Overdo's noble-sounding vision of an all-seeing and all-knowing government turns out to be a fantasy and a farce. Government officials are limited and fallible human beings themselves and just as likely to make mistakes as merchants in the marketplace. The only and the crucial difference between civil servants and private businessmen is that when a central planner makes a mistake, he is likely to disrupt the whole economy, and not just his own business.

vi.

In the eyes of government officialdom, the disguised Overdo appears to be a criminal, and, he like Wasp and Busy, ends up in the stocks. When he himself is charged with "enormity," Overdo

sees the irony of the situation: "Mine own words turned upon me like swords" (III.v.203). The would-be regulators in the play are not happy when they themsevles fall under the power of government regulation. Wasp objects to the intrusion of strangers into his business: "Cannot a man quarrel in quietness, but he must be put out on't by you?" (IV.iv.147-48). When he learns that the intruders are "His Majesty's Watch," Wasp is not pleased with the government's panoptical surveillance: "A body would think, an you watched well o'nights, you should be contented to sleep at this time o'day" (IV.iv.149-52). Wasp would like a respite from the all-seeing eye of the government. One gets the sense from Bartholomew Fair that Jonson, several times the victim of government surveillance himself, sympathized with this position.

The madman Trouble-All provides the inverted mirror image of an all-seeing, all-knowing government in Jonson's play. He is the perfect subject of a panoptical regime,[36] the man who will not make a move without express warrant from a government official: "he will do nothing but by Justice Overdo's warrant: he will not eat a crust, nor drink a little, nor make him in his apparel ready. His wife, sir-reverence, cannot get him make his water or shift his shirt without his warrant" (IV.i.51-54).[37] Here finally is someone who would presumably heed Overdo's invectives against alcohol and tobacco. But Trouble-All provides

the <u>reductio ad absurdum</u> of the world of government regulation. He reveals what would be the disturbing but logical result of a total command economy, in which no human action took place without a government decree. Even Overdo is appalled at what he has done to transform Trouble-All into a figure wholly dependent on authority for guidance: "If this be true, this is my greatest disaster!" (IV.i.55).

From his encounter with Trouble-All, Overdo learns a very Hayekian lesson, what one might call the law of unintended consequences: "To see what bad events may peep out o' the tail of good purposes!" (III.iii.12-13).[38] Jonson seems to measure his characters by the results of their actions, not their motives. The do-gooders in <u>Bartholomew Fair</u> are the cause of most of the difficulties in the play and all the near-disasters. And the reason is that in Jonson's view, life in general and the marketplace in particular are just too complicated for these simplistic and moralistic regulatory schemes to work successfully. Actions have unanticipated consequences and efforts to control events only succeed in producing disorder and eventually chaos. Overdo must learn to accept life for what it is, admit his own limitations, and abandon his plans for perfecting and reforming the world.[39] As Quarlous tells him in the end: "remember you are but Adam, flesh and blood! You have your frailty; forget your other name of Overdo, and invite us all

to supper. There you and I will . . . drown the memory of all enormity in your biggest bowl at home" (V.vi.93-97). Jonson presents the festive spirit of comedy as the triumph of humanity and freedom over petty moralism and officious government.[40]

The spokesmen for authority in Bartholomew Fair want to contrast the ordered and stable world of law with the chaotic and unstable world of the marketplace. But Jonson's satiric view of the would-be regulators suggests a different perspective. He seems to contrast the rigid and stultifying world of law with the fluid and vibrant world of the marketplace. As happens in many comedies, in Bartholomew Fair Jonson portrays the dead weight of the law as the obstacle standing in the way of the characters satisfying their normal human desires. The law appears in the first speech in the play proper, appropriately in stilted legal language: "Here's Master Bartholomew Cokes, of Harrow o'the hill, i'the county of Middlesex, Esquire, takes forth his license to marry Mistress Grace Wellborn of the said place and county" (I.i.3-5). The first manifestation of the power of law in Bartholomew Fair significantly takes the form of a marriage license.[41] Jonson emphasizes the way the law gives power to some human beings to dispose of the lives of others, with men usually ruling over women, and parents over children. Jonson makes one of the marriage plots turn on the fact that Grace Wellborn is the legal ward of Adam Overdo, and thus his to dispose of in

