


Land & Liberty

Putting People at the heart of Economics - Restoring a timeless idea

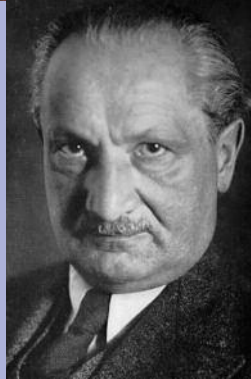
Property and the Common Good

A photograph of a rural landscape with rolling green hills and a barbed wire fence in the foreground. A wooden post with a sign is attached to the fence. The sign has the text 'PRIVATE PROPERTY' underlined, followed by 'Keep Out'.

**PRIVATE
PROPERTY**
Keep Out

A photograph of a construction worker wearing a white hard hat and a high-visibility safety vest, working with bricks on a construction site.

**Solving
the
Housing
Problem**



**Heidegger
on Place
and
Dwelling**



**If money
could talk
what could
it tell us?**

“The institution of public debts, like the institution of private property in land, rests upon the preposterous assumption that one generation may bind another generation.”

Henry George, *Social Problems* 1883

Land&Liberty

issue 1232 SPRING 2014

No 1232 Vol 121 Spring 2014
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Publisher Henry George Foundation

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LAND&LIBERTY has chronicled world events for over 100 years. It has offered a unique perspective with its reports, analysis and comment on the core issues of political economy. And that uniqueness remains. Land&Liberty aims to explore how our common wealth should be used – and to demonstrate that this is the key to building the bridge of sustainability between private life, the public sector and our resources – between the individual, the community and the environment. Land&Liberty – putting justice at the heart of economics.

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ISSN 0023-7575



The Henry George Foundation is an independent economic and social justice think tank and public education group with offices in London and members throughout the UK. The Foundation deals in cutting-edge ideas, exploring and promoting principles for a just and prosperous society and a healthy environment.

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Message from the Publisher Spring 2014

WELCOME to this edition of Land&Liberty, the first by our new editor Joseph Milne who has provided us with much food for thought. I believe this chimes with an important aspect of Henry George's work for, whilst he was politically active all his life, he famously declared his primary concern was not with how people voted but how they thought! This was shown in the priority he accorded to ethical considerations and how, when he agreed to stand for election for Mayor of New York in 1886 he declared that he did so less in the hope that he might be elected than because it presented an opportunity to influence how millions of people thought.

In one way or another each of the main articles in this edition relates to value and George highlighted three important points regarding this. First, that the common measure of value (money) was not fundamental, second that value could arise from two distinct sources, and third, that the same word was used to refer to two quite different and contrasting ideas or forms of value.

What is it that creates value

George noted how the toil, trouble or exertion that a person was prepared to undergo in order to obtain something represented a more fundamental measure of their valuation of it than money. He saw how money becomes a medium of exchange because it is valued, rather than that money is valued because it is exchangeable. His insight, that value can arise from two distinct sources explains why money is valued. It is similar to the reason why people attribute a value to land - they must! Without access to money or land people are unable to participate fully in their community. The value of money, like the value of land derives then not from production (or the associated toil and trouble) but from the obligation people in general may be under to render toil, trouble, exertion or the fruits of exertion, in order to get it.

Economic reasoning shows 'value' is variable

When we appreciate these alternative sources of economic value (production or obligation) it becomes easier to appreciate why George so valued the work of Adam Smith who first made clear how, in economic reasoning it was important to limit the term value to mean only value in exchange and not to confuse it with value in use. He noted how something which was highly valued in use e.g. air, might have no exchange value at all, whilst something that had little or no value in use e.g. paper money, could have substantial exchange value. George lamented that Smith's insight had been generally ignored by the economic thinkers who followed him. He noted how in ordinary conversation this is rarely a problem since the context normally makes it clear or provokes a question for clarification. In economic reasoning, however, where the idea of value in exchange is of such primary importance the danger of the same word being used or interpreted to represent the distinct and often contrasting idea of value in use has serious consequences

I am grateful to Joseph Milne for producing and editing this edition of Land&Liberty and hope you will appreciate the abundant food for thought he has provided.

David Triggs



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HGF NEWS

Library Group Meetings

The library group meetings at Mandeville Place have continued to flourish, offering talks and discussions exploring fundamental questions of economics from different perspectives. Tommas Graves presented a paper showing how failure to collect the natural source of



public revenue leads to the creation of a damaging tax system, unable to collect sufficient revenue, leading to government borrowing, which in turn leads to those who gather the public revenue for private gain to acquire assets and to speculate in land, leading to all the harmful consequences we know so well. He argues that those who gather the natural revenue also lend to the governments and so gain from government debt as well as from asset speculation.

Over that last term the emphasis has shifted to seeking to imagine what the world would be like should George's proposals be implemented. This thematic approach has sought to cultivate an ongoing discussion between participants, and also create a space for fuller response to the presentations of invited speakers.

Talk by Akhil Patel on Economic Cycles

A fascinating talk give by Akhil Patel on the 18 – 20 year economic cycle raised a lot of interest. Akhil developed an interest in economic cycles after reading the works of Henry George and other writers who recognise the operation of natural

law and how its manifestation is affected by conditions at the point of interaction between land and labour under manmade law. He has since developed his study of economic cycles and established an advisory company, Ascendant Strategy, to carry on further research in economic cycles and help investors and corporate directors apply these insights to important strategic decisions. David Triggs invited Akhil Patel to a special evening meeting to explore further the implications of cycles in economic activity. The study of economic cycles would seem to offer a fruitful way of reconnecting economics with natural law.

Friday Evening Programme

The Friday evening programme has continued, under the general heading of Studies in Natural Law, to offer alternate talks on economics and the continuing study of Plato's Laws. David Triggs presented three sessions entitled "Economics for Professional Development". This is a new project he is developing to create and market courses on the science of political economy that address the needs of a wide range of professions as they seek to refine and develop their competence along the lines required by their professional institutions. He welcomed any observations that would help him develop the project.

The Renaissance in England talk about classics revival

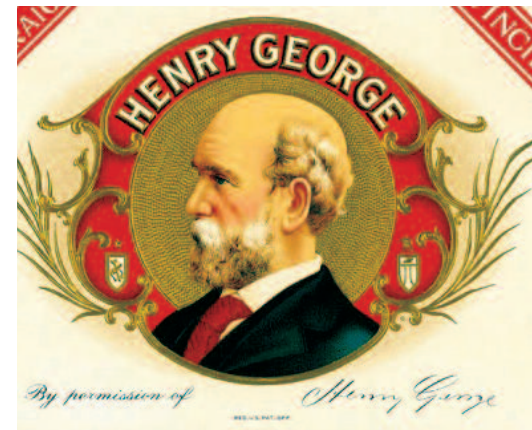
Adrian Bertoluzzi gave a talk entitled "Renaissance in England" illustrating how the revival of classical ideas took hold in England - notably by worthies such as John Colet, Sir Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare - and found favour by Queen Elizabeth I and her Court. This talk, along with others Adrian Bertoluzzi has given on Ficino and Plato and the Italian rulers, shows how the revival and study of Plato by Renaissance scholars shaped the culture and politics of the age. Through extending the Friday evening programme into this wider study of the classical understanding of society and natural law we



Elizabeth 1st encouraged the study of classical literature gain a deeper insight into principles of justice Henry George sought to articulate in his economics.

The complete works of Henry George

Although most of George's works are presently available, there has never been a scholarly edition of the complete works. This is to be remedied by the publishers Pickering & Chatto who will be publish-



Henry George image used on a Cigar box of the period

ing a six volume edition of George's works, under the general editorship of Kenneth C. Wenzler, with introductions and annotations to each work by individual scholars. The project is being funded by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation and various Georgist organizations throughout the world, including the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain. The aim is to place the life and work of George in historical context and provide a sound basis for future study of his economic and social theory.

Money Talking by Richard Glover

If money could talk, what would it tell us about today's financial woes?



WE ALL KNOW SOMETHING about money, and yet a shroud of mystery keeps its magic hidden. But without understanding it, how can we ensure justice can prevail in its provision and use? Three propositions are offered here in the hope of bringing more clarity to the subject, even though they do not have obvious relevance.



