

LAND&LIBERTY

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message from the honorary president

At the beginning of his book *The Science of Political Economy* Henry George suggests that whilst the world as it is presented to our perception may at bottom be one we are compelled in thought to distinguish, in their actions and reactions, three independent and separable elements:

1. That which feels, perceives, thinks, wills; which to distinguish we call mind or soul or spirit.
2. That which has mass or weight or extension or form; which to distinguish we call matter.
3. That which acting on matter produces movement; which to distinguish, we call motion or force.

... of these from our standpoint, that which feels, perceives thinks, wills comes first in order of priority, for it is this which is first in our own consciousness, and it is only through this that we have consciousness of any other existence. In this, as our consciousness testifies, is the initiative of all our own motions and movements, so far as consciousness and memory shed light; and in all cases in which we trace the genesis of anything to its beginning we find that beginning in thought and will.

Here George highlights what underpins the economic choices we make, including what we produce, provide, buy, sell or acquire. However whether those choices accord with what is good for us and/or for others depends upon our character i.e. our distinctive mental and moral qualities. They will also reflect the ideas we hold about ourselves, who or what we are and what we consider 'mine'. Our ability to choose will vary according to the natural and socioeconomic conditions under which we live, in particular the degree of civil and economic freedom that prevails.

Unfortunately a shortage of these freedoms, coupled with moral shortcomings, has for many given the acquisition of wealth a bad name. Unfortunate; because the acquisition of wealth is actually good and essential to the life and well-being of every individual. Sometimes the idea that acquiring wealth is bad arises when people confuse claims on, or greed for wealth, with wealth itself. At other times it may be because of its link with desire and a recognition that people do not always desire what is good for either themselves or for others. It may also be due to how wealth is acquired or to a misunderstanding of what wealth truly is.

In addressing these mistakes we need first to acknowledge that whilst everything we need comes from what nature provides we cannot make use of it without exerting ourselves. Even to breathe requires a measure of exertion, and to access water, food, clothing, shelter and the needs and conveniences of modern living requires still more exertion by both body and spirit. The glory of our human and social nature however is that we may exert ourselves in ways that provide for the needs of others and have our own needs met by the exertions of others. Living in harmony with this aspect of our nature is critical to the survival and development of every civilisation and is why Political Economy is such an important subject for study. The science of political economy seeks to discover the laws of nature that govern the production and distribution of wealth. Effective use of those discoveries however requires a considerable measure of art. First the art required to describe and formulate those laws in ways that may be widely appreciated and second the art required to devise human laws and arrangements to suit a particular time, place and circumstance.

Our new course *The Science and Art of Political Economy* will draw on Henry George's works in an attempt to meet this challenge under today's circumstances.

David Triggs
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