

The Settler Non-Problem

In a piece on the **Arab-Israeli conflict**, Robin Whittle says that the evil Zionists and Americans are to blame for the problem:

The settlements and the severe restrictions and fragmentation of Palestinian life by Israel prove that successive Israeli governments have no interest at all in giving Palestinians even a fraction of their land [...]

Israel can only do this with the financial, technological and political support of the USA. Both the USA and Israel are democracies. The problem here is not despots – but democratic nations systematically killing and oppressing all Palestinians.

His description of Israel's overall stance and its counterterrorist policies in particular is utterly divorced from reality and he would benefit from reading **this excellent article** on Israel's counterterrorist policies, as well as our **Short History of Israel**. (Or perhaps he wouldn't. Someone who can seriously say what he says about "Palestine" may not have much interest in getting his facts straight.)

Whittle is not alone in advancing the curious proposition that the existence of Jewish settlements shows that the Israelis are fundamentally to blame for the violence against them. So let's go through this s-l-o-w-l-y, for Mr Whittle and other similarly confused nincompoops. Question: *Is buying land a crime?*

There are approximately **840,000 Indians** in Britain, many of whom have bought land here. By Mr Whittle's argument, all non-Indian British citizens are entitled to strap on belts of explosives and kill Indians, both here and in India.

Back in the real world, buying land and settling it is just buying land and settling it. Even if *all* Jewish settlers were to remain in the future Palestinian state and *no* expatriate Palestinians were to return there, Jews would constitute some 6% of the population, which one might usefully compare with the 20% of Israeli citizens who are Arabs and with whom Israel is living in peace. When there is an even vaguely reasonable leadership in Palestine, the settlements will be at the very most a minor issue in any peace settlement.

See also **this** piece.

Does Robin Whittle say Jews s...

Does Robin Whittle say Jews shouldn't buy land in other places too, or is he only worried about "Arab lands"? Does he also disapprove of Arabs buying land in Israel? Or does he think that's ok? I see Robin Whittle lives in Australia but was born in England. So that's ok, but it's not ok for Jews to do the same thing? It's like, ok, the Australians didn't object to his parents moving to Australia so that's ok, but it's not ok for Jews to move to Arab countries because Arabs do mind, right? But see, the Arabs also don't want Jews living in Israel either, or anywhere else. That's why they attack Jews all over the world. Where SHOULD Jews be allowed to buy land? Would Robin Whittle agree with those who think the Jews should be bulldozed into the sea? Hitler would be proud.

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Wed, 05/28/2003 - 15:15 | [reply](#)

The Arabs who sold land to Je...

The Arabs who sold land to Jews obviously don't mind Jews living there.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 05/29/2003 - 03:50 | [reply](#)

Buying land????

This is so stupid. Millions of lives are at stake here. The USA and Israel are oppressing the Palestinians. It's true that some Palestinians want to kill every Jew, but that is no justification for what Israel does to the rest of the Palestinians - the law-abiding ones. To describe what Israel is doing as "buying land" is a joke. What planet are you on??? How many American voters have ever seen that map of the settlements? The Israelis are not BUYING land, they are TAKING it. It's a case of the Israeli government giving Jews subsidies to settle on Arab land. There's no buying involved, they just take it and sell it to Jews.

by a reader on Thu, 05/29/2003 - 10:09 | [reply](#)

It's the Evil Jooossss!

"It's a case of the Israeli government giving Jews subsidies to settle on Arab land. There's no buying involved, they just take it and sell it to Jews."

If this is the case then the Israeli is taking money from some Israelis and giving it to others so that they can buy Arab land in PA areas and settle it. In any event the land is still being bought and the Palestinians can still refuse to sell, so the Palestinians have no

beef, but Israeli taxpayers might, strangely the latter group do not see fit to murder people.

