

THE IMMORALITY OF PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF LAND RENT: A NEW APPROACH

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The moral argument for land value taxation is what makes dedicated Georgists and separates them from mere land value taxers intrigued by the economic benefits, and we are in desperate need of dedicated Georgists to staff our organizations. Love of liberty makes for libertarians, but the Georgist morality makes for Georgists, and we are in danger of losing our own soul if we talk exclusively of economics at our conferences; we are philosophers as well as economists.

George's basic moral assumption that "we each own our own selves" is not one that has popularity today. Many (most?) people believe that all of us, acting through our government as agent, own at least a piece of each of us, a view called universalism by philosophers and socialism by others. I agree with George's assumption but it can no longer be assumed to be true; it must be proven.

I would then like to prove that there is one moral statement that can be made which is generally accepted and which in any case can be proven true: i.e., we should treat things as they are. If a person wears glasses, he should be treated as wearing glasses; if his pen is blue, we should treat it as being blue, etc. From there, in a few steps, I logically proceed to the doctrine of equal rights as a provable standard; i.e., we all have a right to our life, liberty and property limited only by the equal rights of others.

Then I proceed along Georgist lines. We have a right to property, which implies a right to our labor, so labor becomes the sole justification for private property, thus excluding land. But we favor private ownership of land so long as the land rent is socialized. The matter must be phrased carefully, and I offer a few suggestions as to that.

The significance of the proof is that it strengthens our own convictions, and provides a purpose for life in general. The reigning subjectivism (moral prooflessness) of our time leads logically to apathy and violence, aimlessness, anti-democracy and even despair, all characteristics of our current outlook (and maybe even we Georgists are somewhat affected by the outlook all about us).

I end by tying all this to practical politics and publicizing.

(Much of this talk is covered by an article I have written in the current American Journal of Economics & Sociology entitled "Equal Rights: A Provable Moral Standard.")