Can Money Touch the Heart?

Today's obsession with money and finance seems to obscure the truly valuable aspects of life. How can we price those precious moments that bring meaning to our lives. The loving family relationships in the home; the sense of quiet satisfaction after a good meal; the delights of good sport; the contentment of just sitting on the seashore with sunshine, gentle breeze and sounds of waves and birds; the uplift in spirit from considering deeper aspects of life; the comradeship and loyalty of good company; the sense of achievement from working with others in overcoming challenges; the satisfaction from a good day's work.

In such ways the heart is touched and we are most nourished. Although the price for beach access may be determined, the human experience that follows cannot. Whether sitting on the beach freely or under license, no money can buy true contentment; it is priceless.

Three Propositions

"Priceless things are to be respected" is the first proposition. This helps constrain the realm of money to those things which can be bought and sold, but more significantly helps us value those things which are given freely by nature or by fellow human beings.

One of nature's laws is borrowed for the second proposition; "sowing comes before reaping". This has wide reaching consequences for our understanding of investment, credit and debt. It is not money that creates new capital in the form of facilities and infrastructure, but it is cooperative human ingenuity and effort; all those things we enjoy are the result of human work and nature's free provision.

Our efforts and rewards are placed in context with the third proposition; "the whole is greater than the sum of parts". In cooperative effort, individual aptitudes, abilities and contributions combine to create something that would be impossible through individual efforts in

isolation. A subsistence existence would prevail if each had to grow their own family's food and create their own clothing and shelter. This reminder also encourages greater appreciation of the whole and discourages activities leading to individual gain at the expense of others.

Trusting Money

So now we turn to money itself and the simplicity of everyday exchanges. Imagine.... A £10 note is found on the floor of a pub. The manager picks it up and uses it to buy bread; the baker uses it to buy fish, the fishmonger to pay a newspaper bill. The newsagent uses it to book a restaurant table and the restaurant owner uses it for a pub lunch.

This £10 came from nowhere and yet facilitated all of these exchanges. Each participant was happy to accept it in exchange for what they had given, trusting that anyone else in the community would do likewise; each trusted that the community could offer something more valuable than what they already had. Everyone gains; the community thrives.

This gives several clues about the use of money, but how does it enter and exit the community's money supply? Where did that £10 note come from? Imagine some more.... Soon afterwards, a regular customer rushed into the pub anxiously asking if a £10 note had been found earlier. By coincidence and unbeknown to anyone, the manager handed





The Bank of England building reflects the importance that the community feels about the part money plays. The picture below of the interior shows how this sentiment continues.

over same note previously found on the pub floor. The regular carefully examined it, holding it up to the light. Then with a sigh of relief, he tore it into pieces and threw it away. He then explained that his mislaid £10 note was a fake!

And yet that note had worked its magic, appearing “out of thin air”, having no intrinsic value yet sprinkling trust through the community, and then disappearing when no longer needed.

We examine the aspects of trust now and return to money creation later.

Money obviously relates to trust. With total trust prevailing, as exemplified in family life, then money is not necessary; the same transfers of goods and services could occur in our small community through simply giving to those in need. With no trust in the community, neither money nor any form of barter or any form of cooperative endeavour is possible. So money can only work where there is trust and only needs to where there is perhaps a measure of distrust.

Those Inseparable Twins

Most exchanges have a period of being half-completed, with the concluding half to follow later; trust enters here as those inseparable twins of credit and debt. The creditor trusts the debt will be settled and the debtor trusts the credit can be satisfied. Although the terms creditor, debtor and especially debt are often darkly coloured by today’s injustices, their essential simplicity and foundation in trust can still be appreciated in everyday simple transactions.

After the manager hands £10 to the baker for bread their trading relationship ends with both feeling better for it and free of any lingering credit-debt relationship between them. However, the baker has given her efforts as bread and she needs sustenance and nourishment in return. All she has is a £10 note; this token signifies the outstanding credit-debt relationship between her and the community and this is ultimately only satisfied with fish. Hence the £10 note in her hand signifies both

the value of what she had given and the value of what she is yet to receive. Her service to one person is rewarded with service from any person through the community’s general trust in money.

Yet money remains a medium of exchange and what has greater value is our contribution to the community and the sustenance and nourishment we receive from the community. The range of possibilities here is vast. Our contribution may be functional and the least we can get away with; but then it could be the very finest service or creativity we can achieve. What we receive may fill the stomach, or it could satisfy our tastes in ways beyond our normal experience. Our contribution and nourishment is essential; their finest aspects are beyond price, in fact priceless. Money is extremely useful in helping this happen, but remains the medium of exchange.

Creating Money Loans

Let us consider the small matter of loans in another community in a series of four exchanges.

1 - Joe works and is paid; his handful of money represents the credit given to the community in general and also the community’s debt for Joe’s sustenance and nourishment.

2 - Loaning Mary the money introduces a new relationship. The community still

owes the goods and will exchange them with the money holder; Joe is still owed goods but now Mary owes him the money.

3 - Mary buys and enjoys the goods. Mary and Joe remain in a credit-debt relationship between them but have no money. However, the rest of the community is debt free.

4 - Mary has to work to benefit someone in the community and get paid. She repays Joe who can buy the things he wants. All credit-debt relationships have now ceased.

As a community, sowing necessarily comes before reaping. Mary’s apparent reaping before sowing is only possible because the community has already sown.



A gold bullion area within the Bank of England.

Creating Money

Now to consider how much money the community needs and how it is created.

Our first community could manage with just £10 if those sequential exchanges were acceptable. With £10 each, transactions would be freer and life easier. With £100 each, prices rise and no further advantage is gained. It is also worth remembering that where sufficient trust prevails no money is needed at all.

Perhaps it is now obvious that there can be no fixed relationship between the amount of money circulating and the level of economic activity. However, some general tendencies can be observed: The more trust, the less money needed; excess money encourages inflation and a lack, deflation; rising economic activity and especially



greater financial activity both tend to need more money.

Very little of our money is visible or can be held in hand. Virtually all money exists as electronic records in the community's banking system. For the UK's total money supply (M4Lx - as defined by the Bank of England), approximately 3% (£62.5bn) is cash and coin. Some 89% is created and held by commercial

and interest; excessive rates alongside excessive bonuses are today's news but ancient scriptural authorities also question this.

Money works due to its ready acceptance in the community; it is the community's trust rather than the bank's provision that powers it. Banks do provide real service and incur real costs in providing the community's money supply

and its associated payments system. Hence there is a justification for a charge, but can today's charges be justified?

Trouble certainly follows where human beings claim to own the essential factors for life such as aspects of nature. Land is an obvious example; a little is owned by the community, but all the rest in the developed world is privately owned. We have no choice but to put our feet on the ground; for human beings earth's surface is priceless. Such owners can

exercise their property right and make a charge. The amount is limited by the ability to pay and the ability to maintain law and order.

Such property rights are seen as valuable assets yielding certain income. Banks are confident in creating new money to buy them, and this elevates their price and in turn rents. More money exists but the rising rents, mortgage payments and other debt charges reduce household money for real goods and services. It is the financial world that sees this incoming flood of money; vastly in excess of the needs for goods and services, it is used to gain ever more control of the economy through acquisition of various forms of property right.

Propositions and Henry George

So have those propositions helped? And can Henry George have the last word?

Priceless things are to be respected. Nature provides freely and yet is irreplaceable. Life, human joy, and expressions of artistic beauty are all priceless and yet available to all if we allow them to be.

Our use of money can help this happen, but money without our trust is useless. This trust is truly priceless.

Sowing comes before reaping. Nature's provision is the result of billions of years of evolution; human provision through traditions and both social and physical infrastructure is the result of the efforts of countless predecessors. Today's provision of money can facilitate today's efforts and provision; it cannot be saved for tomorrow.

The whole is greater than the sum of parts. Nature embraces each one of us and we share our humanity with those of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Our variety of talents and tastes provide everything necessary to provide for everyone. Through our trust in a greater who, money helps us cooperate through our individual contributions to meet countless individual needs.