marriage. In Grace's statement of her position, Jonson stresses the arbitrariness of her status and her dissatisfaction with it. When asked how she became Overdo's ward, Grace bitterly replies: "Faith, through a common calamity: he bought me, sir; and now he will marry me to his wife's brother, . . . or else I must pay value o' my land" (III.v.260-62). Evidently, human beings are bought and sold in the legal world just as commodities are bought and sold in the marketplace.[42] Far from providing an alternative to the venality of the market, the law seems to operate according to the same principles. Indeed in Jonson's presentation, the law seems worse than the market: it gives people the right to buy and sell other human beings, and not just commodities.

Women especially do not fare well in the legal world of Bartholomew Fair. In their homes, they seem to be the chattle property of their husbands, fathers, and guardians. That perhaps explains why the women in the play are particularly eager to go to the fair. For them, entering the marketplace represents a kind of liberation. Jonson suggests this point comically when several of the women quite literally enter the marketplace, that is, are enlisted into prostitution. He certainly is not advocating prostitution as a way of life, but he approaches the subject with greater freedom and less moralism than Justice Overdo does. Half jokingly, Jonson has the bawd Captain Whit try to teach Win Littlewit that she ought to prefer the life of a

prostitute to that of a married woman: "de honest woman's life is a scurvy dull life" (IV.v.26-27). The chief reason Whit offers for his claim is that a wife leads "de leef of a bondwoman," whereas he tells Win: "I vill make tee a free-woman" (IV.v.29-30). In Bartholomew Fair, the legal institution of marriage is presented as a form of slavery, while entering the marketplace as a prostitute appears to be a form of freedom.

Viewed from one perspective, prostitution is one of the chief vices of the fair, but in the full context of the play, it is difficult for the advocates of law and order to use prostitution as an argument against the marketplace. Jonson does everything he can to efface the distinction between prostitutes and married women, as he shows men buying women in marriage.[43] Quarlous thinks of the legal institution as in fact a way to marry money itself: "Why should not I marry this six thousand pound. . . ? And a good trade too, that she has beside, ha?. . . It is money that I want; why should I not marry the money, when 'tis offered me? I have a license and all; it is but razing out one name and putting in another" (V.ii.69-75). Quarlous also reveals the arbitrariness of legal documents: they are supposed to embody the sanctity of the law, but it is an easy matter to doctor them.[44] A legal document can mean almost anything, depending on how the writing is altered. There are a number of "blank checks" in the form of legal documents circulating in

Bartholomew Fair,[45] including the open warrant Overdo thinks he is giving to the madman Trouble-All but which actually falls into the hands of Quarlous. He immediately grasps the possibilities of having the justice's signature on a blank document: "Why should not I ha' the conscience to make this a bond of a thousand pond, now?" (V.ii.112-13). But Quarlous finds a better use for this blank document: to certify transferring Grace as a ward from Overdo to himself. Thus he, not Overdo, becomes the beneficiary when Grace must pay money to her guardian for the right to marry Winwife.

Jonson's criticism of the law is double-edged. On the one hand, the law appears to be too rigid; with its iron hand, it tries to define all human relationships, and keep people confined to the straight and narrow path. But on the other hand, the law appears to be too flexible and arbitrary; with a stroke of a pen, a man can alter a legal document and redefine a human relationship. Ultimately in Jonson's portrayal the problem with the law is its mindless legalism. The law tries to codify the fluidity of life into binding rules, but as Jonson shows in Bartholomew Fair, once a legal document is written down, it can all too easily be rewritten and hence become fluid itself. As Jonson presents it, the law seems to alternate between defining the terms of human life too tightly and defining them too loosely. In either case, the law gives some human beings a

despotic power over others.

vii.