As for the rest of your comments, they make no attempt to address any of the facts at issue and make no argument that our interpretation is wrong. Also I'm confused about the relevance of Americans not having seen the map, the map does not change the logic of the situation, it just depicts the distribution of settlements, or is it that the evil Jooos are concealing the map under their black coats along with the Palestinian babies they kill and eat in their dark rituals?

by a reader on Thu, 05/29/2003 - 21:33 | [reply](#)

ho hum

What he meant about the map is if only the Americans saw the map ... saw how much land the Jews had bought -- surely they would object too. See, if the Jews have bought *lots* of land, more than Arabs can afford, then using the premise that Jews aren't morally better, and the fact luck is a bad explanation, they must have gotten the money/land by stealing, or otherwise cheating. (Perhaps shooting Palestinian landowners under guise of fighting terror, and then installing settlements on the now "abandoned" land really fast and scaring everyone away.....la de da)

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 05/30/2003 - 02:47 | [reply](#)

settlements

I've not noticed that the Indians in Britain live in Indian only settlements which other Britains are barred from living in.

They live by the laws of the country - unlike Israeli occupiers who seize Palestinian land in defiance of international law with no agreement or compensation to the Palestinians.

Neither do the Palestinians in Israel get to live in Arab-only settlements annexing land willy-nilly do no comparison there either.

by a reader on Wed, 04/21/2004 - 13:49 | [reply](#)

Re: settlements

Unfortunately, 'a reader' has fallen for a pack of lies and half-truths so far-reaching and so wicked that a full rebuttal of his or her admirably concise comment would require at least a hundred times as much space. We recommend, for a start, reading Mitchell Bard's [Myths And Facts](#).

But in short: Britain, during the periods when it was at war with Germany, allowed no Germans to live in the country at all, and imprisoned without trial anyone who was even suspected of

sympathising with them. But there **are** Arabs living in Israeli settlements on the West Bank, just as there are Arabs living all over Israel, including in settlements that contain no Jews, and also in predominantly Jewish areas. Land for the settlements is either rented government land (temporarily administered but not annexed by Israel, pending a peace treaty) or is purchased, not seized, from willing private owners.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 04/21/2004 - 14:57 | [reply](#)

It's clear from his writing

It's clear from his writing that Robin Whittle cares much more about inciting people to blame "the Jews" than he cares about history. I hate it when someone who's clearly anti-semitic tries to portray himself as a neutral. This is a person who also writes about the "accepted history" of the holocaust. A holocaust denier. Big coincidence that he has so much to say about "Palestine". I don't think he really cares about the Palestineans, he just has a problem with the Jewish people. He probably just wants to convince others to feel the same.

Hello, you'd be more effective in spreading your hatefulness if you had actually read up on your history! A history lesson is needed! Does this guy even know what happened in 1948? Doubt it. People like Whittle really make me sick.

by a reader on Wed, 07/07/2004 - 17:16 | [reply](#)

Yes, I do think he would agree

Yes, I do think he would agree with that. Maybe he's just Hitler reincarnated.

by a reader on Wed, 07/07/2004 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

Questions

Don't you think your example of Asians in Britain would be a better analogy if Britain were occupied by the Indian army?

And is all that land being settled by Israelis sold by private individuals, or is some of it land in the public domain that the occupation authority is giving preferential access to?

The so-called "private property" of colonial settlers doesn't usually bear much looking into. In colonial Africa, for example, it was common practice for colonial administrators to preempt ownership of uncultivated land (including forest, pasture and other commons) and then distribute it among settlers. That's they way settlers in Uganda and Rhodesia wound up owning most of the best quality land.

Of course, English settlers in Africa are another object of sympathy for those who specialize in apologizing for right-wing settler pariah regimes.

Re: Questions

A reader wrote:

'Don't you think your example of Asians in Britain would be a better analogy if Britain were occupied by the Indian army?'

The Palestinian Authority has been offered and has received freedom from Israeli military interference on more than one occasion. The PA used this as an excuse to increase the intensity of their campaign to wipe Israel from the map and replace it with Islamist tyranny. When the IDF goes into the PA controlled areas they do so in self-defence. Those areas are not occupied but Israel has not allowed and should not allow those areas to be used to support violent Islamist thugs. You might want to try reading about Israeli history here, before you make any more false and baseless accusations:

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node/view/74>

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 11/03/2004 - 20:12 | [reply](#)

Myths from Laputa

"They live by the laws of the country - unlike Israeli occupiers who seize Palestinian land in defiance of international law"

ROFL. Utter drivel. There is no 'Palestinian land' by any sane definition (but hey, who says antisemites are sane?).