The free gifts of nature

Henry George presented a beautiful (and priceless) analysis of value, wealth creation and obligation in his *Science of Political Economy*. All goods and services in the community are created through human effort on the free gifts of nature; this has nothing to do with money but money is very helpful. Through enforced obligation it is possible for some in the community to receive more than they contribute; the enforcements are through forms of property right and the receipts are conveniently paid with money. Provisioning the community money supply itself has become a property right of considerable value.

Talking Money

It is easy to observe flows of money in the communities and the world with increasing disparity of both asset ownership and money income. What is less easy to observe are the underlying causes of this all too persistent tendency. This is partly due to misunderstanding the essential simple nature of money itself. More clarity about money may lead to us hearing what these money concentrations and flows are telling us about the underlying web of property rights and their effect. Let us hear what money is telling us about things unseen.

Greed is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit

Gordon Gekko, played by Michael Douglas (above) in the film *Wall Street*, 1987

We have to accept that inequality is a way of achieving greater opportunity and prosperity for all

Lord Griffiths, vice chairman of Goldman Sachs, 2009

banks such as HSBC, RBS, Barclays etc and is used for most exchanges. About 8% was created by our central bank, the Bank of England, mainly through the recent quantitative easing programme.

Commercial banks have created most of our money through individual loans, mainly through mortgages. Where overdraft facilities are granted, the money is created on spending (drawing-down).

Each loan is based on the borrower's promise to repay the money from future earnings. These promises give the banks the power to create money. The money supply is the aggregate of all past loans and draw-downs, less all past repayments. The balance of new loans to repayments determines its increase or otherwise. Often described as being "created out of thin air", it can be more helpful to see money as being created out of the borrower's undertaking to repay.

Seats of Injustice

And now we have to consider the seat of injustices we can observe and experience all around us. Banks charge fees

The Idea of Property

by Joseph Milne

IN CHAPTER VI of The Science of Political Economy, entitled ‘Cause of Confusion as to Property’, Henry George asks why John Stuart Mill was so confused about the basis of property. He replies that:

It is evidently the same thing that has prevented all the scholastic economists, both those who preceded and those who have succeeded him, from giving any clear and consistent statement of the laws of distribution or the origin of property. This is a pre-assumption they cannot bring themselves to abandon – the pre-assumption that land must be included in the category of property and a place found in the laws of distribution for the income of landowners. Since natural law can take no cog-

nizance of the ownership of land, they are driven in order to support this pre-assumption to treat distribution and property as matters of human institution only. (p. 460)



...natural law can take no cognizance of the ownership of land... H.George

What George is pointing out here is that so long as it is assumed that land can be property, confusion must follow about all ownership and all distribution of wealth. The reason it causes this confusion is because no ground in natural law can be found for the claim of land ownership, and so ownership as such is forced out of the realm of natural law and into the realm of human law. That is to say, property is only a matter of human convention, and this is the case with all ownership, all distribution and all labour. Yet, as George points out, Mill sees that distribution or exchange of wealth must come under natural law if it is to be just, but since land is included in his notion of property he cannot support this truth without contradicting himself.

So that we are absolutely clear on this, George goes on to say:



The real basis of property, the real fundamental law of distribution, is so clear that no one who attempts to reason can utterly and consistently ignore it. It is the natural law which gives the product to the producer. But this cannot be made to cover property in land. Hence the persistent effort to find the origin of property in human law and its base in expediency. (p. 461)

Here George makes explicit what he regards as the real basis of property, “It is the natural law which gives the product to the producer”. This means that property can only be in things produced by human work, and so cannot include anything not produced by human work. Neither land nor any resource already present in Nature can be property, unless it be regarded as the property of God who created it. We may observe also that the same natural law that renders property to the producer operates in the distribution of wealth. Only produced wealth may be exchanged, and the only legitimate exchangers can be the producers of what is exchanged. This cannot include land.

Taking of the product of labour from the labourer

If it were merely a matter of excluding land from property and exchange and all would be well, the problem would be solved. But it is not as simple as that. Since the accepted basis of property is expedience, or human law by convention, this removes the legitimate ownership of property from the producer. Labour can make no claim to its fruits if there is no basis in natural law for property, and so nothing in principle can deny the taking of the product of labour from the labourer. In other words, if no distinction can be made

in principle between what can be property and what cannot be property, then no principle can demonstrate that the wages of labour belong to the labourer.

I recall many years ago when I worked for a large company asking those I worked with, why the boss lives in a large country house and drives around in a luxury car while we struggle just to get by. The unanimous answer was “He owns the company”. Not only that, but because he owns the company he is entitled to pay us the least we will accept. The logic was, that since he owned the company he owned our labour and had the right to dispose of it as he wished.

This anecdote shows that the question of the true basis of property has become wholly obscured because the economists have included land as property. Once it is granted that land may be property, it follows that the real basis of property is overthrown and that what others produce on land may be taken by the landowner. Land ownership obliterates the right of labour to its product. Once expediency becomes the only basis of property, and although this produces obvious injustices and poverty, there is no recourse to natural law to remedy it. Property rights become arbitrary, contingent, accidental, and therefore open to every kind of ingenious manipulation and abuse.

For us, following the thought of Henry George, the economic consequences of this are obvious, as obvious as that water is wet. There are, however, consequences



John Stuart Mill - was seen to be confused about the basis of property

beyond the economic which we should consider, and which are equally as important as the economic consequences.

What are the consequences when a fundamental natural law is misunderstood?

A question that needs to be asked is: What happens to the natural sense of justice in a society where a fundamental natural law is not understood? If reason does not discern that land cannot be property, what happens to our ethical sense in general? It seems, at the very least, that it must become confused, and at worst, so atrophied that almost no limit can be put on the injustices that might be inflicted on humanity. Or that injustices caused by human lack of discernment become attributed to the natural state of things, and therefore beyond remedy.

It is evident that we ought not to separate our ethical understanding from our economic understanding, and that if we are confused in one we shall be confused in the other also. This is precisely what George is pointing out in John Stuart Mill: he cannot bring about a concord between his notion of property and his notion of natural law and justice. This disjunction between reason and ethics is a defining characteristic of Western thought since the seventeenth century, with the rise of modern empiricism, the secular society, reductive materialism and the industrial revolution. It might be argued that with the rise of human rights the ethical has made progress alongside material progress. But the modern rise of human rights has been the ethical side of the conflict between ethics and reason.

Is a 'Free' person someone who decides their own moral code?

There are certain fundamental assumptions shared in common between modern materialism and the emergence of human rights, even though they are in conflict with one another. Materialism, in the name of scientific objectivity and utility, conceives of Nature as a mere resource wholly at human

disposal to exploit. Human will has mastery and jurisdiction over Nature. There is no bound to the way human will may exercise itself over Nature. Ethics, on the other hand, in the name of individual autonomy, asserts the absolute right of the individual to determine their own destiny, and that in the pursuit of this all other persons are under an obligation to grant this absolute autonomy. Thus, the notion of the free person is that of the solitary individual deciding their own ethics, their own moral code subject to no other.

The common ground between the materialistic view of Nature and the ethical view of human rights lies in the assertion of the self-determining will, the will that is answerable only to itself. Thus Kant defines the ethical man as the one who is his own legislator. This parallels the view of Francis Bacon who sees man as stripping the veil off nature and forcing her secrets into human subjection. Neither the materialist nor the ethical position sees itself as answerable to any law outside its own determination, or responsible to anything in itself or for itself.

This rather ruthless common ground between materialism and modern ethics might surprise us. And it is fair to say that a great deal of good has been done in the name of human rights to mitigate the consequences of economic injustice. But this is only to concede that materialism and ethics must necessarily be in conflict, even when they both act from the same common ground of false assumptions. It seems that this peculiar contradiction between reason and ethics generally in modern thought is precisely the same as the contradiction Mill cannot resolve between the right to property in land and the right of the producer to the product of labour that George observes. Where



Francis Bacon... sees man as stripping the veil off nature... forcing her secrets into human subjection...

reason and ethics are in conflict with one another, it is likely that both are somehow distorted or confused.

