Affirmative Case: Self-Determination

By Benjamin McKay

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



Today, we are gathered to answer a very important question. It is a question of individual rights and societal interests, where what are normally two good ends are at odds and we must choose between them. I hope in today’s round to persuade you to affirm the resolution, and stand *Resolved: The Individual Right to Property Ought to be Valued Above the Economic Interest of the Community.*

Before we address my main arguments, let us define some key terms:

Definitions

1. The Individual Right to Property

We are generally familiar with the concept of property. In today’s round, we are not merely discussing property but the individual right to property, meaning we are specifically looking at a person’s rights as pertains to their possessions. For the purposes of this round then, I will operationally define the individual right to property as... *(based on reason, not sourced).*

*The Individual Right to Property*

The right of a person to own, use, and exercise dominion over a particular thing.

1. The Economic Interest of the Community

In order to understand this term, let us define 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

We are generally familiar with the concept of what it means for something to be *in our best interest.* This refers to something contributing to our good. With this understanding of the terms ‘economic’ and ‘interest’, I operationally define the economic interest of the community as follows...

*The Economic Interest of the Community*

The wellbeing of a particular group as pertains to [“the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services”] - \**quoted portion of custom definition from citation above: economic – Merriam Webster*

**Resolutional Analysis:**

**Government Actor**

This resolution asks us to make a decision between the individual right to property and the economic interest of the community, such that we are valuing one above the other. This indicates that the two are at odds, prompting action to be taken such that one is prioritized and the other is mitigated in a particular instance. Such a choice requires an actor, an entity that could reasonably make this decision and act upon it in the real world. The only possible actor is the government, as they are the only entity that would possess a vested interest both in upholding individual rights as well as community interests, and furthermore because the government alone has the authority to make such a choice and enforce it.

With our terms and resolution better understood, let us address the value, or what I believe is the most important thing for the government to consider when making this choice.

**Value: Self-Determination**

***Merriam Webster*** (“Self-Determination Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-determination>, Accessed November 17, 2022).

***Self-Determination***

“free choice of one's own acts or states without external compulsion”

It is worth noting, that this definition denotes both [the freedom to act as well as the freedom to determine one’s state of being] – *\*paraphrased from above citation.* I argue that this concept of self-determination requires two different conditions to be met:

**Condition (1) - Autonomy:** an individual must be free from unreasonable restraint

**Condition (2) - Non-dependence:** an individual must not be dependent on external forces or entities for their primary wellbeing.

Only when both of these conditions are met can self-determination be achieved.

This ought to be our value for two primary reasons...

**Reason (1):** Self-determination is the rightful possession of all human beings and is an essential aspect of their personhood.

***Thomas Jefferson*** (“Thomas Jefferson Quotes.” BrainyQuote, Xplore, <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/thomas_jefferson_157212>, Accessed November 14, 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”

This concept as stated by Thomas Jefferson describes self-determination, in which [individuals are recognized as equal persons possessing a right to live freely in accordance with the pursuit of their own wellbeing] – *\*paraphrase of quote above.*

**Reason (2):** Self-determination is the ideal goal of a well-functioning society. In an ideal community, social order provides individuals with a foundation within which they can live freely and pursue their own flourishing. As Thomas Jefferson once 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”

Therefore, not only is self-determination the rightful possession of all human beings, but it is also the ideal which societies (and governments) ought to uphold.

With our value established, I hope to demonstrate that valuing the individual right to property over the economic interest of the community fulfills both autonomy and non-dependence, and therefore best upholds the value of self-determination.

**Contention 1:**

**The Individual Right to Property upholds autonomy**

The first of the two conditions that must be met to have self-determination is that of autonomy, or the idea of being free from unreasonable restraint. To clarify what I mean by *unreasonable*, allow me to present what I believe conversely makes a restraint *reasonable*.

***A restraint is reasonable when...***

1. Its purpose is to prevent a harm.
2. It is as unrestrictive as possible while still preventing the harm
3. It is consensual, meaning the restraint has been legally ratified in accordance with the individual’s consent to be bound by the law.

If a restraint fulfills these three conditions, I consider it reasonable. A restraint is therefore *unreasonable* when it fails one of these conditions. This is why we can say that taxation is a reasonable restraint but the government breaking down your door and stealing all your savings is unreasonable. By the same reasoning, we consider the restriction of peoples’ liberty via traffic laws reasonable but would consider the government eliminating liberty and enslaving its people unreasonable.

Once again, autonomy is not freedom from all restraint, but only from *unreasonable* restraint.

In relation to our resolution, when we have to make a decision between upholding the individual right to property or the economic interest of the community, we must realize that only in upholding the individual right to property do we uphold autonomy, that is, ensure that individuals are free from unreasonable restraint.

This is best shown by contrast. If we side with the economic interest of the community, we are saying that we should be able to overturn an individual’s property rights in any instance in which failing to do so can be shown to inhibit the greater realization of the community’s economic interest. This open-ended position is far too broad, and effectively gives society and government unchecked ability to restrain property rights anytime they can demonstrate an effective economic benefit will result. This violates a person’s freedom by the principle of interfering with their ownership and use of their own property and does without an appropriate standard. This violates autonomy by unreasonably restraining individuals and unreasonably restraining the right to property.

Conversely, if we uphold the individual right to property, we affirm the individual’s ability to live free from unreasonable restraint, able to exercise their right to property within the already accepted reasonable boundaries defined by law (such as taxes).

Yes property, just like every other facet of liberty, needs to be appropriately limited, and when correctly exercised, the right to property exists within these boundaries and aligns with autonomy’s standard of being free from unreasonable restraint. Negating the resolution goes beyond this and imposes additional and unreasonable restrictions on this right.

Thus, valuing the individual right to property over the economic interest of the community best upholds autonomy, the first condition of our value: self-determination.

**Contention 2:**

**The individual right to property upholds non-dependence**

Non-dependence is once again the concept of not being dependent on outside forces or entities for one’s primary wellbeing. In today’s resolution, it is important we consider the fact that upholding the individual right to property better upholds this principle than the community economic interest.

This is because when property rights are strongly protected, individuals are secure in their possessions such that they can reliably work towards their own prosperity. If individuals do not possess secure property rights, they become more dependent both on the larger community and their own government to care for their needs. This diminishes their self-determination by putting them in a state of greater dependence.

Furthermore, if we value the economic interest over the individual right to property, we now put government in a primary position of regulating the economy, making the entire distribution of resources as a whole more intertwined with government. Thus, negating the resolution puts both the individual and the overall community in a state of greater dependency on the government.

In contrast, if we instead affirm the individual right to property, we are able to pursue our own wellbeing through our own secure faculties, thus achieving non-dependence, the second condition of our value: self-determination.

**Contention 3:**

**The individual right to property best upholds self-determination.**

We have demonstrated that the value of self-determination requires that individuals have autonomy (freedom from unreasonable restraint) and non-dependence (ability to care for their own wellbeing apart from government or societal action). We have furthermore seen that valuing the individual right to property upholds both autonomy and non-dependence while valuing the economic interest of the community fails to secure either one. Therefore, the individual right to property fulfills the conditions for self-determination and therefore achieves it while the economic interest of the community does not. Economic interests are important, but in regards to conflicting with the individual right to property, we must affirm property rights and uphold self-determination.