

# LAND & LIBERTY

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Issue 1257 Spring 2022

## *Society Shifting Gear?*

Ω

**Tommas Graves**  
*Signalling Young People  
Setting Out On Life*

Ω

**Joseph Milne**  
*Henry George And  
The Laws Of Nature*

Ω

**David Triggs**  
*Eulogy To  
Mr John Henderson Cormack*

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PROPORTION OF THE PRODUCE  
TO THE OWNERS OF LAND...

(AS USUAL, THE END OF THE QUOTE TO BE FOUND ON PAGE 19)



# LAND&LIBERTY

No 1257 Spring 2022

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## message from the honorary president

In an address delivered by Henry George at Burlington, Iowa, in 1885 Henry George spoke about 'The Crime of Poverty' and said 'I should like to show you that poverty is a crime. I do not mean that it is a crime to be poor. Murder is a crime; but it is not a crime to be murdered; and people who are in poverty I look upon not as criminals in themselves as much as victims of a crime for which others, as well perhaps, as themselves, are responsible.' This begs a question - which of us are then complicit in this crime? Are those who do not question the taxing of people for working and exchanging, or a means tested system of state benefits that constitutes a 'poverty trap', culpable?

In law abiding societies actions or omissions that transgress the laws that it makes are deemed crimes and, if the culprit or culprits can be identified, held and successfully charged, that society punishes them accordingly. In the natural world actions or omissions that contravene its laws i.e. the laws of nature, are not normally called 'crimes', (although genocide and ecocide are notable exceptions), and the consequences do not depend upon the culprits being identified, held or charged. However there are always consequences and there is no human power that can prevent or impede the operation of nature's laws. The most we can do, as we must do, in order to satisfy our needs and desires, is to act in harmony with nature's laws. It has only been by such actions that we have been able to gather, hunt and cultivate the food we eat, produce the buildings and clothes that house and protect us, traverse our planet by land, sea and air, and explore the space beyond our planet. Sadly though, needless desires can tempt us to ignore nature's laws and the socioeconomic and environmental crises that now confront humanity are two examples.

In *The Science of Political Economy* George identifies 'That which feels, perceives, thinks, wills; which to distinguish, we call mind or soul or spirit' as the most important factor or element in the world as we know it. He points out how it is '...the initiative of all our motions and movements'. Later, being more specific he says 'All human actions - at least all voluntary and conscious actions are prompted by desire, and have for their aim its satisfaction'. He goes on to point out how human desires are liable to increase with the ability to satisfy them and how that ability increases as the main mode of production develops from adapting to growing to exchanging i.e. trade. When we see this in connection with what he identified as the fundamental law of political economy i.e. that 'men seek to satisfy their desires with the least exertion' it is clear that in every age the prevailing quality of human desire determines what is valued, the culture, and the character of the man-made world in that age.

In his Burlington address George points out how 'The curse born of poverty is not confined to the poor alone; it runs through all classes, even to the very rich'. In the largely secular society in which we now live the consequences of offending a law of nature are rarely thought of as 'punishments'. However it is not difficult to see how someone who recognizes that spirit which is the initiative of all our motions and movements as the most important factor or element in the world as we know it, and who sees a yet greater spirit in operation throughout the universe, would!

Such a person might then seek to reconcile society's response to actions and omissions that transgress man-made laws - crimes and actions and omissions that transgress laws that are beyond human control - sins.

**David Triggs**  
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# CONTENTS

issue  
**1257**

SPRING 2022



## Regulars

17

### HGF News

The latest news and events of the Henry George Foundation in London

17

### Reviews & Books Worth Reading

Books Worth Reading provides an overview of the titles *The Law of Primitive Man*, *The Grip of Death: A study of modern money, debt slavery and destructive economics*, and *#WeAreRent II* by E. Adamson Hoebel, Michael Rowbotham, and Fred Harrison, respectively. No review in this issue while Edward J. Dodson sharpens his pen to evaluate *Land: How the Hunger for Ownership Shaped the Modern World* by Simon Winchester for our upcoming summer issue

## Cover Story

11

### Henry George And The Laws Of Nature

Joseph Milne links the truths found in ancient philosophy to the moral depths found in the works of Henry George



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## Features

7

### Political Economy? A Response

Duncan Pickard responds to the cover story in our recent autumn issue 1256

8

### Signalling Young People Setting Out On Life

What are the most prudent steps to take as a young person on the doorstep of adult life and responsibility? And what economic forces will shape your future? Tommas Graves has answers

18

### Closing Thoughts

David Triggs delivers a heartfelt eulogy to a man known both for his kindness and for being a true cornerstone in the inner workings of the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain: Mr John Henderson Cormack



# letter from the editor

I am sure we have all found that when we introduce friends to Henry George they straightaway raise several problems about implementing a land tax. Most often they will say their home will lose its value. For those still paying a mortgage that is a serious problem. Others will argue that the great monopolies will never allow the introduction of a land tax. These challenges can be met through a careful study of George's economic analysis and we need to tackle them here.

A much more interesting challenge I have encountered is from those who argue that the introduction of a land tax and opening up free trade would bring about an explosion of new wealth creation and even greater consumerism. This, they suggest, would be a bad thing and would lead to a deeper entrenchment in materialism. This position is harder to meet than those other challenges. And it is made even stronger by environmentalists who argue that it would cause further depletion of natural resources, loss of species and destruction of the ecosystem. They also argue that proposals to levy taxes on resource use in order to protect the environment shows that a land tax by itself does not establish economic justice or curb abuses of the land.

How can these challenges be met? They raise two fundamental questions. First, would the introduction of a land tax necessarily lead to a huge increase in consumerism and even greater depletion of natural resources? Second, would extra taxes put on resource use be a just or appropriate use of taxation?

To answer the second question first. It was a principle of George and of the early Georgists that taxation should never be used as a form of penalty or fine. Penalties belong to the judicial system. Using taxation in this way would undermine public understanding of the principle of the land tax as arising naturally from the advantage of the community. It would also require a bureaucracy to administer it, which again would defeat one of the principles merits of a land tax as easy to identify and collect. And, needless to say, all present taxes on production and labour are already penalty taxes discouraging production and exchange. The land tax is meant to replace all such penalty taxes. Also the land tax has a natural limit to the revenue it would raise. That natural limit is meant to correspond to the needs and duties of government. It is also meant to limit the possibilities of corruption – one of the arguments raised in George's time. Besides, industrial practices that are harmful to the community or which abuse nature may simply be made illegal. Taxes used to encourage or discourage behaviour defeat the principle of the land tax.

This forces us back to our first question. Would the introduction of a land tax necessarily lead to a huge increase in consumerism and even greater depletion of natural resources? This question is much more difficult to answer. It requires a leap of imagination to judge the real consequences of introducing the land tax. It is not enough simply to claim that it will remove rent exploitation and ensure labour receives its full wages. It would certainly remove those primary injustices, and that remains the most powerful argument in its favour.