The underlying idea shared in common between modern materialism and ethical relativism is that all things are subject to human will, and that will is its own ground. Thus our modern age looks upon society and the world and the universe in terms of subjecting it to human mastery. Even individual persons regard themselves as property at their

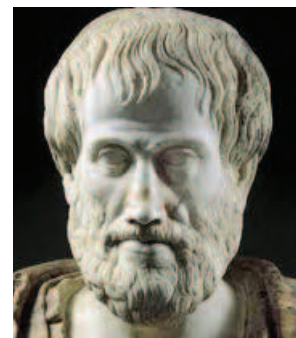
own disposal, as we see in the debates over euthanasia. Locke claimed that all property arises as the extension of self-ownership. Through owning oneself one may "sell" one's labour, or come to own land by mixing one's labour with it. In this single idea – that I own myself – reason and ethics are both equally confounded. Some theorists in the sixteenth century argued that, since a person was their own property, they could sell themselves into slavery. As with land, once something given by Nature is claimed as property, it becomes exchangeable. On that basis there is no difference in principle between selling land or a human being.

The loss of a higher order leads to land being regarded as 'Private Property'.

We should make some allowance for the historical turmoil in which these ideas arose. Western society was seeking a new way of conceiving the relation between the State and the Church, and also between the State and the individual citizen. And in the midst of these struggles arose the scientific and industrial revolutions. The old authoritarian certainties were not equal to the new circumstances. But what disappeared in the search for new understanding was the sense that there was



Kant defines ethical man as the one who is his own legislator...



In Aristotle's time... the individual good was understood to spring from the common good...

a higher order to the universe to which reason should conform itself, and a higher, universal goodness towards which all Nature tends, and with which the human will should align itself. It was with the loss of this higher order to which reason properly belongs, and the universal goodness to which ethics properly belongs, that land and the human person both became regarded as 'private property'. Thus we see that if the natural desire for truth and the natural love of goodness become separated, both become distorted. Truth and virtue belong together. In economics this means that the creation of wealth and justice belong together.



Thomas Aquinas... all things truly belong to God who made them

How did the status of the individual in society change?

It is worth asking what preceded this change, and how the idea of property changed. What we find in the Middle Ages and going back to Aristotle is that the notion of the human person and society is profoundly different from that which emerged in the Age of Reason. Since the whole of Nature was seen as one harmonious order directed to the perfection of each part in relation to the perfection of the whole, so the defining idea of the human individual was that of membership in society, while society itself was part of the greater order of the universe. The relationship between the individual and the state was that of a member within a greater whole, and that whatever served the good of the greater whole was in conformity with natural law and assured the good of the individual. The individual good was understood to spring from the common good, even as the health of a limb of the body springs from the health of the whole body. What distinguishes the human species from the other creatures is that it more fully participates in the greater order of Nature.

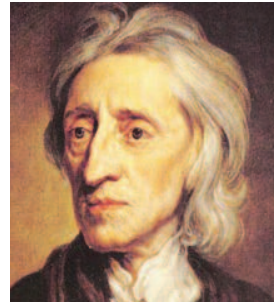
Understood in this way, the first or primary idea of property according to natural law is that all property is held in common.

This is what Aquinas says, because although individuals may naturally own property which they possess legitimately, in circumstances of necessity all private property reverts back to the natural state of common property, where man takes from Nature according to his needs. But also, in the most essential sense, all things truly belong to God who made them.

The notion that in necessity all property reverts to common property is linked to another important idea which Aquinas adopts from Aristotle. The relation between the human person and wealth is conceived in terms of use rather than in terms of ownership. The question for Aristotle is not so much "What is mine?" as "What is the right use of things?". Once the question of right use is raised we see that wealth remains in contact with Nature as a whole, because right use of things must mean use that does no harm to any other thing, and which is in harmony with the common good. This means that right use and justice coincide – to use things justly is to use them for their proper ends.

Common good is replaced by individual human rights

These notions of membership, the common good and right use all finally collapse in the Enlightenment. The idea of human nature being defined by its membership in society is replaced by the assertion of the private, autonomous individual as distinct from the state. The idea of the common good is replaced by the idea of individual human rights. And the understanding of right use is replaced by the idea of ownership. In other words, the relationship of the human species to the natural order shifted from that of membership to that of ownership. The "proprietary self" was born. Thus, as observed earlier, for Locke the defining characteristic of human nature becomes "self-ownership". Remarkably on John Locke the scholar Christopher Flanks writes in his book *He Became Poor*:



John Locke... simply working on the land grants ownership of it

Because one owns oneself and hence one's labour, to mix one's labour with external goods through appropriating them is to attach something to those goods "that excludes the common right of other men (p. 61).

Here we see Locke, like Mill, is confused about how property can arise, and he tries to trace the principle of property back to self-ownership. For him the labourer owns what he makes, not through the work he does, but by the extension of owning himself. He "mixes" his self-ownership with whatever he works on. This conception of the principle of property "solves" the problem that Mill has with the ownership

of land, since for Locke simply working on the land grants ownership of it. By planting seed in the field the field now becomes the property of the planter. The relationship with the land ceases to be "right use" and becomes the establishment of a property right. Work itself is no longer participation in the common good but becomes work for private gain despite the common good.

Separation between reason and ethics

In this situation two separate sets of laws need to be established: laws of property and laws of obligation to society or to the environment. Further, Locke's notion of property arising from self-ownership creates a separation between reason and ethics. The proprietary self is a rational claim, while any obligations to society or to the common good are ethical claims. This contrasts radically with the Aristotelian notion of right use which is at once practical and ethical. But also, and perhaps this is the most significant implication of Locke's notion of property, the legal and the ethical have also become separated, and this is perhaps the decisive separation that destroys the tradition of natural law extending from Plato to Aquinas.

Here we should also bear in mind that Henry George never suggested that property arises from self-ownership, but rather from the producer creating. The capacity of labour to produce does not arise from self-ownership but from knowledge and

effort. If indeed self-ownership were the real principle of all ownership, then it would be the seed planted in the field “mixing” its power of growth with the soil that would own the crop. But of course the seed does not need to own itself in order to grow. It grows because it is its nature to grow. Ownership does not enter into it.

This is why Locke must restrict the notion of property solely to man, and why he must, like Mill, restrict it to human law as distinct from natural law. For George there is no contradiction between human law and natural law. And although ownership belongs strictly to the producer, this does not mean that labour is for the sake of property, as though ownership were the object or purpose of labour. In the end it remains the “use” of things that ultimately determines the purpose of labour. In Aristotelian terms it is the final end of wealth produced that renders it as good or bad, and this must remain the case even if it is commonly believed that wealth is only produced for the sake of ownership. In other words, it is the final effects for society or mankind as a whole that shows whether the creation of wealth is beneficial or not.

Mill...fearful of offending the powerful

There is just a hint in Henry George’s discussion of Mill that one reason he gets so confused over the meaning of property is that he is fearful of offending the powerful, for whom the idea of property means essentially ‘landed-property’. George writes:

He did indeed, come so near questioning it as to excite the dismay of his contemporaries who deemed him a radical of radicals for utterances that squint towards the truth. But he always draws back from uttering it. (p. 461)

It is easy to understand why the powerful land-owners should resist the view that land cannot be property, not only because their unearned income would vanish through conceding the truth, but also because it brings to light the abuse of land and the power to exploit labour. Private ownership of land inevitably means it is put to unjust or unnatural use. But also, from the point of view of deprived labour, it seems that property is the only means of security, whether property be land or a

loaf of bread. For the land-less to draw subtle distinctions between proprietary rights and access rights is liable to appear as mere sophistry. But even intellectuals, such as Marx, cannot see the distinction, and so communists can only think of transferring ownership from one owner to another through the state taking possession of the land and the means of production. It still remains a system founded in property, in which the ‘state’ is now the landlord.

Nevertheless we find the distinction has always been understood down the ages. Writing of the Golden Age the poet Virgil says:

*No tenants mastered holdings,
Even to mark the land with
private bounds
Was wrong: men worked for the
common store, and earth
Herself, unbidden, yielded all
more fully.*¹

Here we observe not only that there were no ‘private bounds’ in the land, but also that by working for the “common store” the earth is naturally more fruitful, because it is then put to its natural use.

