Affirmative Case: Liberty and Limited Government

By Benjamin McKay

*Resolved: The Individual Right to Property Ought to be Valued Above the Economic Interest of the Community.*

This case relies upon a framework of practical consequences of voting negative. That is to say, this case argues (1) the highest value is liberty (the rightful exercise of freedom within moral boundaries), (2) rightful liberty requires that citizens are left to exercise their right to property and that government remains limited, and (3) in order to achieve liberty, we must therefore uphold the right to property and in so doing limit government power.

This case takes a more diverse approach than some other cases in that its reasoning applies to two different trains of logic: both the short-term and the long-term consequences of negating the resolution. The first argues that liberty by definition demands that the right to property not be infringed. This is intuitive as all rights are considered to be extensions of one's liberty. The second train of thought argues that voting negative is functionally giving the government the power to overrule the right to property whenever it can make the case it is in opposition to the economic interest of the community (which government will have the task of defining for itself). This grants far too much power to the government and lays the groundwork in the long run for other similar power-grabs and limiting of individual rights. The end result if this type of power is corruption and tyranny.

The negative is therefore pressed to argue against the resolution by addressing both their alleged obstruction of the highest value of liberty and also the risks presented by granting the government the power to act in accordance with the negative position. This shifts the negative to more of a defensive position and forces them to address their position's logical implications both in philosophical and real-world terms, for the immediate action and the resulting consequences.

***Ronald Reagan*** (“Ronald Reagan Quotes.” *BrainyQuote*, Xplore, <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/ronald_reagan_183965>, Accessed November 17, 2022).

***Ronald Reagan*** (“Ronald Reagan Quotes.” *BrainyQuote*, Xplore, <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/ronald_reagan_183965>, Accessed November 14, 2022).

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same”.

These words of Ronald Reagan remind us of the ongoing importance of protecting liberty. Liberty is not mankind’s default position. We must resolve now whether we be a generation who acts to defend Liberty or resolves to neglect it, and no question could be more serious or consequential. It is because I agree with Ronald Reagan that liberty must be protected, that I stand *Resolved: The Individual Right to Property Ought to be Valued Above the Economic Interest of the Community.*

Before we move on, let us define our key terms so we can better understand our resolution:

Definitions:

A. Property:

***Merriam Webster*** (“Property Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/property>. Accessed November 14, 2022).

***“Property”***

the exclusive right to possess, enjoy, and dispose of a thing

Thus, *the individual right to property* describes a person’s or persons’ property rights.

**B. Economic:**

***Merriam Webster*** (“Economic Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/economic>. Accessed November 11, 2022).

***“Economic”***

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

Thus, *The economic interest of the community*describes a collective group’s goals and priorities specifically in relation to economic matters.

With our main terms defined, let us address some other aspects of the resolution.

**Resolutional Analysis:**

**A. Government Actor**

The resolution prompts us to decide between valuing either the individual right to property or the community’s economic interest higher than the other. The only entity that possesses the power and scope of responsibility to make such a choice between these two objects is the government. Therefore, we must analyze the resolution from the perspective that the government is the one that will be acting on our decision in favor of the individual right to property or the economic interest of the community.

**B. Conflict Standard**

In the resolution, we see the words *ought to be valued above* when the resolution says, *the* *individual right to property ought to be valued above the economic interest of the community.* This indicates that we are in a situation in which the individual right to property and the economic interest of the community are at odds with one another (or in conflict) and we have to side with one over the other. We are choosing today, in particular instances of conflict which of the two sides to prioritize and which to limit.

Now that we properly understand the resolution, let us move on to my value.

**Value: Liberty**

My value, or the thing that I believe should be considered the most important end-goal in our round today is that of liberty. Liberty is defined by ***Thomas Jefferson...***

***Thomas Jefferson*** (“Thomas Jefferson Quotes.” *BrainyQuote*, Xplore, <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/thomas_jefferson_136362>. Accessed November 12, 2022.)

“Rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add 'within the limits of the law' because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual.”

Liberty should be our value in today’s round for two primary reasons. The first reason is that liberty is the rightful possession of all human beings. We intuitively know that people ought to live freely just as much as we intuitively know that slavery and oppression are evil. When considering our resolution and matters of individual rights and societal interests, we ought to recognize the primary importance and relevance of making our choice based on what will best upholds liberty for all.

The second reason that liberty should be our value in today’s round is that establishing liberty is a significant government interest. Governments (at least ideal governments) organize society in accordance with law so that people can live together in security without fear of harm from others. In other words, I take the position that an ideal government establishes order within which individuals can live their lives in accordance with liberty.

For both of these reasons then, our decision on whether the government should affirm or negate the resolution ought to be based upon what best upholds the value of liberty.

With my value established, let’s address my criterion...

**Criterion: Limited Government**

My criterion, or the means by which the value of liberty can be upheld is through limited government. By limited government, I mean what was described by Thomas Jefferson in his first inaugural address when he said...

***Thomas Jefferson*** (First Inaugural Address, March 4th, 1801, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-33-02-0116-0004>, Accessed November 12, 2022).

“a wise & frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, & shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. this is the sum of good government”

Essentially, limited government refers to a government whose possession and use of power is limited such that they may only interfere with the freedoms of their people insomuch as it is necessary to prevent injustice and maintain order.

Let us move on to my contentions...

**Contention 1:**

**Liberty requires limited government**

If people wish to live together in accordance with liberty –that is, they desire to be free insomuch as no one is permitted to infringe on the rights of another– a government with the capacity to limit freedom is necessary. A government that possesses and uses only as much power as is necessary to enforce these limitations is able to maintain a society in which liberty thrives without becoming itself an obstacle to liberty.

Conversely, if a government is not appropriately limited in its possession and use of power, it will inevitably go beyond creating and enforcing reasonable limits for its people and become an oppressor. Yes, individuals ought to be limited. However, if they are limited beyond what is necessary to protect others, it is no longer a legitimate act to uphold liberty, but now an act of crime and corruption.

**Contention 2:**

**In order to limit government, we must protect the right to property**

Governments must be limited, and the most effective way to do so is to deny them the ability to take any action that violates the rights of their people. No tyranny can exist where the rights of the people are protected. Conversely, no peace, justice, or safety can exist where the rights of the people are violated without objection or consequence.

We must recognize that the individual right to property is among the basic rights of the people that must be protected. If liberty is to exist, the people must be secure in their property rights and assured that government cannot violate them. If we neglect to protect property, we erode yet another limit on our government authorities such that they are permitted to disregard protections on property whenever they decide to call it “necessary”. Let us not forget that negating the resolution gives the government this power, and that they alone are left to define for themselves when and how property should be obstructed for what they alone are left to define is the “economic interest” of their society. This does not uphold liberty.

**Contention: 3**

**Protecting property upholds liberty**

By protecting the individual right to property, we affirm both limitations on government power as well as the respect of individual rights. Every individual ought to be assured of their own liberty, knowing they are free to exercise their right to property in accordance with respecting the rights of others. By affirming the resolution, we uphold the right to property, limit government, and therefore uphold and preserve liberty.

Thus, we ought to affirm the resolution.