But would it unleash a boom in production? If labour had higher wages, would that be the consequence? In terms of current economic thinking it certainly would. It is generally assumed that greater spending power would increase demand. On the other hand, where cheap labour has been used to keep market prices low, prices would rise. If the exploitative factor was removed from the economy we can assume it would attain a natural balance between demand and production.

Further, the restoration of the original social grounding of the economy would replace the distortions of absentee landlords, absentee shareholders, and exchange would no longer be anonymous. Profit-making would cease to be the sole purpose of economic exchange.

Economists such as Herman Daly have shown that the ever-growing economy is a result of distortions of the market, banking and land monopoly. Or, as others such as John Médaille have shown, it is a debt economy, with increased production met only by greater borrowing. It is in fact unsustainable. This unsustainability is reinforced by the built-in obsolescence of advanced products of technology. The ever-growing economy is not driven by market demand as such but rather by the pressure of ever-increasing debt. For example, graduates now enter the market already heavily in debt, or buying a home creates a lifetime debt. This unsustainable debt economy would not be carried over into an economy with the full land tax collected. Rather than be driven by a few major monopolies, the economy would diversify. Smaller enterprises would naturally arise. Wholly unsuspected talents and vocations would emerge and be released. Vast impersonal industries would no longer be attractive where more creative and independent careers would become possible. Individual initiative would be liberated within a deeper sense of community.

It is clear, then, that the land would take on quite different uses and our relation with the land would change. With smaller, local enterprises and cooperatives, wasted travel would be eliminated. The distribution of population on the land would also change, as George points out. With such changes becoming possible, the values of society would change. The mere accumulation of wealth would cease to be an end in itself, especially when the economy would no longer be driven by debt created by land and monetary speculation. All incentives to abuse the natural provisions of the earth would simply disappear. There is no *natural demand* for destructive industries. A truly free economy would not be exploitative of labour, land or capital. On the contrary, it would tend towards serving the common good.

And, as George envisaged, leisure time would be increased and cultural pursuits would spontaneously flourish. It is feasible that a three-day week would suffice to meet all material requirements. The economy would no longer be regarded as an end in itself but rather the foundation for an expanded social, civic and cultural life.

While we can only make tentative guesses at how the economy would change with the implementation of the land tax and how the new freedoms would be exercised in society, we can nevertheless assume it would seek to be more just and desire to remove all forms of exploitation, including the exploitation of the earth which is the counterpart to the exploitation of labour. In reply to those who suggest that the implementation of a land tax would necessarily lead to a huge increase in consumerism and even greater depletion of natural resources, it can be argued that the effect would be the reverse. Given the present concern for climate change, this is probably the greatest challenge Georgists are presently called upon to meet. It is inseparable from the primary Georgist concern for the causes of poverty.



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## IS WIDER KNOWLEDGE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY NEEDED TO SOLVE NATIONAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS?

My answer to the above is yes. Political Economy is the study of the production and distribution of wealth and needs to be returned to the economics courses taught in schools and colleges so that more people are able to understand how wealth is created and how it is distributed between the factors involved in its creation. Only then will more people be able to understand why there is poverty, underemployment, unemployment and increasing inequality in wealth and health, so that they can challenge politicians in sufficient numbers and persuade them to make the radical reforms of our taxation and monetary systems necessary for improvements to be made.

Most of the commentators on economic matters on radio, television and in newspapers have qualifications in economics but have little or no knowledge of Political Economy and were taught *Neoclassical Economics*, a title which gives the impression that it is based on the Classical Economics of Adam Smith, William Ogilvie, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, and Henry George. It should be called *anticlassical economics* because it does not accept the classical theory of the creation of wealth which says that Wealth is created by Labour using Capital and Land, and is distributed as Wages to Labour, Interest to Capital and Rent to Land. Anticlassical economists say that Land is Capital and Land is not a separate and distinct factor and therefore Rent is irrelevant. They consistently declare that high and rising house prices are beneficial to the national economy but the opposite is true and they are unable to see that the high prices are due to the high price of land. This means that few are aware that the price of houses will not be reduced by building more houses because banks can create money for mortgages from nothing, faster and more easily than houses can be built.

Gross Domestic Product is a poor indicator of national prosperity since nothing is produced by much of what constitutes GDP. For example, the increase in the price of land on which new houses are built does not produce more land, and money which is wasted on futile government projects still contributes to GDP, which would be better described as GDC, Gross Domestic Cost. A new index is needed but few are able to define GDP and even fewer are competent to challenge its use.

A revolution in education is needed to return Political Economy to the core of the teaching of economics in universities but those who are in charge of what is currently taught are not likely to take kindly to being told that what they were taught and what they have been teaching for decades is useless for understanding how the economy should function and why there are booms and recessions, which are completely avoidable. Advanced mathematics constitutes most of what is taught instead of Political Economy and hardly anything is said about economic history. Every student of economics should read *Progress and Poverty*, written by Henry George in 1879. There is little time spent on discussion or criticism and only those who are talented in mathematics are deemed suitable to be called economists. The Classical Economists described their theories without the use of complicated mathematical equations or meaningless jargon so that even uneducated people could understand what they said.

Unless Members of Parliaments who are ultimately responsible for funding the establishments which teach and do research in *economics* can be persuaded to revolutionise what is taught, nothing will change. More people could become aware that economics is a simple subject to understand if it is stripped of all jargon and words such as Capital, Land and Rent are used according to their proper economic meaning. 🗨️

*Editor's note:*

*This article is a written response to the cover story "Economic Infighting: Is Political Economy The Right Answer?" by Edward J. Dodson in Land&Liberty issue 1256.*

*A lively and active discourse surrounding Land&Liberty and its content is most welcome. Your editors encourage responses to all Land&Liberty articles, past and present.*

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## SIGNALLING YOUNG PEOPLE SETTING OUT ON LIFE

The first thing I should say to you is, “Have you equipped yourself with a skill?” The reason why this is so important is that it gets you away from the lowest paid sector of society. The minimum wage is £8.91 per hour. With a skill, your wages will rise to £18 per hour, maybe more. The government has promised to raise the minimum to £10.50, but no one knows how much of this will go into increasing rents.

But it is clear that the lowest wage is not sufficient to live on. You would be relying on social assistance, government handouts etc.

The added value per person in the UK is shown as £29356 a year by ONS tables. That is an estimate of the value of a person’s contribution to the country. The person on minimum wage receives gross pay of £16,350 of this. But then, tax is deducted. Taxes direct and indirect reduce this to £9,818. This is the share of the added value created which is left to them.

So, the person on minimum wage has £188 per week. Average rents for a small home are quoted at £200 per week. To buy with a mortgage is £170 per week, or to have a local authority home is £110 per week. This leaves precious little for food and clothing, and the person cannot exist without help from the State, which of course is paid for by the taxes paid.

So, it appears that we create poverty on purpose. The question is, “Why do we do it like that?” How do we get out of this fix? At present we do it by a system of benefits. A representation of these is given below. Strangely enough the result is very close to their contribution to added value!