The fact that Jonson develops such a devastating critique of the law and its representatives in Bartholomew Fair does not mean that he is blind to the failings of the marketplace. On the contrary, as we have seen, he was well-aware of all the shortcomings of the fair and the emerging market economy it represents--if anything, he exaggerates them. But when Jonson compares the would-be regulators of the market with the people they wish to regulate, on balance he seems to side with the latter. On the whole, the apparently unregulated markets of the fair stand for order in the play, while their would-be regulators actually prove to be the motive forces for disorder. Jonson presents the merchants as generally cooperating with one another, if only in schemes to defraud and rob their customers. They are of course not saints, but they are not quite sinners either, at least not in the evil terms in which men like Busy and Overdo try to portray them. Many of the merchants provide legitimate goods and services to their customers and Jonson presents the fair as a life-enhancing force. After all, people flock to it voluntarily and thus it must be performing some sort of service to the community.

By contrast, the characters who try to shut down the fair are the spoilsports of the play, and must be defeated for the

comic ending to be possible. In seeking to please the public, the fair may cater too much for Jonson's taste to the baser appetites of the London populace. And yet all the opponents of the fair have to set against these natural desires is their anger and their moral indignation, as Wasp, Busy, and Overdo repeatedly prove. And in Jonson's portrayal, this anger turns out to be just as irrational as desire and more socially disruptive. As we have seen, Jonson suggests at several points that religious and moral hostility to the marketplace easily translates into a revolutionary impulse and may in fact tear the fabric of society apart.

In earlier plays like Volpone and The Alchemist, Jonson had dwelled upon the ways in which the emerging market economy was itself a revolutionary force, threatening to upset the settled order of society and above all to overthrow the social hierarchy by making poor men rich and rich men poor. But in Bartholomew Fair, Jonson appears to rethink his view of the social effects of the market economy, or at least to refine it. He now dwells on the ways in which the market allows people to negotiate their difference and thus actually helps to bring them together. The market provides an image of social harmony in Bartholomew Fair, not a harmony without conflict, but one in which the tensions among the characters can be worked out as the participants in the fair come to realize their common economic interests.

Jonson shows the way the market tends to level out differences. Bartholomew Fair is a place where people from all walks of life meet and interact freely.[46] The market does a particularly good job of levelling social pretensions. Winwife tries to put on airs when he first comes to the fair and acts as if the commercial world were beneath him: "That these people should be so ignorant to think us chapmen for 'em! Do we look as if we would buy gingerbread? Or hobby-horses?" (II.v.10-12). But Quarlous points out that to enter the fair is to accept it on its own terms and acknowledge kinship with the rest of the customers: "Why, they know no better ware than they have, nor better customers than come. And our very being here makes us fit to be demanded as well as others" (II.v.13-15). In fact the only people the fair works to exclude are zealots like Busy and Overdo who will not accept its terms and admit their common humanity. Unlike the merchants, they are uncompromising and refuse to negotiate their differences with others.[47] By contrast, in the fair money provides a common currency by means of which people can settle their accounts, financial and otherwise.

It would be easy to overstate the extent to which Jonson anticipates the arguments in favor of free markets developed long after his death. He has a weak grasp of how free markets operate, which is only natural for someone who was in effect witnessing their troubled birth. He has only the barest sense of

how markets are self-regulating mechanisms; he does at least have some inkling of how Bartholomew Fair, left to itself, constitutes a kind of rough-and-tumble order. But one could not credit Jonson with anticipating the full concept of spontaneous order as it was to be developed by Mises, Hayek, and other Austrian economists. Where Jonson does genuinely anticipate later economic thinking is in his critique of efforts to regulate the marketplace. Here his thinking becomes rather sophisticated economically, as he shows how efforts to reform the market actually tend to make things worse, and how efforts to impose order on the economy only succeed in making it more chaotic. In short, his negative case for not regulating the market is much stronger than any positive case he makes for leaving the market to regulate itself. This is only to be expected of a writer who had extensive experience with government regulation of the economy, living as he did in a world still largely feudal and mercantilist, but only limited experience with genuine economic freedom, which was only just beginning to emerge in his day. Though Jonson could not fully understand how merchants regulate themselves, he knew enough to be suspicious of the kind of people who seek to regulate them.

