Affirmative Case: Human Dignity and Individual Rights

By Benjamin McKay

*Resolved: The individual right to property ought to be valued above the economic interest of the community.*

This affirmative case relies upon three basic premises, (1) that government is the actor (the entity that will actually choose to affirm or negate the resolution and act upon that choice), (2) that the government has an obligation to uphold the human dignity of its people, and (3) that in order to uphold human dignity the individual right to property must be upheld. This case essentially attempts to argue that the government by its very nature is obligated to uphold this right as failure to do this is a failure to care for the wellbeing and dignity of its people.

This case relies heavily on John Locke's understanding of individual rights that he outlines in his 2nd treatise of government. The negative can bring this back around and argue from John Locke that we need to limit our freedoms in a society at which point more study and a deeper discussion are welcome. It is important to understand a lot about John Locke if at all possible to understand how his philosophy can relate to multiple concepts.

Additionally, this case is heavily philosophy focused and hypothetical focused as opposed to concrete statistics or outside evidence focused (although much is referenced).

***Thomas Jefferson*** (“Thomas Jefferson Quotes.” *BrainyQuote*, Xplore, <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/thomas_jefferson_157212>, Accessed September 27, 2022).

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

These famous words bring to our memory an indispensable truth: to be human is to be endowed with dignity and inherently connected to this honor are individual rights. It is because I believe that we must uphold individual rights in order to uphold human dignity that I stand resolved: *The individual right to property ought to be valued above the economic interest of the community.*

Before we explain my reasoning, allow me to provide some definitions.

Definitions

***John Locke*** (Locke, John. *Two Treatises.* York University, 1823. pp. 106-107, 141, <https://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf>. Accessed September 27, 2022).

\*the following paragraph in brackets paraphrases and quotes the above source as cited\*

[The renowned philosopher John Locke describes in his 2nd Treatise of Government that all human beings are created by God “naturally” possessing particular freedoms pertaining to the ownership of the self, freedom to act, and ability to have and exercise dominion over possessions. In this “state of nature” Locke argues there is “a law of Nature” which dictates that “being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions”. Locke argued based on this philosophy that these things (namely life, liberty, and property) were items established by God to all human beings, or in other words, what we would refer to as individual rights].

Thus, I define...

***“The Individual Right to Property”***

the inherent (God given) right of a person to own property and use it as they see fit without interference from others

*\*Note the above definition is custom but based on the ideas from the below source as cited\**

***John Locke*** (Locke, John. *Two Treatises.* York University, 1823. pp. 106-107, 141, <https://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf>. Accessed September 27, 2022).

Also, I would like to define the term...

***“Economic”*** *Merriam Webster Dictionary*

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/economic>. Accessed September 27, 2022.

of, relating to, or based on the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services

**Resolution Analysis:**

**A. Government Actor**

With these two definitions established, we must note that the government is the *actor* in this resolution. The *actor* is the person or entity that will choose to affirm or negate the resolution and take action based on that choice. In order for that choice to exist, the actor must be able to both affirm and negate the resolution. Thus, the actor must be capable of enforcing and upholding the rights of individuals as well as limiting or overruling the rights of individuals. If a person’s individual right to property can be legitimately overruled at all, the only entity with the power to do so would be government authority. Thus, we must answer the resolution recognizing that the one acting is the government.

**B. Resolution Interpretation**

Now that we have my definitions and actor laid out, the resolution ultimately becomes a question: when the economic interest of the community cannot be met unless we either limit or overrule an individual’s right to property, what should we do? More specifically, this is a question to governments, and whether they should use their power in these situations and interfere with property rights in an attempt to fulfill economic goals.

**Value: Human Dignity**

For the purposes of this debate, I will operationally define human dignity as...

***“Human Dignity”***

The respect due to each person by virtue of their being human

This should be our value in today’s round because human dignity is more important than practical considerations as it stems from the moral worth of human beings. It is immoral and evil to violate a person’s human dignity even if the end result is beneficial to us. Thus, human dignity should be our first priority.

**Criterion: Individual Rights**

For my criterion, or the means by which we achieve the value of human dignity is that of individual rights. In accordance with the reasoning I have already provided from John Locke, I’d like to define...

***“Individual Rights”***

an individual’s inherent (God-given) rights to life, liberty, and property

*\*Note the above definition is custom but based on the ideas from the below source as cited\**

***John Locke*** (Locke, John. *Two Treatises.* York University, 1823. pp. 106-107, 141, <https://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf>. Accessed September 27, 2022).

This ought to be our criterion in today’s round for upholding the value of human dignity as it is impossible to uphold human dignity without upholding a person’s individual rights. Namely, we affirm and uphold the human personhood of an individual when we affirm and uphold their individual rights.

With my definitions, actor, value, and criterion established, let’s move on to my contentions

**Contention 1:**

**The government has an obligation to uphold human dignity**

As already discussed, human dignity is a moral must when it comes to how we treat human beings and for governments this is no different. To violate the human dignity of the people through either negligence or malicious intent is for government to become an instrument of dehumanization, danger, and injustice rather than a source of security. We must realize that human dignity is not an optional matter, and that government must therefore prioritize this concern above all others when making decisions for their people.

**Contention 2:**

**To uphold human dignity governments must uphold individual rights.**

***John Locke*** (Locke, John. *Two Treatises.* York University, 1823. pp. 106-107, 141, <https://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf>. Accessed September 27, 2022).

\*the following sentence in brackets paraphrases and summarizes the above source as cited\*

[To reiterate, John Locke argues that individual rights are inherent possessions of human beings, and sourced from the granting and moral establishments of God alone]. The moral significance and corresponding obligation to uphold these rights is therefore tied in nature to humanness. In essence, to violate a person’s individual rights is either to deny they are fully human or to insinuate that there is nothing morally significant about treating a human being unjustly. Either way, there exists an unbreakable link between honoring and respecting human dignity and upholding individual rights. In order for governments to uphold human dignity then, they must protect and preserve the rights of their people.

**Contention 3:**

**To uphold individual rights, we must uphold the right to property**

In order for governments to fulfill their obligation to uphold human dignity, they must uphold our individual rights, and this includes the right to property (\*see definition\*). Governments cannot cherry-pick. Governments do not get to choose which rights they want to protect and which they would rather disregard. To say so would be to say that we can pick and choose when people are or are not human. We cannot hold life and liberty sacred while holding property as profane, or espouse the humanness of individuals ends where their possessions begin. The simple truth is, if we don’t uphold the individual right to property, we are violating individual rights, and if we violate individual rights, then we violate human dignity.
 In today’s debate, we are once again faced with our choice; what should the government do? If the government violates the right to property for the sake of economic concerns, it violates its obligation to the people as a protector of their human dignity, it unjustly harms the few for the benefit of the many, and it places practical benefits over moral absolutes. Governments ought not be given the power to remove birth-right possessions of human beings. Such a power is a tyranny and does not ensure justice or safety for any who are under it. Conversely, a government that instead upholds and protects the individual right to property is one that upholds justice and human dignity. Thus, in order to uphold the value of human dignity, we must affirm the resolution and stand *Resolved: The Individual Right to Property Ought to be Valued Above The Economic Interest of the Community.*