Affirmative Case: 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, or the entity that will actually choose to affirm or negate the resolution and act upon that choice, (2) that the government's purpose is to protect individual rights, and (3) that the individual right to property is one of those individual rights. This case essentially attempts to argue that the government by its very nature is obligated to uphold this right and not overturn it.

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: that to be human is to have honor, and to uphold that honor and act justly we must protect individual rights. It is because I agree with Thomas Jefferson, 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 renown 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: Individual Rights**

In accordance with the reasoning I’ve already stated, I 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 should be our value in today’s round because the government is the actor and they ought to consider the protection of these rights their most important duty. This is attested to once again by John Locke.

***John Locke*** (Locke, John. *Two Treatises.* York University, 1823. pp. 142, <https://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf>. Accessed September 27, 2022).

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

[As John Locke argues, individuals come together to form governments, vesting all ruling authority with that government to create and enforce laws and punish offenses. Locke notes that the purpose of this creation of government power is to provide increased protection of life, liberty, and property for all members of that society, or in other words, to provide protection for individual rights].

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

**Contention 1: The government's purpose is to protect and uphold individual rights**

***John Locke*** (Locke, John. *Two Treatises.* York University, 1823. pp. 142, <https://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf>. Accessed September 27, 2022).

\*the statement in brackets references the above source as cited\*

[As already discussed, John Locke clearly identifies that governments are formed in order to offer increased protection for individual rights]. Thus, anything a government does that contradicts this purpose is an illegitimate and unjust use of government power. A government must act in such a way to fulfill its purpose.

**Contention 2: To uphold individual rights, government must uphold property rights.**

The individual right to property is an essential core part of our individual rights, just as life and liberty are. In order for governments to truly fulfill their duty and uphold individual rights, we must realize that they cannot be allowed to cherry-pick. Governments do not get to choose what aspects of human dignity they will honor and which they will disregard. They ought to be justly forbidden from holding life and liberty sacred while holding property as profane. The simple truth is, if we don’t uphold the individual right to property, we are violating individual rights.

**Conclusion:**

We have seen today that governments are purposed to uphold the rights of their people, and that to fulfill this end, the individual right to property must be upheld. If the government violates the individual rights of the people for the sake of prosperity, it not only violates its obligation to the people but also unjustly harms the few for the benefit of the many. Governments ought not be given the power to remove birth-right possessions of our humanity or violate them in the name of increasing a sense of prosperity. Such a power is a tyranny and does not ensure justice or safety for any of its members. Conversely, a government that instead upholds and protects the individual right to property with enforced and established law is one that respects and honors its citizens individual rights. In order to uphold the value of individual rights, we must affirm the resolution and stand *Resolved: The Individual Right to Property Ought to be Valued Above The Economic Interest of the Community.*