Jonson's sympathy for the free market in Bartholomew Fair makes the play unusual if not unique in his dramatic output. As we have seen, in other plays he can be highly critical of the

marketplace and its effect on society. But it seems that for once in this play he decided to give the market its due and explore what kind of case could be made for economic freedom, or at least against economic regulation. If this seems like an implausible concern for Jonson, one must remember that by participating in the English Renaissance theatre, he was experiencing one of the most sophisticated and advanced segments of the economy of his time, and also one that was heavily regulated by the government. Jonson's experience in the theatre in fact put him in an excellent position to examine the question of government regulation of the economy, of the law versus the marketplace. His new-found sympathy for the marketplace seems to have grown out of a new recognition of the way his theatre world was inextricably intertwined with the emerging market economy of his day.

NOTES

T. S. Eliot claimed that *Bartholomew Fair* had "hardly a plot at all." See his
en Jonson" in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 134. See
so Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago:
iversity of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 202: "We cannot find any central line of
tion which holds everything together." In his *Introduction to English*
naissance Comedy (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), Alexander
ggatt quotes Terry Hands, who, in connection with his 1969 production of the
ay for the Royal Shakespeare Company, described it as "an enormous canvas with
particular focus" (p. 138). I quote *Bartholomew Fair* from the edition of
rdon Campbell in Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford
iversity Press, 1995), with citations incorporated in the text.

See Levin, *Multiple Plot*, p. 208 and Eugene M. Waith, ed., *Ben Jonson:*
rtholomew Fair (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 2.

Martin Butler says that Jonson manages "to give an illusion of randomness
ich is carefully and rigorously premeditated." See his *The Selected Plays of*
n Jonson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Vol. 2, p. 147.

See Waith, *Bartholomew Fair*, p. 20.

See Leggatt, *English Renaissance Comedy*, pp. 136-37, E. A. Horsman, ed.,
rtholomew Fair (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), p. xi, and Anne

rton, "Shakespeare and Jonson," in Essays, mainly Shakespearean (Cambridge, UK: mbridge University Press, 1994), p. 294: "[Bartholomew Fair] maintains the most licate balance between order and chaos, between structure and a seemingly disciplined flow which is like the random, haphazard nature of life itself."

For information on the actual Bartholomew Fair and Renaissance fairs in neral, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of ansgression (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), especially Chapter 1. tallybrass and White correctly emphasize the modernity of the fair and its role a harbinger of developing market principles, and they criticize a nostalgic ew of the fair as a backward-looking, medieval institution.

See Waith, Bartholomew Fair, p. 3 and William W. E. Slights, Ben Jonson and e Art of Secrecy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 149, 152, d 211 (note 34).

See Stallybrass and White, Transgression, p. 66, Jonas Barish, Ben Jonson and e Language of Prose Comedy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 2-13, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind rinceton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 132.

For examples of government regulation during the Elizabethan period that oved disastrous to the theatre companies and to Jonson in particular, see David

ggs, Ben Jonson: A Life (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. -34.

. For an excellent attempt to sketch out the structural pattern of Bartholomew ir, see the section on the play in Levin's Multiple Plot, especially pp. 211- .

. Friedrich Hayek, The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism (Chicago: iversity of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 90, 91, and 93.

. This is one of the main themes of David Riggs's biography of Jonson; see pecially Jonson, pp. 4-5.

. On Jonson's ambition, see Riggs, Jonson, pp. 2-3.

. See Riggs, Jonson, pp. 24-25.

