

An Argument for LVT: A Proof of Equal Rights

Steve Cord

There are two ways to prove the *Single Tax*:

(1) *It is economic* - it produces desirable empirical results. Empirical studies by the Center for the Study of Economics show that a spurt in new construction and renovation follow a property-tax shift from buildings to land, and our two-rate LVT jurisdictions out-construct and out-renovate their building-taxing neighbors. Prosperity results from LVT. *Reality* supports our case.

(2) *It is ethical* - it accords *logically* with equal rights. *Rationality* supports our case. This article develops this point of view.

Progress and Poverty starts with the assumption that "we each own ourselves." We Georgists all agree with that, but it is a conclusion, not a starting point. Some can disagree and logically say that it is not proven, merely assumed. Let's see how we can prove it.

The Proof

First of all: *A thing is what it is*. This statement is a tautology, but it is true and that's what concerns us. $A = A$; this is the basic Law of Logic.

Then surely *we should treat a thing as it is*, as an end in itself (i.e., for its own sake, irrespective of such irrelevant considerations as utility). That's also true, isn't it? We surely shouldn't treat a thing as it isn't. It cannot rationally or

logically be denied. This is obviously true, if only by definition. You can't have rational discourse without it. So then, obviously *we should treat a thing as it is*, as an end in itself. If a statement is true, shouldn't we treat it as being true? If we don't treat a thing as it is, we are acting on the false premise that it is what it isn't. But since we have a right to be free to do what we should do, then it is proven that we have the right to be free. Should = right to be free. This gives us the basis for *Progress Poverty's* ethical argument. If we each have the right to be free, then clearly we have the right to life, which is the sum of all our rights to be free. Therefore we each own ourselves. If we have the right to be free, then we have the right to use our body as we wish, in which case we have the right to labor, and therefore to what we produce with our labor since our labor is embodied in what we produce. But this defense of property cannot apply to land, since it is not a product of labor (private landownership may be legal, although it is not ethical; but because it is eminently practical, let us advocate private landownership so long as the government taxes landowning according to its value instead of taxing labor or capital).

If we have the right to be free, we have the right to life since life includes all our freedoms; we can't be free if we don't have the right to life. And if we have the right to be free, we have the right to our labor since that is one of our freedoms. If we have the right to our labor, we have the right to the fruits of our labor, otherwise our right to labor would be meaningless. The fruits of our labor = our ethical property (legal property might be something else). But if labor is the sole justification of private property, neither people nor land can be justifiably owned (neither being produced by human labor). Therefore, wage-slavery should be abolished and practicality requires that land be kept as private property but taxed according to its value, replacing taxes on what people produce with their labor.

We must make one more point before we leave this ethical exposition: Since we all have rights to our life, liberty and property, we have a duty to respect the equal rights of

others. Expressed succinctly, *we have a right to our life, liberty and property limited only by the equal rights of others.*

Objections & Replies

The following objections are often raised

We have the right to labor, and therefore to what we produce with our labor since our labor is embodied in what we produce.

against this equal-rights ethical doctrine:

(1) *You can't logically prove ethics.* However, this statement can't be proven, for if no ethical statement is true, then neither can this one. One might prefer the word *valid* to true; whatever, it doesn't matter. But don't base your attempted proof on definitions; you shouldn't define yourself as being correct. Proofs require facts for reality statements or logic for ethical statements.

(2) *"I don't like the word should."* Well, isn't there *something* we should do, or should not do, even to say we should do whatever we like, or we should not use *should*. From *should* we derive rights.

(3) *Isn't an ethical proof an attempt to overcome the famous massive impermeable "Is-Ought" Barrier?*

Absolutely not. There is no attempt here to say that whatever is, should be. That would be futilely assaulting the "Is-Ought" barrier. The *correct* source of ethical truth is *rationality*, not in reality. Merely labeling a belief religious or cultural does not make it correct. - *suttee* should have been abolished because it contravened equal rights and rationality, even though it was a religious and cultural belief. It was therefore wrong, false. *The ought is in the thought, not in reality.* We get our ethical views from other individuals, culture, religion or reason, but only the latter is the *correct* source of ethics. The individual is not - there is no proof, and clearly the individual is often wrong; the same is true for culture and religion (merely calling a belief cultural or religious doesn't make it true, when culture or religion contradict reason, it is the latter which should prevail).

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