### WHY ARE THE LOWEST WAGES INSUFFICIENT?

There is a long history to this. Since the Elizabethan age, the aristocracy set about enclosing the land. This was justified they said, by the need to produce more food using better farming methods. But the downside was that the landowners now owned the food, and labourers had to buy it from them.

The enclosure movement continued apace. It was regulated by government but heavily in favour of landlords, who also were the government themselves. Means of dissent were closed off, by such things as demanding solicitors’ representation, and the requirement to fence any land retained. Often, they had no option but to sell to the nearest large landowner, because they had no funds for such expense.

By about 1830, the aristocrats had enclosed most of the land area. Full land enclosure meant that the landlords were in a position to dictate wages. They set it at “just enough” to live on, in order to be able to carry on labouring.

If you want to look into this, a good source is two books written by J L Hammond and Barbara Hammond *The Village Labourer 1760 to 1832* and *The Town Labourer 1760 to 1832*.

### WHY DOES ALL THIS MATTER TODAY?

In the first place, nothing has changed. No government has attempted to right the original wrong. But now we need an excursion into economics. By their action the landlords captured “location value” and some of the wages as well.

The rent you pay is made up of two parts. The first part is the hire charge for the property being let. This effectively diminishes over the years until the house is demolished. The second part is the location value. That is the value of all the amenities surrounding the plot; roads, railways, sewers, services, nearness to a city or other desirable factors, all such things. The main feature of these amenities is that they have been supplied over the past by government action or initiatives by groups of people. You can ask yourself three questions: 1. What is location value? 2. Who created it? 3. To whom does it belong? By natural law you can only arrive at the conclusion that it rightly belongs to the community, which created it. But the landlords captured it.

The mechanics of capture is to charge that part of rent, which is called location value. The landlords are able to do this because of full land enclosure. There is no alternative. Land is given to us free by nature, just as is air and water. Consider this. By its nature land is provided free to all, humans, animals, plants and all. In truth it does not belong to landlords. But because they have captured it, it has a value that can be bought and sold. This becomes the value of land. Because of this, no-one on the minimum wage has a hope of owning a house to live in. Here is the cause of the housing crisis.

The landlords also captured some of the earnings of the people they employed. But what should a wage be? Is it just a matter of negotiation? Henry George, writing in the 1870s, produced a best-selling book, *Progress and Poverty*. He introduced it with the words, “To those who seeing the vice and misery that spring from the unequal distribution of wealth and privilege feel the possibility of a higher social state, and would strive for its attainment.” George came to the conclusion that the only natural law applicable to wages is, “What a man makes is his”. Think about that.

The corollary is that what a man does not make is not “his”. Here is the whole natural world, and especially land. But as he has captured location value by enclosing all the land, he can also capture part of wages, especially from those in the lowest tier. *Progress and Poverty* is well worth careful study.

Tommas Graves is an accountant and lifelong supporter of the Henry George Foundation. He hosts Land is Free at [landisfree.co.uk](http://landisfree.co.uk)



**WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?**

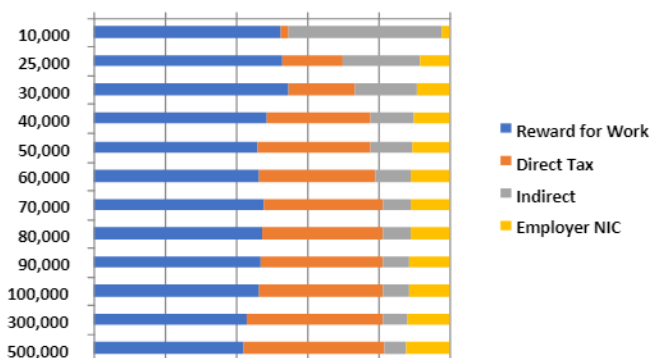
The government of the day introduced taxation. The first Income Tax was brought in by William Pitt the Younger to finance the Napoleonic Wars. As time went on, it became clear that measures had to be undertaken to protect the lowest paid and this was the beginning of the welfare state.

But then, a very interesting phenomenon developed. If wages had been forced so low, how were the poor to pay taxes? The result was that rent was reduced by the amount of taxes applied to wages. Nowadays, rent received by landlords is much lower than it was at first, but in the mean-time the landlords have amassed a huge store of wealth, which they invest in bonds, shares, land and other assets. Much of it is lent to government via bond auctions. So, the capture of location value and part of wages led in the first place to massive inequality, then a debt mountain.

When disasters have to be faced, such as war, or pandemics, the wealth is no longer in the whole population, but in a few pockets protected by "ownership". The government has no choice but to borrow these locked up funds, and the lenders want a reward for that which may be interest, profits, or speculators profits. So, we have accumulated a huge debt over the years.

**DO WE KNOW HOW MUCH TAX WE PAY?**

We probably have no idea... Although direct taxes are fairly easy to see, there are a large number of indirect taxes. Here is a chart, which shows the rough effect of both direct and indirect taxes.



For the given wage on the left, the blue is what is left after the taxes in orange, grey and yellow. As you can see, for the lower paid, indirect taxes take the largest share of their wage. This is mainly VAT. The total taxes amount to approximately half of all wages. I call this 'Employers Burden' because the employer appears to be paying twice as much as the real reward for work. This amounts to 100% tax on wages.

To my way of thinking the two captures of location value and part of the reward for work were two massive acts of stealing. After nearly two centuries it still continues. As a result, we face inequality, a housing crisis, poverty and a debt mountain. These punishments are unfortunately not suffered by the debt mountain. These punishments are unfortunately not suffered by the perpetrators, but by the lowest paid.

**CAN ANYTHING BE DONE ABOUT IT?**

The problem is enormous. With the expansion of trade and colonialism, the same system appeared all over the world mostly with no conception of the likely results. Some whole countries became owned by a few families. These families became wealthy and powerful. It is true that some introduced land value taxes, following the message from Henry George. But it was always insufficient to meet the main problem. No-one was prepared to simply put right the original wrong.

What we should do is that land should be held on secure tenure, not amounting to ownership. The user has the right to use it subject to paying the community the location value of that site. The location value is the natural recompense to the society, which together has provided all the benefits of a site. Society then does not need taxation.

The result would be that no-one would hold land they did not need. This would produce freedom for the vast number of those, able to work. We would have the option of setting up by ourselves, where we could receive the whole value of our efforts. Businesses would be bidding up the wages for working for them. Partnerships and common ownership arrangements would flourish.

The price of land would reduce to nil, as the rents, which sustained it, were exchanged for the payment of location value to the state. A house could then be bought for the building costs alone. The non-payment of rents would bring inequality gently to a close. Then, inequality would only result from extra work or talent. Every improvement of facilities would bring a natural reward in higher location values.

**CONCLUSION**

I hope I have said enough to convince you to obtain a skill to keep you away from the lowest level of wages. If you have also picked up some crusading zeal and might put it into practice, I am delighted. All that is needed is a conscience and some knowledge. I give below the names of some of the societies and crusading groups who still continue to spread the ideas for reform.