And there is no 'defiance of international law' (actually, there is no such thing as 'international law').

Basically, you just want to keep parts (all?) of the Jewish homeland Judenrein.

Won't work. Tough. Live with it.

by [Myself](#) on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 22:37 | [reply](#)

calls of racism

I personally am part African-American and part Jewish Ukrainian.

There have been one or two times in my life when I experienced something where racism might possibly have played some small part.

A lot of black people like to use racism as an excuse for anytime they don't get their way. Didn't get the job? Its not because the other candidate had a more relevant degree, its racism. More black people getting pulled over, its not because black youth have less respect for the law and tend to drive obnoxiously, its racism. More blacks in prison, its not a complex issue related to the legacy of

slavery, the lack of reparations, inheritance, capitalism, and the

accumulation of wealth leading to greater degrees of poverty and lack of education which in turn correlates to a higher crime rate - its just racism.

And American Jews do EXACTLY the same thing.

If anyone condemns the actions of Israel, they are called "anti-Semitic"

Yet these same people condemn the actions of any violent or oppressive government.

The issue here can not be reduced to "these people are right, these people are wrong"

First, Palestinians have no justification for blowing up Israeli citizens.

Second, Israel's reactions to Palestinian attacks is almost always disproportionate and unjustified. I read once in the paper about Israel firing mortars over a wall after some kids threw rocks at Israeli soldiers.

If you deny that Israel often overreacts, or claim it has never done anything wrong, you are just as much full of it as someone who claims the Holocaust wasn't that bad.

Yes we (Jewish people) have been heavily persecuted throughout history.

That does not make us perfect, or saintly, or immune from wrong doing.

History: thousands of years ago, Jews found what is now called Israel and claimed it. At the time a lot of land was not incorporated into any particular country, so this was kind of like Europeans coming to America and claiming it. There were people already living there, but they weren't organised into a country, so in their minds that made it ok.

Then, after Rome took over, and the Jews and Romans had their falling out, Rome took Israel, and as punishment for trying to gain Independence made the country of Palestine and Syria.

Thousand years later, the league of nations (UN) changed it back again.

Obviously no one from the last change was still around, nor their children or grandchildren, so its hard to say if the land was rightfully theirs or not.

Most of the middle east didn't think so.

Egypt was the aggressor in the first war, and in that aspect Israel was in the right.

Israel kicked the crap out of the Arab countries.

But they didn't stop there.

They also took, by force, about 26% more than land they had originally be given, (which, as pointed out already, was only semi-legitimate to begin with).

Then, years later in the 6-day war, they did it again.

In terms of international law, this was unjustified.

This is the origin of the Gaza Strip / West Bank conflict. They never were a part of Israel. It is as though the US settled parts of Mexico, and then when the Mexicans attacked the settlers, we started a war

over it, and then officially claimed that land (oh, wait, we DID do

that).

Before any discussion over whether Israel's actions regarding land usage are moral or not, they would have to give back all of the land they claimed in all wars - not just to the green line, but to the original 1947 borders.

by [Jay Aziza](#) on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 18:54 | [reply](#)

capitalism is inherently moral?

"buying land and settling it is just buying land and settling it."

As though, if you can afford it, it must not hurt anyone.

Consider a hypothetical situation:

There is a natural disaster. As a result, most stores are short on food for a while.

A man who has plenty of money has an emergency shelter in place, well stocked.

He is out during the day, his shelter locked up, and he comes across a store which has some food, albeit at higher than normal prices.

But they have a limited supply.

He could just walk home, but he is hungry now, so he buys some bread and eats it.

Which means someone else can't.

He is just buying something and using it, and he can afford it - but it is still immoral.

Another example, a real life one this time.

I used to live in a trailer park about 15 miles from Manhattan.

In that area rent for even a small apartment can be over \$1000 per month.

Our rent at the park was \$420 a month.

It was affordable, and it was totally unsubsidized.