With the Iron Age this is lost, as Ovid writes:

*The earth itself, which before has
been, like air and sunshine,
A treasure for all to share, was now
crisscrossed with lines
Men measured and marked with
boundary posts and fences.*²

The Roman Stoic Seneca also conceived of social ‘virtue’ in which there was no poverty. He writes:

*The social virtues had remained pure
and inviolate before covetousness dis-
tressed society and introduced poverty,
for men ceased to possess all things
when they began to call anything their
own . . . How happy was the primitive
age when the bounties of nature lay in
common and were used freely; nor had
avarice and luxury disunited mortals
and made them prey upon one another.
They enjoyed all nature in common,
which thus gave them secure posses-
sion of public wealth. Why should I
not think them the richest of all peo-*

*ple, among whom there was not to be
found one poor man?*³

It is important to observe that it is Nature that Seneca is speaking of here, not common property in the produce of labour. Through enjoying Nature in common it follows that all other wealth is secured. There is, however, a deeper idea present here too: “for men ceased to possess all things when they began to call anything their own”. Seneca is suggesting that once “possession” becomes “my possession” to the exclusion of another, natural possession, as the gift of nature, is lost, and with that comes poverty. Seneca calls this “covetousness”, which means to desire unlawfully or contrary to nature. It is a mixture of wrong knowledge of things and wrong desire for things, and so at once irrational and unethical. Also, and perhaps most important of all, when Seneca says all men “enjoyed nature in common” he does not mean a joint ownership of nature, but rather what is called “use-right”. Thus he is cited by Grotius as saying:

*To all the way was open;
The use of all things was a common
right.*⁴

So we need to also bear that in mind when we read “for men ceased to possess all things when they began to call anything their own”. The word “possess” here means use-right, and it is this common use-right that is lost when men “began to call anything their own”.

The truly significant point is that the relationship with Nature and the abundance of the earth changed once men “began to call anything their own”. Once things are valued as property rather than for the good they have in themselves and as part of the universal scheme of things, the human relationship with them is deformed and human nature itself cannot act according to its proper place within the scheme of things. This is the great insight of the Stoics. The way the Stoics see how the whole universe is the embodiment of justice and providence, drawing all things to their natural perfection within the whole, makes most contemporary ecology or environmentalism look rather feeble by comparison. For the Stoics there cannot be a right relationship with the earth without right perception and inward justice.

“England is not a free people, till the poor that have no land, have a free allowance to dig and labour the commons...”

Gerrard Winstanley, 1649



To the Diggers and the Levellers natural law was clear and benefited all

We cannot draw to a close without mentioning the Diggers and Levellers of the seventeenth century – contemporary, we should note, with Hobbes and his degenerate conception of Nature and natural law. Here are the words of Gerrard Winstanley:

“And thus you Powers of England, and of the whole World, we have declared our reasons why we have begun to dig upon George hill in Surrey. One thing I must tell you more.....

“Break in pieces quickly the Band of particular Propriety [property], disown this oppressing Murder, Oppression and Thievery of Buying and Selling of Land, owning of landlords and paying of Rents and give thy Free Consent to make the Earth a Common Treasury without grumbling.....that all may enjoy the benefit of their Creation.

And hereby thou wilt honour thy Father and thy Mother : Thy Father, which is the spirit of community, that made all and that dwells in all. Thy Mother, which is the Earth, that brought us all forth: That as a true Mother, loves all her children. There-

fore do not hinder the Mother Earth from giving all her children suck, by thy Inclosing into particular hands, and holding up that cursed Bondage of Inclosure by thy Power.”

“Propriety and single interest divides the people of a land and the whole world into parties and is the cause of all wars and bloodshed and contention everywhere”

Gerrard Winstanley & 14 others The True Levellers Standard Advanced - April, 1649

And in A Declaration by the Diggers of Wellingborough – 1650, we read:

We find in the Word of God, that God made the Earth for the use and comfort of all Mankind, and set him in to till and dresse it, and said, That in the sweat of his brows he should eat his bread; and also we find, that God never gave it to any sort of people, that they should have it all to themselves, and shut out all the rest, but he saith, The Earth hath he given to the children of men, which is every man.

We find, that no creature that ever God made was ever deprived of the benefit of the Earth, but Mankind; and that it is nothing but covetousnesse, pride, and

hardnesse of heart, that hath caused man so far to degenerate.

These amazing Diggers and Levellers were not philosophers or scholars but ordinary men who saw in the teachings of the Scriptures the goodness of the creation and the wisdom of divine justice which, if lived by, would remove poverty and all strife from human society. To them it was clear that natural law and the Scriptures grant to everyone the use of the Earth, but not possession of it, and that all the hardships of mankind arise through claiming possession of what is given freely for proper use by all.

The Medieval theologian Meister Eckhart, in his *Talks of Instruction* which he gave to novices, says that in truth all things belong to God, and that so long as we desire to possess anything for ourselves, then we are removed from God. Therefore, he says:

*“...we should hold all things as if they were lent to us and not given, without possessiveness, whether it be body or soul, senses, powers, outward goods or honours, friends, relations, hearth and home, or anything at all”.*⁵



1. Virgil, *Georgics*, I/126-29, quoted by Richard Pipes in *Property & Freedom*, London, 199. p.10.
2. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I/134-36, quoted by Richard Pipes in *Property & Freedom*, London, 199. p.10.
3. Quoted by Richard Pipes in *Property & Freedom*, London, 199. p.11.
4. Quoted in Stephen Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume*, Oxford, 2002, p.36.
5. Meister Eckhart, *Sermons and Treatises*, Volume III, translated by M. O'C. Walshe, Longmead, 1987, p.54.

Solving the Housing Problem

Brian Chance considers a possible solution



THERE IS GENERAL agreement that more new homes should be built, but there is no general agreement about what prevents it. It is often suggested that planning problems delay the building of homes but evidence suggests that the major property developers could immediately start building much more quickly on the large number of sites with planning consent that are already held in their land banks.

It is also suggested that the real reason for limiting the number of houses built is to maintain and if possible increase the level of house prices. This policy is generally believed to be both desirable and necessary. It certainly appears to be current public policy. The 'Help to Buy' scheme has helped to increase prices.

Building enough new homes to force a reduction in selling prices would inevitably result in a general reduction of house prices as well. In a free market it is not possible to achieve both objectives at the same time.

Building costs are efficiently controlled and changes in house prices are predominately changes in the value of the land on which they are built. For a development project the land value is calculated as a residual amount by deducting construction costs, fees, interest and profit from the expected maximum selling price of the houses

to be built on it. The desirability of the location governs the price of the houses and therefore determines the value of the land. A forced reduction in the selling price of the houses must therefore reduce the value of the land and make the landowner reluctant to sell. Compulsion or subsidy would be needed to make sufficient land available.

Location governs price

To solve the housing problem it is the treatment of land value that needs radical reform. The value of land, expressed as the desirability of its location, is a social surplus generated entirely by the presence and work of society as a whole. At present, the owner of land used for building is able to capture in the selling price the full capitalised value of this social surplus.

The alternative treatment of land value is for the social surplus to be paid as land value tax (LVT) to the exchequer by the owners of the new houses, as annual compensation to the community for exclusive use of the plot. By returning the

land value to the community, to whom it rightfully belongs, the housing problem could be solved.

A simple solution

Prices for new houses, excluding roads drainage and other common services would be reduced to the cost of building the house. The greatly reduced purchase price would be more readily financed because it would be more easily repaid. LVT would be offset against an equivalent saving in direct and indirect taxation on earnings.

Property developers would use their expertise to build profitably the homes that purchasers were seeking. Land cost would be nominal and there would be no Community Infrastructure Levy (section 106 payments). Affordability would be determined solely by location, which would determine the LVT payable, and there would be progressively less need for the socially divisive policy of providing subsidised "affordable" housing.

Normalising supply and demand

Planning procedures would include weighing objections to change of land use against the need for revenue. This would be particularly relevant to proposals for building on green belt land. Location values and the consequent LVT assessments would be determined as a condition of the planning approval and subsequently revised annually in the light of current conditions. Freely negotiated location values would ensure an adequate supply of land. Normal laws of supply and demand would ensure that homes were available for all.

As with any radical reform, there would be losers, and justice would require a long and gradual introduction, to include comparable payments on homes already built.