Best of luck! 🍀







## A SOCIETY NEEDING TO SHIFT GEAR: HENRY GEORGE AND THE LAWS OF NATURE

In *Progress and Poverty* Henry George frequently calls upon the 'laws of nature' or 'natural law', or upon 'universal justice'. It is worth exploring what he means by these expressions. One does not find them in current economic theory. Occasionally one hears a politician calling for justice, but often this is more a call for retribution than for justice. But one never hears modern economists invoke the 'laws of nature' or 'natural law'.

This gap between the language of George and the prevailing language of economics calls for enquiry. There is a need to understand why economic language has so radically changed from concrete to abstract terms, and why the notions of justice and natural law have fallen away from the discipline. There is a complex history that needs to be explored here. But more immediately, we need to grasp what George himself meant by the 'laws of nature', 'natural justice', and 'universal justice'. There is a danger that we may read these expressions as merely rhetorical, as emotive language to stir the heart but not reason. Indeed, there are proponents of George who set aside his appeals to natural law and justice and attempt to reduce his work simply to a fiscal policy, and so bring his thinking more into line with modern economic models.

It is worth hearing how George speaks of law and justice. For example:

*In permitting the monopolization of the opportunities which nature freely offers to all, we have ignored the fundamental law of justice—for, so far as we can see, when we view things upon a large scale, justice seems to be the supreme law of the universe. (Progress and Poverty Book X, Chapter 5)*

This is a very bold assertion. Are we persuaded that "when we view things upon a large scale, justice seems to be the supreme law of the universe"? Is this a poetic or figurative way of speaking, or does George expect us to recognise a universal truth here? This is a very important question, because the founders of modern political and economic theory in the seventeenth century disputed over the idea of universal justice.

Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes, for example, claimed there

was no such thing as universal justice, as the ancient philosophers held, and that justice existed in society only by way of common consent or contract between a people and their government. Justice is nothing more than agreed convention. In what they called the 'state of nature', a condition they imagined existed prior to society, each man lived under his own law and entirely for himself. In Hobbes' famous phrase, this state of nature was a condition of 'war of all against all'. The establishment of society and government, he argued, aimed at restraining this natural human condition so that there would be peace between people, rather than the rule of natural war. It is the fear of reverting to the state of violence that holds society together and shapes its laws, rather than any natural justice. According to Hobbes, the basic law of human nature is the 'fear of death', and it is this fear of death that drives us to create society for protection from one another.

This way of thinking carries through into John Locke, although Locke seeks to disguise it by referring to Hooker, and into the general consciousness of modern society. It is the foundation of liberal individualism, where society is considered to work at its best when each person acts for their own interests. Individual interest is equated with freedom or liberty, a social philosophy most highly developed by Herbert Spencer in George's time. In its modern form it manifests as moral relativism, in the belief that all truths and values are merely pragmatic.

These founding ideas of modernity are powerful and permeate everywhere from the popular media to academia. So when George suggests that justice is the 'supreme law of the universe' he is attributing a moral dimension to the order of nature that is wholly foreign to current thinking, but which was still recognised in his times by ordinary people through the Christian doctrine of providence, and which had deep roots in the medieval understanding of nature. Indeed, it was this medieval understanding of the providential order of nature that Bacon and Hobbes vigorously opposed. Contrary to the theory of Hobbes, George observed that ordinary people were naturally inclined to socialise and to cooperate, and that it was this natural inclination to cooperate and work together that distinguished the human species from all others.

# cover story

In George's time the ideas of Bacon, Hobbes and Locke had not yet permeated the thinking and attitudes of ordinary people. It was the 'intellectuals' who had adopted the new thinking, while the ordinary citizen still lived under the wing of the sense of natural justice, common decency, and the Christian ethic of respect towards one's neighbour. The sense of 'natural justice' has deep roots in cultural history, in Roman jurisprudence throughout Europe and in the English tradition of common law, and in the Christian understanding of divine providence we just mentioned. The biblical commandments such as 'Thou shalt not steal' still had force and seemed entirely just. To this may be added that people lived in closer contact with each other in George's times, and so their morality sprang more directly from the feeling of belonging to a community. The closer people live and work together, the stronger the sense of moral commitment.

In his writings George speaks to this sense of natural justice and community which still resonated with his audience. He was able to address an intuitive knowledge of justice that all ordinary people have, but which was lost in the cleverness of the 'intellectual' economists and social theorists for whom 'intuition' had no place. The ordinary people, however, are not as articulate as the intellectuals of the day, and so over time their intuitive knowledge of justice is crowded out by the powerful and intricate writings of the leading intellectuals. History testifies that if an untruth is spoken or written with great skill and power, it becomes persuasive. Or as George says in Chapter 41 of *Progress and Poverty*: 'the idea of justice is blurred by the habitual toleration of injustice'.

It is notable that the early followers of George have an enthusiasm grounded in goodwill. One can see this in the early issues of *Land&Liberty* and its predecessor the *Single Tax*. This goodwill springs from a recognition of the goodness of justice and a desire for the common good. It is never factional. This is very different with the followers of Marx, fired by the idea of class struggle, and who are driven by anger and a desire for retribution rather than by goodwill. But a just society cannot emerge from anger any more than it can emerge from fear of death. Anger at injustice is not the same as the love of justice.

The traditional understanding of justice is grounded in the tradition of natural law: 'For Liberty means Justice, and Justice is the natural law—the law of health and symmetry and strength, of fraternity and co-operation' writes George in *Progress and Poverty*. Are liberty and justice equated in modern thought? Is liberty now associated with health and symmetry, or with fraternity and co-operation? Clearly not. The conception of liberty has changed. Liberty now commonly means being independent and going one's own way. It is conceived as freedom *from* law, rather than freedom *in* justice and co-operation. It is an atomistic notion of free will. The individual takes precedence over society and co-operation. This is precisely the Hobbesian view, where society is taken, at its most modest, to be a mere convenience for each individual to pursue their own desires. The natural law, contrary to this atomistic conception of society, is the law belonging to nature as a whole, and to society and to humanity within nature as a whole. It is the law that relates every part of nature together in order that each may play its natural part within the whole, and may contribute to the good of the whole. It is the 'health and symmetry' of the whole, exactly as George says. George's understanding of natural law and justice is far closer to Marcus Aurelius and Cicero than to Hobbes or Locke.

This understanding of natural law needs to be distinguished from the 'laws of nature' as conceived by Bacon and the rise of modern science. The scientific conception of laws in the physical universe is that of laws governing things from outside. Thus gravity pulls a stone down to the earth, or the rays of the sun cause plants to grow. This mechanistic conception of the laws of nature is foreign to the ancient conception of law. The traditional conception of law conceives of each thing as ordered within its own nature and completed through actualising itself in conformity with its own nature and as a part of nature as a whole. Law is the nature of a thing, not an influence governing it from outside. Its essence and its law are the same, or its law is the expression of its essence. The new scientific conception of the laws of nature imposing themselves on things from outside coincides with the rise of deism – the conception of God as a being governing the world from outside, or setting it in motion like a clockwork machine and leaving it to run by itself. Such a conception of nature has no ethical dimension. Law becomes mere depiction with neither teleological nor ethical implications.