Some residents were retired, some disabled, some young, some with families, some working poor. The majority of the residents could not afford to more than double our rent. There were about a couple hundred households between my park and another one next door.

There was no other comparably low cost housing in the area.

The city government wanted to, under the eminent domain ruling, force the parks owners to sell, and then re-sell the land to private developers who would put up a strip mall in its place. The rationale was that the mall would provide more tax revenue to the city.

Economically, as long as they compensated the land owners, they would have been in the right, but it would have still been immoral (I don't know what happened, I moved out of the state).

Suppose Phillip Morris can afford to put cartoon ads for smoking on during Saturday morning cartoons. Would that be ok? Its just buying and using advertising slots on radio wave frequencies.

Suppose wealthy Islamists want to buy the Washington Monument,

Mt. Rushmore, Yosemite and Yellowstone Parks, and the Golden Gate bridge.

If they can afford it, do we let them?

Suppose someone wants to buy the house you live in as a renter, and throw you out.

In the REAL buying land and settling it is NEVER just buying land and settling it, because anywhere you go in this country, someone already lives there.

Go find a Native American and ask them if "buying" land and settling it is "just" buying land and settling it.

The pioneers bought the land they settled from the US government. Only problem is, it wasn't rightfully theirs to sell.

Little wonder that the citizens of a country built on this practice would support Israel for doing the same thing.

by [Jay Aziza](#) on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 19:13 | [reply](#)

Tiny Bit of Land

Even if the situations you describe suggest the immorality of trade in certain circumstances, in what sense are the situations you mention analogous to the settler issue in Israel?

The settlements are a tiny fraction of the land area of the West Bank and Jordan. In what sense are Palestinians being displaced?

Two peoples had individuals living on the land in the 1800's. Jewish immigration then encouraged Palestinian immigration because of the prosperity they created. The overwhelming majority of Palestinians living in the West Bank are descended from immigrants.

To the extent that Palestinians did lose land, they did so in the late 1940's because they declared war on the Jews and tried to take their land. So land was not stolen, except if you mean that there was intent to steal land.

In which case, Palestinians have a lot to answer for.

by a reader on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 23:34 | [reply](#)

Re: capitalism is inherently moral?

Jay Aziza is arguing by way of some examples that, trade is not just an isolated act and so it may be immoral or even illegal in some cases to allow free trade between consenting parties. However, in the examples he gives he has fallen victim to the same error he is supposedly trying to point out in the original post. Indeed, trade is not an isolated act; it always occurs within a broader social context. So if we mean to show that free trade may be immoral and (thus) illegal in some cases, we must do so by looking at those cases in the broader context they sit in.

In the first example Jay is saying that, the well-stocked person who

buys food at the local store would be doing an unethical act. That could be if the assumption that the store has "limited supply" were true over a long enough period of time. But, In such cases "food" or any such commodity would usually be thought of as a public good and even the most libertarian minds would agree that there would be a case for some (limited) government role at least in the form of laws and their enforcement. But in a context where free trade is the common form of trade, food supply does *not* satisfy this condition even in places where a natural disaster has struck except in rare occasions. Usually the shortage is over in a short time because the incentives of a free economy work overwhelmingly against it. In such a broader context, buying food at the local store when one is hungry, even if one is well-stocked, is nothing more than buying food to eat.

The second example, the one about the eminent domain of the city over the trailer park, in fact demonstrates the opposite principle to what Jay is trying to support. The eminent domain is supposed to be about giving the city (the state) the power they need to achieve the goals they are supposed to. Things like building roads, parks, etc. Giving permission to build a mall in place of existing, occupied housing is a modern overstretch of these goals and goes against the more important principle of private ownership. As such, this example does not show the moral deficiency of free trade, but the moral deficiency of state control.

If Philip Morris could buy ads in Saturday morning cartoons, he had not done any immoral act. But do you think the networks that allowed such ads in their cartoons would have nearly as many viewers as they would otherwise? Would they be willing to sacrifice the most important reason they could sell ad space to Morris in the first place? In a free-trade context, with enough information about the harms of tobacco, this would not be a pressing issue of morality, but a simple matter of economy.

