

LAND&LIBERTY

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letter from the publisher

In the concluding chapter of *Progress and Poverty* Henry George considered the 'The Problem of Individual Life' and began:

The problems we have been considering lead into a problem higher and deeper still. Behind the problems of social life lies the problem of individual life.

I was reminded of this recently when I noticed confusions over what constitutes 'me' and what is really 'mine'. Followers of the ideas associated with Henry George generally distinguish between private property in the things people make and the idea of private property in people, or in that which nature provides (land). More rarely however do we pause to distinguish between what we are and what nature has provided for each of us individually. Nature provides each of us with the means by which we may become a 'producer' or 'maker' and in simple terms that comprises a human body and soul. The human body, sometimes referred to as the 'outer instrument' is composed of various organs each uniquely equipped to operate in ways that are conducive to the functioning of the whole body. The soul, sometimes referred to as the 'inner instrument' is likewise composed of various parts each uniquely equipped to enable the individual to perceive, remember, evaluate, decide and act.

Recent studies of Plato have also been quite important for me in understanding why Henry George would say 'Behind the problems of social life lies the problem of individual life.' In considering justice and injustice in his *Laws* Plato says:

When anger and fear, pleasure and pain, and jealousies and desire, tyrannise over the soul, whether they do any harm or not - I call this injustice.

In Greek history a tyrant is a cruel or oppressive usurper who, ignoring the law, seizes absolute power in a state. Plato is however here speaking of tyranny over the soul i.e. that which subtly governs an individual rather than the government of a state.

An important injustice that concerned Henry George was that associated with ignoring the natural law of rent and earnings. This law naturally provides an abundant source of public revenue for the state and enables individuals to receive, in full, what their own labour and capital earn. The injustice may be seen as a failure to respect the true nature of human society if part of its instrument (e.g. a functioning class or group) is allowed to claim more than its proper due.

At an individual level injustice may be seen to arise in a similar manner. If, for example on seeing one of these tyrants arising in the soul I identify with it and claim it as my own, saying 'I am angry, fearful, pleased, pained, jealous, or desirous' I make a mistake. It may be seen as a failure to respect my true nature if part of my instrument is allowed to lay claim to more than its proper due. In extreme cases the mistake can be devastating but mostly it is just misleading and something we all need to be wary of when we seek to champion justice!

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