. On Jonson's motives for bringing out the 1616 Folio, see Barish, The titheatrical Prejudice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 8, Leggatt, English Renaissance Comedy, p. 135, and Stallybras and White, ansgression, p. 75.

. For the tension running throughout Jonson's theatrical career, see Riggs,

nson, pp. 63-64, 69, 234, Stallybrass and White, Transgression, pp. 66-79, rish, Antitheatrical Prejudice, pp. 132-54, and Kate McLuskie, "Making and ying: Ben Jonson and the Commercial Theatre Audience," in Julie Sanders, Kate edgzoy, and Susan Wiseman, eds., Refashioning Ben Jonson: Gender, Politics and e Jonsonian Canon (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 134-54.

. See Waith, Bartholomew Fair, p. 205, Butler, Selected Plays, p. 148, Leggatt, glish Renaissance Comedy, p. 136, and Campbell, Alchemist, p. 503. As these itors point out, a measure of the "popularity" of the Hope Theatre is the fact at it was still being used for the "sport" of bear-baiting.

. See Horsman, Bartholomew Fair, pp. xii-xiv, Butler, Selected Plays, p. 149, d Julie Sanders, Ben Jonson's Theatrical Republics (London: Macmillan, 1998), . 92-93.

. See McLuskie, "Making and Buying," pp. 144-45.

. This was L. C. Knights' view of Jonson and his "fellows" in his famous book, ama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937). See pecially p. 7: "The standards of judgement that they brought to bear were not rmed in that new world of industrial enterprise. They belonged to an older rld which was still 'normal,' a world of small communities."

. On the stimulation of desire in Renaissance fairs, see Stallybrass and White, ansgression, pp. 38-40.

. This point is reinforced by the fact that the Wasp-Cokes story in Bartholomew ir may reflect events that actually happened when Jonson accompanied Sir Walter leigh's son Wat as his tutor on a trip to Paris. See Riggs, Jonson, pp. 206-7, rish, Prose Comedy, p. 213, and Butler, Selected Plays, p. 137: "during this ip the pupil triumphantly exposed his mentor to public view in a cart while he s prostrated in a bout of drunkenness."

. On the parallels between Wasp and Busy, see Levin, Multiple Plot, pp. 204-5.

. Riggs (Jonson, p. 195) suggests that in creating the character of Zeal-of-e-Land Busy, Jonson may have had a personal score to settle with a particular ritan preacher named Robert Milles.

. See Slights, Art of Secrecy, p. 158.

. See Slights, Art of Secrecy, p. 159.

. See Leggatt, English Renaissance Comedy, p. 139.

. See Slights, Art of Secrecy, pp. 157-58.

. See Levin, Multiple Plot, pp. 206-7.

. See Leggatt, English Renaissance Comedy, p. 149 and Slights, Art of Secrecy, '. 154, 169.

. Evaluating Overdo's attack on tobacco is complicated by the fact that it sembles sentiments expressed in James I's Counterblast to Tobacco (published in 04). It is difficult to determine if these parallels are meant to raise Overdo our esteem or lower James, but on balance the latter possibility seems more kely. Barish, Prose Comedy, pp. 319-20 (note 23), details a number of the rallels between Overdo's speech and James's Counterblast, but "wonders what nson's royal patron thought of this scene." Horsman, Bartholomew Fair, p. xxi, even more skeptical: "It is tempting to suspect that the attack on tobacco was ded to please James I, whose views were known, at the court performance; but is seems ruled out by the uncomplimentary resemblance between James and the stice." Sanders, Theatrical Republics, pp. 94-95, also discusses the mplexities of the parallels between Overdo and James I.

. Gordon Campbell's note in his edition (Alchemist, p. 507, line 12). See also tler, Selected Plays, pp. 137 and 530. The claim that the mayor referred to s Thomas Hayes can be found in Horsman, Bartholomew Fair, pp. xviii-xix and chael Jamieson, ed., Ben Jonson: Three Comedies (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin oks, 1966), pp. 481, 483. Slights (Art of Secrecy, pp. 153, 209, note 14)

ttles the identification in favor of Middleton.