If wealthy Islamists could afford to buy the Golden Gate bridge, why should we not let them? What are they going to do with the bridge? Close it, or blow it up? Then we just need to set a price that would allow us to build another one if that is a credible outcome. Would they then buy it? Another scenario is that, they might pose a security problem by building a base for themselves within our society through acquiring land, etc. This is actually already happening. In Canada for instance, there are credible rumors that the highest officials of the government of Iran have piled up enormous assets and private properties. But that is not an argument against free trade. The problem here is not freedom in trade but the ideology of the despots such as Hashemi Rafsanjani and Khamenei of Iran who are against it. In such cases, it is by default the responsibility of the government and/or the courts to create the necessary legal framework that protects the free trade for all to have, not to take it away by unnecessary restrictions.

So, in all Jay's examples, the actual conclusion is not one against free trade. To the contrary, the best solution to such problems is one that expands and protects free trade.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Tue, 12/26/2006 - 11:39 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

In such cases "food" or any such commodity would usually be thought of as a public good and even the most libertarian minds would agree that there would be a case for some (limited) government role at least in the form of laws and their enforcement.

I don't agree the public good issues make any case whatsoever for government action. There was an extensive discussion of public goods in comments on another thread here. I don't believe that governments have any special knowledge of what should be done with goods.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 01/20/2007 - 15:55 | [reply](#)

It's Not Knowledge

"I don't believe that governments have any special knowledge of what should be done with goods."

It's not a question of governments having special knowledge. When there are public goods, the government sometimes has the ability to act coercively in order to improve overall societal efficiency, even when private citizens do not. If this coercive action increases efficiency and if non-coercive solutions are less efficient (which is theoretically possible when the government enables public goods to be produced), this increased efficiency increases people's freedom because people have more money to spend. So citizens tolerate some coercion some of the time, in order to increase their freedom in other circumstances, more of the time.

Very few people (even the rich) will vote for a pure libertarian no government economy, because they recognize that limited government intervention, for example when there are natural disasters, sometimes increases efficiency. Virtually no one will vote for a pure libertarian economy, because in net it is too inefficient, and therefore too coercive to citizens.

"Liberal Iranian" is right. Sometimes even libertarians should consider that a consequence of limited coercion can be an increase in net freedom, due to greater prosperity.

by a reader on Mon, 01/22/2007 - 22:31 | [reply](#)

Knowledge

You believe everyone agrees on what is best (it's not an issue of knowledge), but some people act wickedly by refusing to do it (it's an issue of forcing people who refuse to do what they know is

right). Is that correct?

Regardless, this question may make sense to you: If it's not a matter of knowledge, then why can't a private citizen use force? He has, by premise, the same knowledge of what outcome to force as the government does.

-- Elliot Temple

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Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 01/23/2007 - 00:58 | [reply](#)

More Public Goods

"You believe everyone agrees on what is best (it's not an issue of knowledge)"

Elliot

Mostly, I agree with that, but not entirely. With public goods, the overwhelming majority may favor using taxation to accomplish something, but there may be a few individuals who don't agree that a project qualifies as a public good (that the provision of the good by the government would increase efficiency in society).

Those individuals who don't agree, if they favor living in a particular democratic society, usually believe that even though they are overruled in one election, overall their rational conception of when something is a public good, will in general be shared by others. So they expect to be in the majority when most other votes are taken.

So they maximize their net freedom in society by participating in democracy, even if they disagree with a particular decision of their fellow citizens.

"If it's not a matter of knowledge, then why can't a private citizen use force?"

Elliot

The common knowledge of those in a democratic society is that a monopoly on the use of force is the most economically efficient way of providing security (and desired coercion) to the society.

In public good situations, a single coercive force can sometimes increase economic efficiency in society. With more money, people can do more of what they want, so their net freedom increases. But coercion is most efficiently implemented when only one specialized group of people have overwhelming firepower (the police). If everyone has overwhelming firepower, then no one has overwhelming firepower. So if everyone is equally powerful, everyone has wasted money on arms. Wasting money takes away people's freedom. So most people think that functioning militaries and police are "public goods", best financed by our tax dollars.