This new shift in thinking gave birth to the idea of civil law ruling society from outside, or of government or the state imposing its will upon its subjects. This in turn gave birth to the notion of an irresolvable conflict between the citizen and the state. And from this arose an apparent conflict between the individual good and the common good. The various notions of social contract are intended to arbitrate this assumed conflict.

When George speaks of 'natural law' or the 'law of nature' he does not mean this scientific conception of law. Neither does he mean laws which governments may devise and impose upon the state. He means the laws of natural justice inherent in the order of the universe and recognised by reason and conscience. This understanding belongs to the ancient tradition of natural law which was discarded by the seventeenth century thinkers. It was their new mechanistic notion of the laws of nature which opened the way for Herbert Spencer's theory of 'survival of the fittest' and to Social Darwinism among George's most vocal opponents.

How far George was aware he was calling upon this ancient tradition we cannot be certain. From his writings it is clear that he was familiar with ancient history and the ancient conceptions of society as cooperative rather than individualistic. He refers to Marcus Aurelius several times, and also to Thomas Aquinas. Marcus Aurelius was a Stoic, and we have from the Stoics the fullest elaboration of Roman natural law – in Zeno of Citium, Cicero and Seneca, as well as Marcus Aurelius himself. But these in turn go back to Plato and Aristotle. So far as I am aware, we have no record of the ancient writings George might have read. It seems he did most of his reading in libraries. We can only go by the occasional historical reference, but mostly by the spirit of his writing about law and natural justice.

It is important, however, to appreciate that the new scientific mechanical conception of law was fiercely opposed at the time of Bacon and Hobbes. The sixteenth century was a time of great theological, philosophical and political debate and turmoil. In Britain the resistance to the new thinking came mainly from either jurisprudence or moral philosophy. The great barrister and jurist Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634), for example, defended the English tradition of common law, which is founded in the natural law. He wrote:





*The Law of Nature is that which God at the time of creation of the nature of man infused into his heart, for his preservation and direction; and this is lex aeterna, the Moral Law, called also the Law of Nature. (Sir Edward Coke, Selected Writings of Sir Edward Coke, Volume 1)*

The *lex aeterna*, the eternal law, that he invokes stands in direct opposition to the new notion that human laws originate in the will of the ruler, or by agreement or contract, first formulated by Machiavelli and adopted with praise by Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes. The notion of the 'will of the ruler', which replaces the *lex aeterna*, has roots further back than Machiavelli in the nominalism of William of Ockham (1285 - 1347). Nominalism is the theory that there are no universals, only particulars, and that any universal is an intellectual notion only. For example, 'mankind' is an idea or concept abstracted from particular human beings which has no reality beyond that of a classification. This means that there is no such thing as 'being' but only individual beings, or no such thing as 'truth' but only particular truths. Universals are merely intellectual concepts. But this also means that there is no such thing as 'justice', only individual instances of just acts. There are no universals in reality, but only in concept.

William of Occam also introduced a shift in how theology conceived God. He held that the divine will was prior to the divine intellect, thus inverting the traditional understanding that the will of God is informed by divine wisdom. This meant that the will of God stood by itself and was totally free. And this in turn meant that the divine will was arbitrary and even free from its previous acts which could not bind it.

It was this voluntarist conception of God that found its way into the notion of the 'divine right of kings', where law becomes the will of the sovereign, and law has no other source. This was the notion adopted by Machiavelli and later by Bacon and Hobbes. It has been very powerful and even today it still has its descendent in rule by 'the will of the people'. The 'will of the people' is no more a ground for law or justice than the 'will of the sovereign' or the will of a tyrant. This is because justice is not rooted in will, but in the true order of the universe, in nature. It is the *lex aeterna*, not the arbitrary rule of an individual or of popular demand. Also, combined with nominalism, it is the root of individualism - the conception of society composed only of autonomous individuals each seeking their own self-interest. Such self-interest is rooted in will, not reason. These are the grounds for the rise of 'moral relativism', where private values replace universal justice and the virtues.

As just mentioned, this new thinking was strongly opposed. There was another famous jurist, Matthew Hale (1609 - 1676), who wrote a book entitled *Of the Law of Nature*, in which he expounds the ancient tradition of natural law, beginning in Plato and Aristotle, through the Stoics and Aquinas, and English common law. Hale observes two things contrary to the new thinking:

*1. That there is a natural propension in Man to Society, even antecedent to any discursive operation of the mind: And 2. That this is no casual incidence in the Nature of Man, but an instituted Character, imprinted upon that Nature which appears by this, that by the advantage of speech, and instituted Signs (which no Creature besides Man is capable of) he is adapted and fitted to that sociability that his Nature is inclined to. (Matthew Hale *Of the Law of Nature*, p. 99)*



Hale is directly referring to Aristotle here, for whom every person is by nature social and political, and whose natural inclination and state is to live in society as he says in Book One of the *Politics*. The view that society is natural to human nature was directly opposed by Hobbes. For Hobbes society arises not from 'natural propension', but rather from fear and the desire for protection. We must remember that for Hobbes the ruling passion in human nature is the 'fear of death'. For him it is this fear that drives all other desires, and the human will itself proves to be rooted in fear. Yet without naming Hobbes, Hale directly opposes this new idea:

*And therefore it is but a narrow and weak conjecture that fear was the primum Movens [prime motive] of Man to the entering into society, since it is apparent that this natural propension placed in Man is antecedent not only to the actings of the passions, but in some measure antecedent even to any act of deliberations of the mind.* (Matthew Hale *Of the Law of Nature*, p. 99)

Here is a very important choice we are called to make in our understanding of human nature and the nature of society. While Hobbes proposes that fear is what drives human beings together into society, Hale, following Aristotle and Cicero, proposes that man is by nature a social being, inclined to society prior to any passion or even any rational deliberation. Society is simply the natural human condition, the true state of nature. It is based upon a conception of nature understood as designed and ordered towards cooperation and mutual benefit. Henry George understands nature in the same way. In *Progress and Poverty* he writes:

*The laws of the universe are harmonious. And if the remedy to which we have been led is the true one, it must be consistent with justice; it must be practicable of application; it must accord with the tendencies of social development and must harmonize with other reforms.* (Book VI Chapter 2)

This matches perfectly what Hale says of the harmonious nature of human society:

*Therefore there is a further advantage namely the mutual communication and participation of one Man in that good that he wants, and another hath or hath in greater abundance, for Nature hath so ordered the several states and conditions of Men that one Man stands in need of what another hath, and this creates necessitude between one Man and another, and by this disposition of the Divine regiment of things, there is a Mutual necessitude and indigence of mutual Offices between Man and Man.* (Matthew Hale *Of the Law of Nature*, p. 99)

And what Hale says here is echoed in the quotation George makes from Marcus Aurelius in *Progress and Poverty*:

*Economic law will prove the perceptions of Marcus Aurelius: 'We are made for cooperation—like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of the upper and lower teeth.'* (Book VI Chapter 2)

The human species may flourish only through cooperation. A society forms a natural whole, like the body, with its 'mutual Offices', where each part serves the good of the whole. The natural good of human society manifests only through mutual good. There follows from this a natural distribution of human gifts that match the needs of each. Hale describe it thus:





*...one Man hath more wit, another more Courage, another a good Naturalist or Physician, another a good Orator, one dexterous in Mechanicks of one kind, another of another; And the advantage of Consociation makes the Communication of the good of one to another more ready, facile and useful, and by this means one Man is as it were mortis'd into another and contiguated by the communication of offices and supplying of wants each of other; (Matthew Hale *Of the Law of Nature*, p. 100)*

Matthew Hale also opposes the new deism, which gives primacy to the will of God, with the traditional understanding of God's acts being expressions of his divine wisdom:

*First from the Author of them who is a God of infinite wisdom, and therefore doth every thing by the most exact wisdom, ordering every thing to most suitable Ends and conducting every thing to those Ends by most suitable means; It is he that hath drawn these Lines & Strictures of those Natural Laws in the human Nature; (Matthew Hale *Of the Law of Nature*, p. 107)*

Although Hale speaks here as a Christian, this passage could equally be derived from Plato, Aristotle or Cicero. For here we have the ground of natural law itself as an expression or manifestation of the "exact wisdom" that informs and guides nature everywhere, ordering all things to their natural ends through the most suitable means. It is a 'teleological' or 'purposeful' view of nature, which sees the nature of things in their ends, or their completeness. Everything in the universe tends towards perfection or to the fullest order of being. Seen in this way, the universe is filled with wisdom and intelligence. This is to see nature rightly, and seen in this way humanity can discern the right way of living that is in harmony with the wisdom manifest in nature. By conforming reason to the harmonious order of nature, the human being can discern the laws that belong to society by nature, and through which it may flourish in justice and in peace. Here the 'will' performs its proper office of assent to truth and justice in obedience to reason.

This way of observing the order and unity of nature was lost in the seventeenth century, displaced by an abstract atomistic notion of nature no longer grounded in direct observation. The traditional understanding was rejected and regarded as utopian and wholly impractical, the idle dream of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. The new 'empiricism' is not so much based upon the impartial observation of nature, as it is claimed, but rather upon a *mechanical theory* of nature and the power of the human will to master and direct it. According to this view, nature does not have any natural ends or *telos*. It is merely passive resources, with no intrinsic value or meaning of its own. This is the Machiavellian way of beholding the world. It is for man to impose his own ends upon nature. Thus the ancient harmonious understanding of the order of nature is rejected because it is incompatible with the new notion of the primacy of will.

It is not hard to see how these ideas still subtly permeate modern economic thinking, reducing it to mechanical exchanges of 'products' ruled by indifferent 'market forces'. And this is reinforced by the individualism that sees each person in competition with every other, where 'enlightened self-interest' becomes a more refined name for 'war of all against all', and which serves as the foundation of Herbert Spencer's new 'social science' which George challenges in *A Perplexed Philosopher*. There is neither society nor ethics in such a view. It is here where

George's understanding of economics is profoundly different. He understands human nature as essentially rational and cooperative and society itself as the natural human condition.

We have seen how this nominalist view was opposed by the English jurists of the seventeenth century. But it was also opposed in the sixteenth century by the influential theologian Richard Hooker (1564–1600), who with great foresight anticipated the fragmentation of society through the religious and political conflicts of his time. Drawing on ancient philosophy and the scholastics, he forcefully endorsed the communitarian understanding of human nature and society:

*Civil society doth more content the nature of man than any private kind of solitary living, because in society this good of mutual participation is so much larger than otherwise. Herewith notwithstanding we are not satisfied, but we covet (if it might be) to have a kind of society and fellowship even with all mankind. Which thing Socrates intending to signify professed himself a citizen, not of this or that commonwealth, but of the world. (Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book 1, Chapter X)*

We do not know if George read Richard Hooker. It is improbable. Yet I believe he would have endorsed every word of this statement of Hooker's, and perhaps especially his idea of being a citizen of the world. That vision of Socrates, as a citizen of the world, found its fullest expression in the Stoics, who understood the entire cosmos itself to be the 'city of gods and men'. It is from the Stoics we have the word 'cosmopolitan', the idea of the human citizen living in harmony with nature and blessed with the wisdom of the gods.

If George read Cicero, if not Hooker, then he would certainly have endorsed this passage from his *Treatise on the Commonwealth* where Scipio says:

*Well then,—A commonwealth is a constitution of the entire people.—The people, however, is not every association of men, however congregated, but the association of the entire number, bound together by the compact of justice, and the communication of utility. The first cause of this association is not so much the weakness of man, as the spirit of association which naturally belongs to him—For the human race, is not a race of isolated individuals, wandering and solitary; but it is so constituted for sociality, that even in the affluence of all things, and without any need of reciprocal assistance, it spontaneously seeks society. (Cicero, *Treatise on the Commonwealth* Book I: 25)*

Now, as sympathetic as George might be with these ancient ideas, his way of arriving at them is not the same. He is a man of the nineteenth century, and the understanding of reasoning about things has changed. George adopts the way of arguing from effect to cause – which is not how Hooker or Cicero argue. For example, in the chapter on Natural Law in *The Science of Political Economy* George discusses how we seek to understand things through tracing their causes. From this way of thinking he infers there must be a first cause and a divine will behind the created world.

Now while this way of reasoning is appropriate for many things, it is not appropriate for understanding natural law or justice. This is because natural law does not produce effects from causes, but rather it belongs the constitution of existent things as such – the law of their own nature.

# cover story

Justice itself is of this kind. It is what belongs to things, the right relation of them together, like the proportions of a geometric form. The rules of a game are like this too – in a sense they are the game, since without them there is no game. But they are not the cause of the game, nor is the game their effect.

The problem with George's reasoning here is that it leads him to assume a 'will' or an 'intention' moving all things. In the chapter on Natural Laws he argues:

*Thus, whether civilized or uncivilized, man is compelled to look for causes beneath the phenomena that he begins really to consider, and no matter what intermediate cause he may find, cannot be content until he reaches will and finds or assumes intent. (The Science of Political Economy Book I)*

The difficulty with this way of reasoning is that it takes 'nature' to be a passive substance upon which a 'will' or intention is imposed from outside. It is unwittingly deist. The natural law tradition, on the contrary, understands that the laws of nature are integral to nature herself. The order of nature is not different from nature. Nature is self-moving or self-governing. So the natural law exists already in the essence of things. And this is true also of our human knowledge of justice. The intellect already knows justice and understands intuitively that action in conformity with human nature must necessarily be just. Injustice, therefore, is contrary to human nature itself. There is no 'will' directing justice. Justice acts of itself and is the measure of itself, and guides human will with right judgement or prudence.

