

BOOK REVIEW
OUR ENEMY, THE STATE
by Albert Jay Nock
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This is a book that is both remarkable and disconcerting. It is remarkable above all for the analysis presented in its opening chapters – perhaps the most anti-statist ever written about a critical period for the United States: the 1930s, during which, under the pretext of the Great Depression, the great American nation became gradually but inexorably infected, and, under the leadership of President Roosevelt, by the most odious form of statist fascism—originating in Mussolini’s Italy and German Marxism—which eventually spread throughout the world. In this regard, Jay Nock’s analysis, replete with quotations from *The Revolt of the Masses* by our own Ortega y Gasset, or from the great libertarian philosopher Herbert Spencer, is impeccable and devastating, in that it highlights the grave betrayal of the libertarian principles of the Founding Fathers of the United States—led by Jefferson and Madison—represented by the statist and totalitarian drift towards which the United States evolved from the New Deal years onwards.

Yet Jay Nock’s book is, in turn, disconcerting, for from the second part onwards—and particularly from Chapter 4—it becomes muddled and loses much of the analytical rigour with which it began. This is undoubtedly due to the failed attempt to apply, to the interpretation of the historical events analysed by Nock, the conceptual analysis developed by Franz Oppenheimer in his classic treatise *The State*. For whilst Oppenheimer’s distinction between the acquisition of wealth through economic means (voluntary exchange) and political means (the theft and plunder perpetrated by the parasites that are states and governments) is a fundamental starting point for any anarcho-capitalist theory, it is no less true that Oppenheimer was unable to bring to a conclusion coherently

draw out the consequences of his brilliant initial insight, instead falling into a 'liberal socialist' stance and a pseudo-Marxist analysis based on class struggle which, to a certain extent, is disappointing and renders much of his analysis fruitless. This flaw also extends to Jay Nock's work, insofar as, from the second half of his book onwards, he endeavours to reinterpret American political developments by drawing on, not only the worst aspects of Oppenheimer's confused conceptual framework of pseudo-Marxism but also the doctrines on land rent and land reform put forward by Henry George and his followers—doctrines which, many years ago, were thoroughly demolished by the theorists of the Austrian School of Economics, led by Rothbard.

In short, my assessment of Albert Jay Nock's book is ambivalent. Its main merit lies in its groundbreaking title, which has already become legendary, and in the anti-statist analysis of its first part; which, as we have indicated, is then completely ruined from Chapter 4 onwards. So much so that one is overcome by an irresistible urge to rewrite, under the same title, a comprehensive and coherent analysis that applies the entire body of anarcho-capitalist theoretical analysis currently at our disposal to historical reality.

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