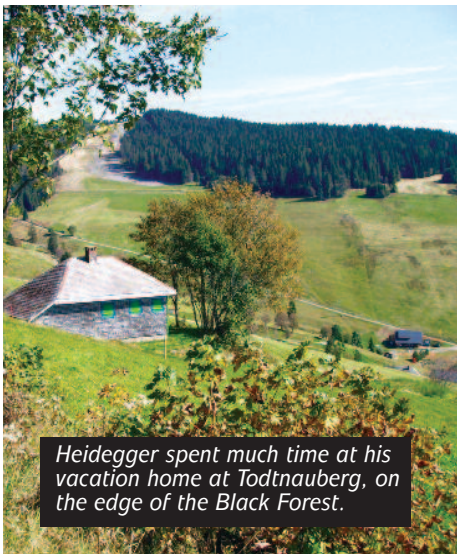
The time for objection is past. We cannot go on as we are. It is in everybody's interest to correct this great wrong in an orderly way before those with nothing to lose adopt more forceful tactics. The just and equitable long term housing policy must be for each to compensate society for the exclusive possession of land and for the revenue to be used to reduce taxation on earnings. This policy would provide affordable homes for all and solve the housing problem



Heidegger on Place and Dwelling

By Todd Mei

WHEN WAS the last time you happened to notice a place? Apart from unique events or moments when we remember an occurrence in relation to a location, we tend merely to pass through places, as if they were intermediary positions towards a destination or locations too plain and familiar to be worthy of thought. Should we be more attentive to place? And if so, how might this attention take shape?



Heidegger spent much time at his vacation home at Todtnauberg, on the edge of the Black Forest.

For the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), place is an essential part of human dwelling. Yet the task of understanding place is neither easy nor straightforward, and Heidegger identifies two obstacles.

The first concerns the way our conceptions of place have been influenced by the Galilean mathematization of nature (c. 1600) and the advent of Cartesian physics (c. 1630). The second is based on an insight original to Heidegger's own philosophy when he argues that our practical relations inevitably involve a tendency to forget about the very things that allow us to perform actions and realize projects.

When walking shoes 'disappear'

For example, in the activity of walking we may at first notice the importance of the proper type of shoes to wear (given the kind of walking—e.g., vigorous hike, city stroll, trudging through snow). However, during the walk, our initial way of

bearing in mind our shoes disappears. We simply focus on the walk and perhaps the scenery and destination; or perhaps we allow ourselves to be carried away by other thoughts. Heidegger summarizes this phenomenon in terms of disappearance: As soon as we use things in a practical way, they "disappear" in usage. Our relation to place, because it involves spaces of use (or what a famous anthropologist refers to as "task-scapes"), is of the same nature. Places for the most part tend to disappear as we rely on them to perform activities.

When seated halls 'disappear'

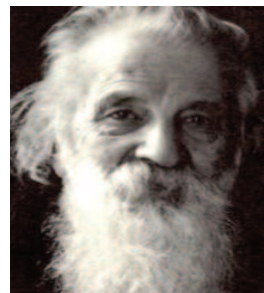
Consider, for example, how a concert hall is at first marked out by its unique design and location and how these features make an impression upon us as we wait to be seated for a performance; and furthermore, how these features that cause us to regard the place of the concert hall disappear from our attention once the performance has started. All those features that were at first prominent to us are, in effect, in the background; yet they allow for or enable the performance to occur.

From this example, one can get a sense of how Heidegger regards the role and significance of place. The way in which places are designed and constructed, not only make possible a certain range of activities, but more importantly, are determinate of the quality and meaningfulness of these activities. And yet because places disappear in our usage of them,

we can dwell in places not knowing how they affect us. This last consequence is decisive for Heidegger.

In what follows, I will provide a brief account of Heidegger's philosophical criticism of the Galilean-Cartesian legacy. This will allow us to see how he understands the way in which place plays a fundamental role in shaping human dwelling. From Heidegger's perspective, human activity is predominantly defined by seeing reality in terms of future possibilities of being. He refers to this as the "as-structure" of seeing. Place plays an essential role in concretely manifesting what we see "as" our future possibilities of being.

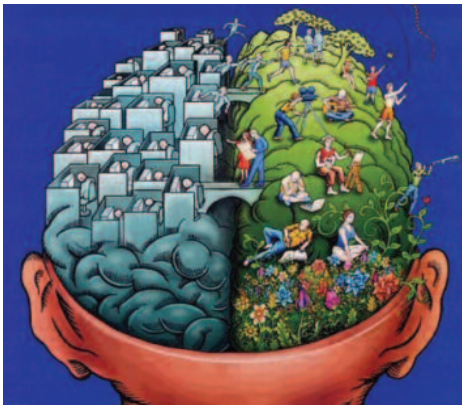
As the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard once said, our way of seeing place "augments the values of reality." A house is not simply a shelter but a form that imaginatively and practically synthesizes the values of function and beauty. The form, function and beauty are not simply extant properties; rather they actively allow us to exist in specific ways; we exist through these properties. Yet it is Heidegger's contention that apart from the occasional moment of astonishment, we dwell in a manner that is oblivious to the significance of place. And if this is the case, then it follows that we are also oblivious of our future possibilities of being.



Nature and Cartesian physics?

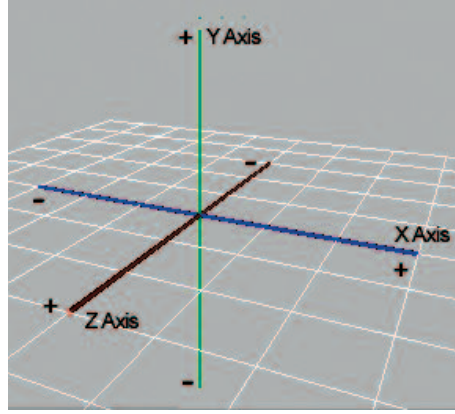
So what is it about the mathematisation of nature and Cartesian physics that should be of philosophical concern? In short, their respective move to formalise reality in such a way that processes (whether natural, artificial or human) can be represented by simplified relations, such as cause and effect. In doing so, those concerns or questions that do not fit into the simplified relations are deemed “externalities” and are expunged. Most often, such externalities involve meanings uniquely wed to human values and beliefs.

The variety, and in some cases incommensurability, of human values is a mire



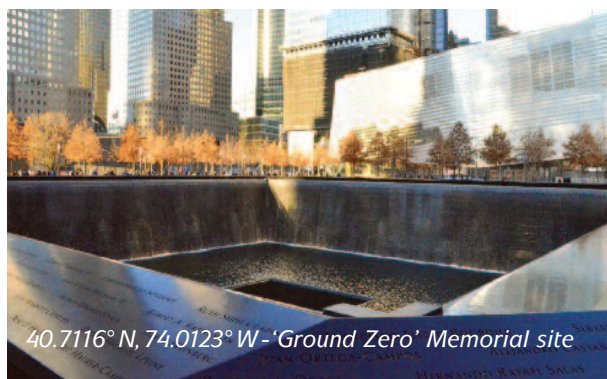
that formalism seeks to remove since its method cannot treat its plurality in any consistent and uniform way. A formal representation of human agency according to the rational choice theory recently used by economists, for example, assumes that decision-making is based on an almost perfect knowledge of information relevant to a decision. Rational choice is thus based on an ideal type: Given perfect knowledge, a rational agent would choose in favour of X. But as we know, real humans do not have perfect knowledge, and of course, there are a variety of other factors that someone might deem to be more important that rational choice theory does not take into account.

With respect to place, one of the consequences of this formalisation is a representation of the immediate environment around us as neutral, as if no prior and significant relations existed. Rather for Heidegger, and recalling my



comments above on use and equipment, things are already in a relation such that our dwelling is ordered and made possible by them. So when furnishing a room, we find the “place” of the room is already ordered in such a way that makes possible what we might deem to be an appropriate arrangement. And this is a unique feature of the world that cannot be accurately represented by formal means. A colleague of mine puts this case well. He notes, the Galilean-Cartesian legacy allows us to represent place mathematically (as a set of coordinates) and abstractly (as neutral and empty). The coordinates “40.7116° N, 74.0123° W” refer to an exact place which are useful for many purposes, such as mapping. Both this usefulness and the simplified numerical form of the coordinates seem quite innocuous. But tell someone these coordinates are “Ground Zero” in New York City, and suddenly the abstract area is “filled” with meaningful—that is, “lived”—content. And yet, we see that any place can be represented by coordinates, and furthermore, that as coordinates, place really loses its sense of locality. As one German philosopher noted, with this type of mathematisation, places are targets devoid of life and history; with the push of a button all life and history can be wiped out, and yet the coordinates will remain.