The point here is not so much to criticise George's way of reasoning from effect to cause, but rather to assert that his understanding of society ultimately did not derive from that kind of reasoning. He is explaining himself in the manner of thinking established in the Enlightenment. What he actually saw was that things act according to their inherent nature, and that this is the root of justice. Nature is just. This accords with justice the way Cicero presents it in his *Treatise on the Commonwealth*.

There is always an ethical dimension in understanding nature as presenting itself to human intelligence. It is to this ethical dimension that we make a human response. Society is not a passive collection of people waiting to be directed by laws. Nor is it artificially created by Hobbesian fear. Rather, reciprocity and cooperation in friendship *is* society, and is already given in the nature of things. Injustice prevents society being itself. The nature of society and the good of society are the same, just as the nature of the body and its health are the same.

It is this correspondence between nature and goodness that distinguishes the natural law. The natural law is the manner in which all things seek their good in common with one another. The scientific method that seeks causes, while suitable for certain applications, excludes this ethical dimension of nature, and so can never fully grasp the laws that belong to society or to human exchange. This moral dimension of the natural law is confirmed by George himself in the conclusion of *Progress and Poverty*:

*...when we see that economic law and moral law are essentially one, and that the truth which the intellect grasps after toilsome effort is but that which the moral sense reaches by a quick intuition, a flood of light breaks in upon the problem of individual life.*

And further:

*And we find that everywhere we can trace it, the social law runs into and conforms with the moral law; that in the life of a community, justice infallibly brings its reward and injustice its punishment.*

Nothing could be further from Bacon or Hobbes. What moves the writings of Henry George is not so much the search for causes, or a will governing things, as the love of justice. This gives an insight 'a flood of light', that rational inference alone cannot discern. What is being suggested here is that the ancient understanding of wisdom infusing all things, rendering the universe as full of intelligence, is how the natural law tradition conceives things, and that this is more in harmony with George's vision than his arguments from effect to cause.

George gives testimony to this in a remarkable letter to his friend the Rev. Thomas Dawson, to whom he wrote:

*Because you are not only my friend, but a priest and a religious, I shall say something that I don't like to speak of—that I never before have told to anyone. Once, in daylight, and in a city street, there came to me a thought, a vision, a call—give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And there and then I made a vow. Through evil and through good, whatever I have done and whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true. It was that that impelled me to write *Progress and Poverty* and that sustained me when else I should have failed. And when I had finished the last page, in the dead of the night, when I was entirely alone, I flung myself on my knees and wept like a child. The rest was in the Master's hands. That is a feeling that has never left me; that is constantly with me. And it has led me up and up. It has made me a better and a purer man. It has been to me a religion, strong and deep. (George, Jr., Henry. ([1900] 1981). *Henry George*). p. 311 – 312)*

The natural laws that George consistently calls upon are not a mechanical determinism deduced from nature as though it were a lifeless machine, but rather the inherent laws of justice that belong to human nature and to society as such and which draw all things to their natural perfection in mutual benefit or the common good. They extend through the realm of government, the natural institutions of civil society, and lastly into the economic realm where they may be clearly seen in human exchanges.

The higher order of things determines the lower order. That was the ancient view before it was lost in seventeenth century. The study of society is in essence the study of justice. ■

*Editor's note:*

*Revised talk given at the Henry George Foundation Open Day 2017*



## HGF BRIEFING NOTES


### BOOKS WORTH READING

For those with an interest in the laws of primitive societies the classic study is *The Law of Primitive Man* by E. Adamson Hoebel republished by Harvard University Press in 2006. It studies five societies: the Eskimo, the Ifugao, the Comanche, Kiowa, and Cheyenne tribes, the Trobriand Islanders, and the Ashanti of western Africa. It explores their traditions of rights and duties, the conceptions of property and ownership, and their relations with the land.

The distinctions between law and custom are explored in detail as these are foundational to all social, economic and political relations within a society. In these 'pre-modern' societies we can observe how the various conceptions of law, justice and duty gradually emerged in human history, and which throw light on the same concerns in modern societies.

For those interested in the destructive uses of money in our modern economies Michael Rowbotham's *The Grip of Death: A study of modern money, debt slavery and destructive economics*, 2018 edition, is worth reading. It provides detailed analysis of how money in the global economy is created as debt, how mortgages account for two thirds of the money stock on the UK and USA, why business debt is the highest it has ever been, why farming is not viable, why national debts cannot be paid off, why debt is the real driving force of growth, why there are never enough funds for public services, why debt undermines basic human rights.

This is an extensive and hard-hitting study. Although Rowbotham does not look at land monopoly as such, he does give very detailed analysis of what he calls 'the tyranny of mortgages' where an ever-increasing rise in mortgage debt as a proportion of income is matched by a decline in house ownership in the UK.

Book 2 of Fred Harrison's *#WeAreRent* has now been published. It continues the hard-hitting analysis of Book 1 in tracing the way rent seeking has distorted civilisation and repeatedly brought about poverty and every kind of social injustice. In this book he argues we are at a turning-point in history and that 2026 will see a colossal destruction of the economy and to civilisation itself. He argues there is enough time to avert this catastrophe if democratic consent could be reached on fiscal reform that would put an end to rent seeking. Harrison builds his case on massive historical evidence going back to Mesopotamia 2000 BC, through Greek and Roman civilisation, and up to the present day. 



### FRIDAY MEETINGS AT MANDEVILLE PLACE

As Spring rolls around our Friday study groups at Mandeville Place continue to play a vital role in the activities surrounding the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain. Still, the meetings are to be joined online via the Zoom platform, which we are all too familiar with at this point.

The Afternoon Study Group with its usual timeslot from 2:30 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. is led by Tommas Graves.

The current reading is *Social Problems* (a collection of essays by Henry George published in 1883 which presents his views on political economy and his vision of reforms needed for the achievement of Justice in Social and Economic arrangements). These afternoon readings will draw on notes etc from Vol III of recently published volume in the series *The Annotated Works of Henry George*.

Go to: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83880666680>

Meeting ID: 838 8066 6680  
Passcode: 544247

The Evening Study Group also remains in its usual timeslot from 6:45 P.M. to 8:15 P.M. Evening sessions are led by David Triggs.

This term the focus is on George's speeches: *The Study of Political Economy, Justice the object: Taxation the means, The land for the people, The crime of poverty, Moses: Apostle of freedom, Scotland and Scotsmen, Thou shalt not steal, Land and taxation, Thy kingdom come*.

The term will also include an analysis of the UK National Accounts.

Go to: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87944408537>

Meeting ID: 879 4440 8537  
Passcode: 603155



## EULOGY TO MR JOHN HENDERSON CORMACK

It is my privilege to pay tribute to John on behalf of The Henry George Foundation of Great Britain and those who, like John, have devoted such a large portion of their lives to protecting and promoting a body of knowledge essential to the peace and prosperity of the world. John understood how the value of all that nature and society as a *whole* provides, is distinct from what individuals and firms, by their enterprise and work provide. He understood how the value of all that nature and society as a *whole* provides is a natural and just source of public revenue and how taking what individuals and firms, by their own enterprise and work produce, is unjust and inefficient, and is a cause of widespread poverty, stress, unhappiness and war.