. Leggatt, English Renaissance Comedy, p. 150, speaks of the "principle of spersed attention" in Bartholomew Fair. In a very different context, allybrass and White make an argument similar to Hayek's: the traditional view the fair "consigns the subordinate classes to contesting state and class power thin a problematic which has positioned them as ignorant, vulgar, unitiated--as w. In fact 'low' knowledge frequently foregrounds not only the actual nditions of production but also the conditions of bodily pleasure" 'ransgression, p. 43). If I am reading them correctly, Stallybrass and White e in effect making the point of Austrian economics that consumers are in a tter position than government officials to know what their desires are and how st to satisfy them.

. The socialist calculation debate began with Mises' essay "Die rtschaftsrechnung in sozialistischen Gemeinwesen," published in the Archiv für zialwissenschaften, 47 (1920). For an English translation by S. Adler of this say, see Ludwig von Mises, Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth uburn, AL: Praxeology Press, 1990). For Hayek's key contribution on the oblem of knowledge, see his "The Use of Knowledge in Society" in his dividualism and Economic Order (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948). is volume also contains several other chapters on the socialist calculation bate (chapters VII-IX). For further contributions to the debate from the free

rket side, see Ludwig von Mises, Socialism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 51) and Volume 10 in The Collected Works of Friedrich Hayek, Socialism and War hicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). For overviews of the socialist lculation debate, see Trygve J. B. Hoff, Economic Calculation in the Socialist ciety (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981) and David Ramsay Steele, From Marx to ses: Post-Capitalist Society and the Challenge of Economic Calculation aSalle, IL: Open Court, 1992).

. See Maltsev's foreword to Mises' Economic Calculation, p. vi.

. Leggatt, English Renaissance Comedy, describes Trouble-All as a "citizen of authoritarian state" and "a figure Kafka might have invented" (pp. 150-51).

. See also IV.ii.4-5, 86-87, 98-99, IV.vi.4, 114-15.

. On the importance of the "unintended result" in the play, see Levin, Multiple ot, p. 211.

. See Horsman, Bartholomew Fair, p. xii.

. See Barish, Prose Comedy, p. 236 and Maus, Roman Frame, p. 134.

. On the importance of the marriage license in the play, see Sanders Theatrical

publics, pp. 90-91 and Slights, Art of Secrecy, pp. 161-62.

. See Leggatt, English Renaissance Comedy, p. 145.

. See Leggatt, English Renaissance Comedy, p. 147 and Slights, Art of Secrecy, '. 160, 163, 166.

. For a good discussion of the dubious status of legal documents in the play, e Slights, Art of Secrecy, pp. 154, 170.

. See Leggatt, English Renaissance Comedy, p. 140.

. See Barish, Prose Comedy, pp. 189, 231. Horsman (Bartholomew Fair, p. 189) otes a near contemporary description of the fair (1641): "Hither resort people all sorts, High and Low, Rich and Poore, from cities, townes, and countrys; of l sects, Papists, Atheists, Anabaptists, and Brownists: and of all conditions, od and bad, vertuous and vitious, Knaves and fooles, Cuckolds and ckoldmakers, Bauds, and Whores, Pimpes and Panders, Rogues and Rascalls, the ttle Loud-one and the witty wanton."

. Slights (Art of Secrecy, pp. 160-61) makes a similar point and in support of quotes the Table-Talk of Jonson's friend John Selden: "Disputes in Religion ll never be ended, because there wants a Measure by which the Business would be

cided: The Puritan would be judged by the Word of God: If he would speak early, he means himself. . . . Ben Johnson Satyrically express'd the vain sputes of Divines by Inigo Lanthorne, disputing with his puppet in a rtholomew Fair. It is so; It is not so: It is so, It is not so, crying thus e to another a quarter of an Hour together."