Heidegger would, of course, not deny that this formal representation presents us with new developments for practical life, at best making tasks more feasible and less burdensome; however and at the same time, he is uneasy with the way in which this representation removes a level of meaning more original to human existence than subsequent advances in scientific and technological reasoning



can provide (in fact, Heidegger says they cannot provide such meaning). Consider, for instance, how the Galilean application of mathematics has allowed for the development of different types of instruments. Heidegger would argue, though he was not alive at the time, that the emergence of mobile phones is a specific form of the instantiation of mathematised reality wherein we are dislocated from physical place. One need only recall how common it is for a conversation in which both interlocutors are physically present to one another to be interrupted by a call on a mobile phone. In fact, the incoming call often has precedence over the conversation. Everyday, physical existence is in this way broken such that the virtual space of mobile communication can manifest. I place what is physically nearest to me at the most distant reach when speaking on a mobile phone.

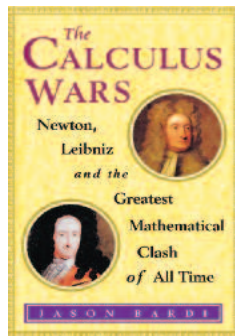
Human beings marginal utility

Or, let us make a bolder claim: The calculus developed by Newton and Leibniz allowed for the marginalist methods of economic analysis and prediction which represents human beings in terms of marginal utility. (Even Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill acknowledge the limitations of the role of human self-interest in economic method.) To quote the economists Stanley Jevons who compares the calculus of physics to economic agency,

Utility only exists when there is on the one side the person wanting, and on the other the thing wanted . . . Just as the gravitating force of a material body depends not alone on the mass of that body, but upon the masses and relative positions and distances of the surrounding material bodies, so utility is an attraction between a wanting being and what is wanted.

Homes now only equity

Whilst we may make a distinction between a purely economic conception of human agency, there is nonetheless the subsequent effect of





how such representations become imbedded in human practice. To begin, one can conjecture that if place really is ordered in such a way that it affects and relates to our dwelling so fundamentally, then to go about reconstructing or describing place in another way can have significant consequences. Today, places are no longer viewed in relation to dwelling but as ends that express marginal utility. We do not have homes but houses, where the former is for dwelling and the latter for equity (i.e., “the property ladder”).

Essential to these examples is how we lose touch with a fundamental relation to our immediate manner of dwelling and, more generally, nature. And this is to suggest that those practices which develop in this interval are free-floating and abstracted from reality. They are, as Heidegger would say, “uncanny”—that is, because they are so abstracted, they produce a sense of homelessness in which we think we are in touch with our existence but are really divorced from its fundamental dimensions of meaningfulness.

So what might be some positive examples that Heidegger would consider to express a “right” relation? One of his well-known accounts involves how a bridge spans two banks of a river. He says the bridge “gathers” different levels of meaning in and through its construction and location. That it spans two banks means that it now makes two communities, on either side of the river, near; they are neighbours. Depending on the type of bridge, it retains unique symbolic and aesthetic qualities. Perhaps the bridge symbolises a journey and sojourn of spiritual significance—that is, of crossing from one phase of life to the next. Whatever the meaning, a bridge

designed appropriately will not represent this meaning; rather, as Heidegger indicates by the term “gather,” the bridge enables such meaning to manifest. Meaning is located in and through place.

He refers to this meaning-giving feature of place according to the ancient Greek term *stadion* (measure). Place, in other words, provides a form of measure, if measure is understood in the sense of a perspective between various meanings. It is only through a room designed with a hearth that one gets a sense of measure about family life in contrast to a home whose centre is gathered by the television. Because of this measuring capacity of place, Heidegger says that place therefore “locates” our being. It is, in this sense, localising and a kind of being-at-home in the world.

And how do we know if we are at home in our dwelling? For Heidegger, the answer lies in understanding human destiny. But he does not intend this term to mean an unalterable course of human history. Rather, he marks a sense of the unfolding of history that is imminent according to a present situation or period. This situation can, of course, change; and thus the destiny would change. So what Heidegger is attempting to show is that the current forms of our understanding of place and dwelling have consequences that are consistent with this understanding. Should this understanding change, then so would the consequences (if it is not too late). To clarify this, Heidegger provides a lengthy and difficult examination of the ancient Greek term *moira*, which is often translated into English as “dispensation.” Our practices, says Heidegger, dispense a future possibility of which we may not be aware . . . because we do not understand what is actually occurring in these practices.

Place and human future

So let us return to place to see more clearly what Heidegger is attempting to show. Place gathers and manifests the locations through which we participate in existence and come to understand it. This understanding is, above

all, engaged with a concern for our future possibilities of being. The relation between place and human beings is in this sense circular: Place provides the conditions for our actual and possible being; as reflective beings, we create the places we need in order to dwell. It is clear in what I have said so far that for Heidegger we tend not to see this circular, mutual dependence.

We think instead that the only real pole of relation is the human subject who is not determined by anything like place in any substantial way. Rather, we can create and destroy places as we see fit. But this is only to assume place is really insignificant, and that the creative process of human making need only consider our own aims. Speaking cynically, one might say that this myopic and unbalanced view is readily noticeable in the modern places of urban sprawl and land development.



How attentive to and reflective of place are we today? And what types of conventions and practices are at play that may inhibit our relation to place? In many ways, Heidegger is not so much interested in the answers to these questions as he is in our ability to ask and receive these questions in the right manner. Whilst he does not prescribe what this right manner should be, he does nonetheless indicate an essential criterion for this reception. He speaks of a patient listening in order to hear what needs to be thought. For, like our understanding of human existence, the most significant issue is how we initially relate to that which is before us, as that which, as he would say, is most worthy of thought. How do we receive place? Do we receive it all? Or, do we find ourselves constantly ignoring the way places exist so that we can be somewhere else? Heidegger thought the ignorance of place was characteristic of the modern era; we dwell in place-less-ness, that is, we are homeless.

This may indeed be characteristic of modernity, but at the same time, it is not fated so long as we care to think.



The Bridge connecting St Paul's and Tate Modern

Book Review by Valentin Gerlier

What Money Can't Buy

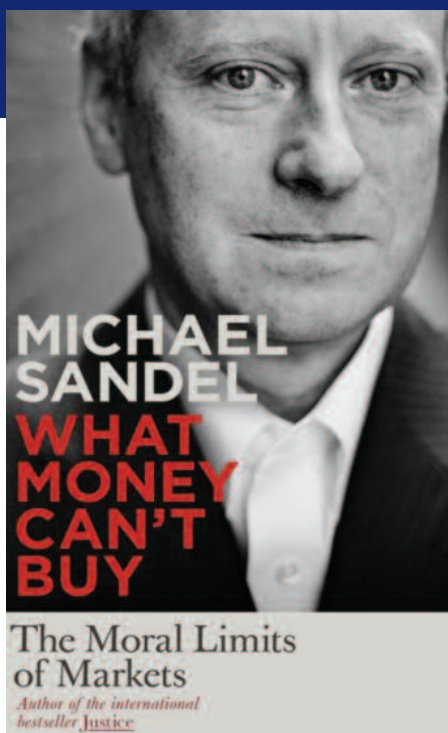
EVERYTHING HAS ITS PRICE' - a tired refrain that we too often hear. While philosophers and political thinkers may ponder the meaning of human society, economists, we are often told, practice a 'realistic' social science, founded on the age-old understanding that human beings are fundamentally self-interested creatures, for whom things only truly make sense when seen as tradable resources and financially valued goods.

Economics, it is said, is unencumbered by ethical considerations, since economic value is monetary, and hence morally neutral. 'Free markets', furthermore, appear to go hand in hand with the growth of democracy and liberal freedom, so why can't everything, ultimately, be up for sale? In recent years, however, this 'market triumphalism' has extended well beyond the sphere of what is usually viewed as tradable goods, and has come to involve areas of citizenship which, traditionally, were held to be of moral worth and civil virtue and thus financially beyond value: medicine, education, law, governmental issues and even family relations have now been invaded by ideas of 'incentives', naming rights and other market-related concepts.