My understanding is that John discovered this truth in the early sixties when, after realising that the economics taught at university was not true, he joined an evening class run by the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values. John had a very high regard for Vic Blundell, the Committee's leader, and John would occasionally refer to what he thought he might have said, in connection with certain issues. Later John came to tutor the School's course himself and his commitment to the importance of education remained with him for the rest of his life. He was instrumental in securing the status of the organisation as an educational charity as the United Committee launched ESSRA (Economic and Social Science Research Association) and in the management of its transition to the Centre for Incentive Taxation and in due course to The Henry George Foundation of Great Britain in 1996.

I first met John a few years after this intense period of activity and change when I joined the Foundation's Council of Management where John was Treasurer. By this time the organisation's finances, were far less robust than earlier. The Vauxhall Bridge Road premises had been sold and rooms were rented at The London Fruit Exchange.

The Foundation was still employing a Chief Executive and several staff but by 2005, after another move to offices and a bookshop in Edinburgh, and a rapid depletion of our financial resources I, as Chairman together with John and other members of the Council, were obliged to arrange for all the Foundation's work to be carried out on a voluntary basis. I became Executive Chairman and John's activities as Treasurer increased several fold as he took on everyday responsibility for all matters financial and he continued to perform this role until shortly before he died.

When John first learned that he was seriously ill he prepared to hand over his responsibilities to a successor but there was no obvious successor. After a while a likely candidate was found and John, despite declining health and strength, worked very hard indeed to ensure a smooth handover. Unfortunately, it was not to be, as the candidate withdrew at the last minute. This was a bitter blow, but determined and courageous as John was, he kept going, supporting the system he had built. Eventually he found a suitable replacement himself so that the handover actually took place only a few weeks before his passing.

My experience of working with John was that he never sought the limelight, but that he was the most reliable of allies in support of what I and others were doing to promote the cause that had brought us together.

In this I pay tribute to a principled man who was a key player in preserving the Foundation through difficult times. I am sure he could not have done this without the support of his dear wife Christel and the rest of the family, of whom he was so proud - so my thanks extend to them also.

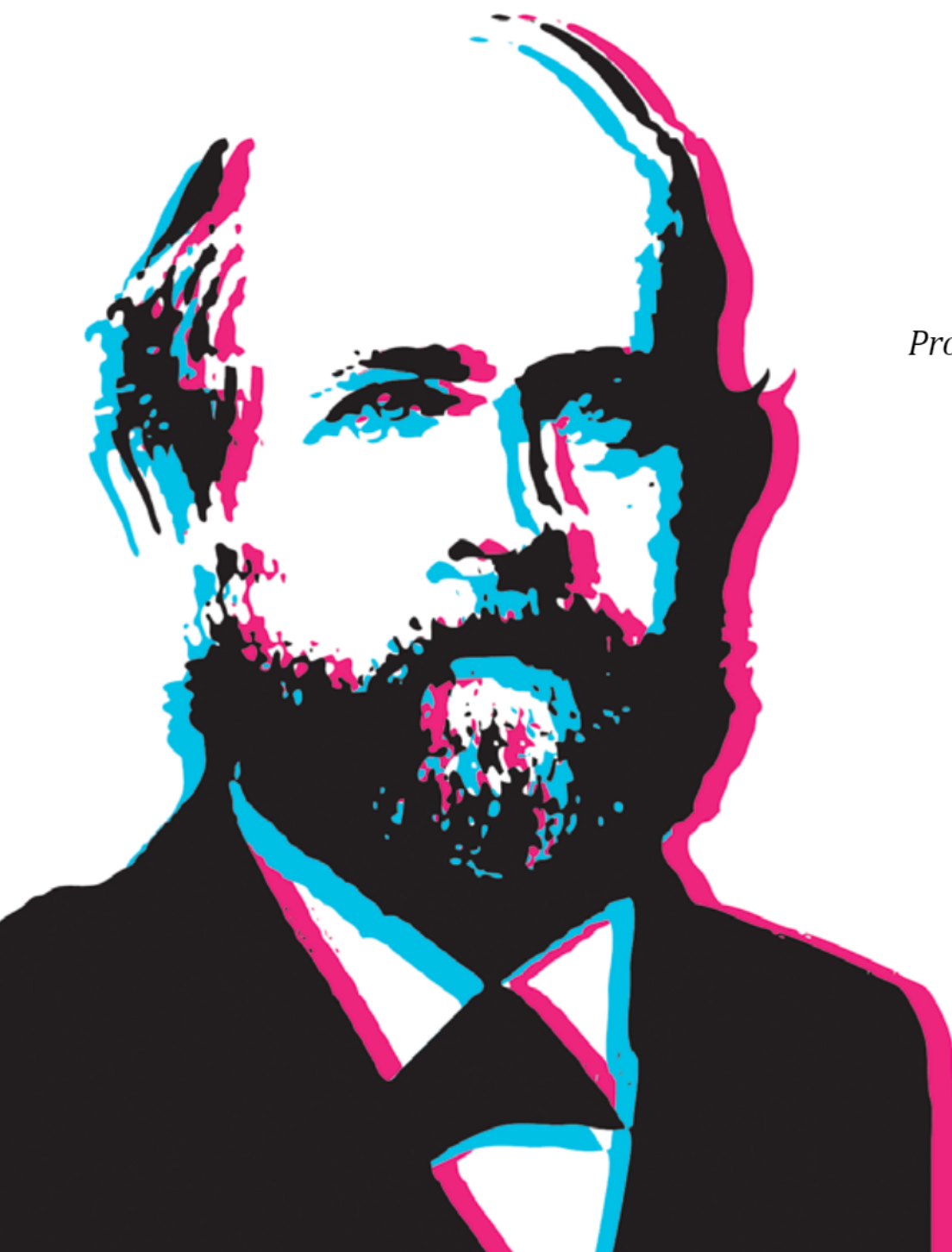
John's quiet and principled counsel and his absolute reliability will be missed by the Foundation and the wider economic justice community of which he was an important part. 🇺🇰



...AND A SMALLER AND  
SMALLER PROPORTION  
TO LABOR AND CAPITAL.

”

Henry George,  
*Progress and Poverty, 1879*



To find out more visit  
[www.henrygeorgefoundation.org](http://www.henrygeorgefoundation.org)  
or  
[www.landandliberty.net](http://www.landandliberty.net)

# 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 through 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, Huxley, Helen Keller, Woodrow Wilson, Stiglitz, Friedman, and Sun Yat-sen. 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 constitute 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 the 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 these laws of nature as operating everywhere, at all times, and throughout a creation that includes man and society, and the worlds of body, mind and spirit. Furthermore, that people and societies can only behave ethically and succeed in their own designs when they are cognisant of, and act in harmony with, those natural laws.

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