In *What Money Can't Buy*, the moral and political philosopher Michael Sandel sets out a powerful argument that the value-neutrality of markets is a myth; that market-oriented thinking actually does constitute a certain kind of ethical commitment; and that the 'crowding out' of moral questions by market norms constitutes nothing less than a threat to the spirit of democracy.

Market Norms are part of our everyday life

Though steeped in a clear understanding of the history of moral philosophy, this book is, in fact, a clearly laid out, easy to follow empirical study. Its goals are to show, by means of a multitude of examples from a variety of fields, how and how much market norms are part of our everyday life. Whether exploring the history of life insurance, the widespread use of monetary incentives or the relentless sale of naming rights in the public and private sector, Sandel shows how, in each case, a tacit,



unarticulated 'market morality' actually ends up restricting the moral debate by replacing it, for in each of the cases, Sandel argues, 'What begins as a market mechanism becomes a market norm.' Paying children to get good grades, for example, may succeed in achieving better exam results, but it completely circumvents the question of the true end of education as something that might be valued in and of itself, or what might constitute mindful or meaningful study, and why such a thing should be considered as an important part of our society. And, in the same way, selling naming rights of private and public property inevitably bypasses the civic attitudes and virtues places such as a park, school or sports hall are seen to represent, uphold and stand for.

If market systems become accepted as norms, Sandel points out, they absolve citizens from their prime responsibility as members of a democracy: that of asking ethical questions, questions which refer to our ultimate ethical and spiritual values, and what he terms - after Aristotle - 'the good life'. 'We have to argue', says Sandel, 'about the meaning of social practices and the good they embody', and we have to ask ourselves 'whether commercialising the practice would degrade it'. For this reason, he notes, market mentality contains within itself an 'anti-democratic impulse': it removes the philosophical and enquiring spirit that is a foundational and essential requirement of

democratic societies. At the heart of Sandel's thesis is the simple insight that societies and social life are founded not on economic welfare or financial growth, but on a shared understanding of what this 'good life' is - and that is, what we ultimately value, morally, culturally, and also spiritually. Thus, to truly flourish, a democratic enterprise ought to have the forum for an open, thoughtful and frank debate as to the essential nature of the good life, and what virtues and practices we should promote and value above all else. What such an account of the good life would turn out to be, Sandel does not say - his task, in this book, is simply to show that market triumphalism is making such debate increasingly muted and restricted.

Arguments for and against market triumphalism

It is worth noting that, though concerned with moral questions, the book is in no way 'moralistic' in the usual sense. Sandel does not settle for an easy condemnation of commercialism. Instead, he points out how even critics of a commercial society appeal, by implications at least, 'to conceptions of the good life'. He carefully sets out the leading arguments for and against market triumphalism, pointing out how, in most cases, and despite the sense that many of us share that something distinctly ethical is being violated - the fundamental question of social life is rarely being addressed, neither by proponents nor critics.

This book, cogently, urgently and intelligently written, is fruit of the insight of a mature, clear thinker, who has his finger on the pulse of an ethical crisis that moves, unseen, behind the social thinking of our times. In his own way, Sandel brilliantly shows a modern audience that an age-old Aristotelian insight still holds true today: how injustice results, inevitably, from a human failure in thinking on the nature of Justice itself.

What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets by Michael Sandel,
Price: £12.80 Hardback, £6.74
Paperback, Allen Lane, ISBN-10:
184614471X



School's Poster Competition

£1000 in prizes to be shared between you and your school


£500 first prize; 5 runners up each receive £100

AS AN EDUCATIONAL CHARITY The Henry George Foundation of Great Britain is holding this competition for students who can produce colourful, eye-catching poster designs which it can use to promote and use alongside its newly commissioned film **'The Taxing Question of Land'**

The film explores how the use of land and the incidence of taxes affect the economic and social issues that challenge Britain's and the world's economists

during the present post crash period - just as they have done for many decades past. It suggests a fresh approach to economic reform and explores how this could be applied in practice in Britain today. It reflects the ideas of American economist Henry George who's genius has been recognised by such intellectual luminaries as Albert Einstein, Aldous Huxley, George Bernard Shaw, Leo Tolstoy, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stiglitz and many others throughout the world.

How to Enter

1. Watch the film on  YouTube
2. Produce, by hand or computer, an A3 poster which conveys the main ideas in the film and the connections between them.
3. Submit, by an email attachment, a digitised pdf file version of the poster by **3rd May 2014**. Include in the email (but not the poster) the name and age of the entrant and name and address of their school.



Conditions

1. Posters will be judged on content, style and effectiveness at conveying their message.
2. Posters should not include any information regarding the identity of the student or their school.
3. The Foundation reserves the right to use any winning entries for promotional and/or educational purposes and will not be able to return any entries after the competition.

The film may be seen via the Foundation's web site - www.henrygeorgefoundation.org, directly at www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpYSsME_h7E or simply Google **'The Taxing Question of Land'** and follow the link. Entries must be sent by email to office@henrygeorgefoundation.org by 3rd May 2014.



Additional Information If you require additional information about this competition or the Henry George Foundation or would like a representative of the Foundation to visit the school to present the film and lead a discussion on it please contact us at office@henrygeorgefoundation.org or call 0800 048 8537

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Our Philosophy



What is Land & Liberty?

Land&Liberty, a quarterly magazine published by the Henry George Foundation, has chronicled world events for over 100 years. Dedicated to promoting economic justice along lines suggested by the American writer, social reformer and economist Henry George, it offers a unique perspective to stimulate debate on political economy with its reports, analysis and comment.

Who was Henry George and what is special about his ideas?

In 1879 George published one of the best-selling books on political economy ever written, 'Progress and Poverty'. By the twentieth century the wisdom he expounded was recognised and supported by many of the world's most respected thinkers including, Tolstoy, Einstein, Churchill, Keller, Shaw, Huxley, Woodrow Wilson, Stiglitz, and Friedman. Today, as the world faces environmental and economic crises, we believe George's philosophy is more relevant than ever. But, as George foresaw in Progress and Poverty, and is inscribed on his gravestone:

"The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured."

Today Henry George is mostly remembered for his recognition that the systems of taxation employed in his day, and which continue to dominate fiscal policy in the UK and throughout the world, are unjust, inefficient, and ineffective.

He saw how taxes discourage wealth creation, positive economic activity and employment and prevent people and nations from realising their full potential. By ignoring property rights they involve theft and encourage dishonesty and environmental abuse. In short, as a method of raising public revenue, they fail. By offering an alternative, George also showed that taxes are unnecessary.

George realised that some land at particular locations acquired a value that was not due to the actions of any individual or firm but was due to natural influences and the presence, protections and services provided by the whole community. He saw that this value grows as the need for public revenue grows and is sufficient to replace all existing taxes. This could be collected by levying a charge based on land values and is commonly referred to as land value tax or LVT. However, George was clear that this is not actually a tax but is a rental payment individuals and groups need to pay to receive exclusive use of something of value from the whole community, i.e. the exclusive possession of a common, limited and highly-valued natural resource.

Henry George's ideas were not limited to his proposal to change taxes. His

profound body of theory also included issues such as: the difficulties inherent in the study of political economy, the fundamentals of economic value, a proper basis for private and public property, trade, money, credit, banking and the management of monopolies.

Key to 'the truth' that Henry George tried to make clear is that every thing is bound to act in accordance with the laws of its own nature. He saw that these laws of nature operate everywhere, at all times, and throughout a creation that includes man and society and the worlds of body, mind and spirit. Further, that people and societies can only behave ethically and succeed in their own designs where they take proper cognisance of, and act in harmony with, those natural laws.

This magazine is free, as are the meetings and classes of its publisher, the Henry George Foundation. However, we rely entirely on charitable donations of members, supporters and friends to survive.

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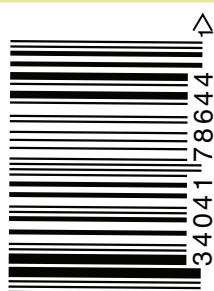
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