If minor forms of coercion can increase economic efficiency and therefore net freedom, most people will want that coercion produced in the most efficient way possible, again to maximize

freedom. Government police forces and militaries serve their citizens, in democratic countries, in that way.

by a reader on Tue, 01/23/2007 - 03:03 | [reply](#)

Monopoly on Force

The common knowledge of those in a democratic society is that a monopoly on the use of force is the most economically efficient way of providing security (and desired coercion) to the society.

What is the argument that this is most efficient? I thought that monopolies created by forcibly suppressing competition were inefficient. For example, the post office. And indeed our government: since when is it very efficient at anything?

The alternative I'd like you to address is not everyone having guns, but a relatively small number of companies having significant armaments.

-- Elliot Temple
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[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/24/2007 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

Knowledge

As I see it, your recommendation involves the majority, when it thinks it is right, imposing its will on a minority which says it disagrees. This is justified by saying that it's not a real disagreement -- they are wrong, and know it -- they are just being wicked.

One problem with this is that it makes no serious attempt to differentiate between wicked people (who know what's best, but refuse to do it), and people who genuinely disagree.

There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property. I know that you will say there is: it's more economically efficient. But that presupposes that the forcer is right. That's invalid. There is no system with the quality that it only uses force when it is in the right.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/24/2007 - 02:04 | [reply](#)

Radical Libertarianism Attacks Freedom

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property."

Not quiet what I am saying. People make a trade in certain

situations. They agree to be coerced by the majority when they are in the minority, in exchange for being able to coerce the minority when they are in the majority. Theoretically, 100% of people could agree with that. Are you really saying that even if 100% of people agree to this, they are doing something wrong?

"no justification"?

None?

Even if 100% of people unanimously agree to utilize democratic principles to solve certain classes of problems?

We know that the overwhelming majority voluntarily agrees to live in a democracy because virtually no one, including the rich, will vote for libertarian candidates. The majority will not vote for (particularly radical) libertarian candidates because such individuals do not recognize the existence of public good problems.

The gross inefficiency created by not recognizing certain public good needs of communities (e.g. the need for defence, police, courts, roads, etc.) is too great for most people to stomach. A libertarianism that recognizes no public goods, deprives people of money and their lives.

So virtually no one will vote for these radical libertarian arrangements, because this libertarianism grossly violates individual liberty.

by a reader on Thu, 01/25/2007 - 01:42 | [reply](#)

Clarification

"One problem with this is that it makes no serious attempt to differentiate between wicked people (who know what's best, but refuse to do it), and people who genuinely disagree."

1. You seem to be saying that if a "serious attempt" were made to differentiate between "wicked people" and those who genuinely think the taxation is inefficient, you would be more sympathetic to taxation of everyone, except those who honestly disagree.

If so, what would constitute "a serious attempt", in your mind?

2. Or is your point that a "serious attempt" that gives a valid answer is truly not possible. In which case you didn't mean to say that serious attempts are not made, but rather that even serious attempts can never give valid answers!

Is 1 or 2 correct?

by a reader on Thu, 01/25/2007 - 04:54 | [reply](#)

Re: Clarification

The problem is that the supposed justification for coercion was that the majority **was** right (as, you say, everyone involved knows) -- the dissenters were wicked and had no point. But no attempt is being made to identify when the majority is actually wrong. It just

keeps being assumed that it is right, b/c of your delegitimazation of dissent. Such a system, with next to no ability to correct errors in the thinking of the majority, is deeply hostile to new ideas, and can easily entrench bad ones.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 01/25/2007 - 15:57 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

You say that not recognizing certain public goods is inefficient. Well, I say I recognize more than you. I recognize that, the option to buy a sandwich at a location for a particular price is a public good. Anyone in the world (with a few exceptions) has that option. It's a useful, valuable option.

I say the option to walk into a bookstore and browse books, and walk out, without paying, is a public good. You get something for free, and it's quite difficult for the store to give different treatment to people who plan to buy something, and people who don't. And the fact is that this public good exists.

Every single business and store on the Earth provides public goods. Many of them were created without force, and without help from the government. Public good problems are solved all the time, without force.

It's interesting that you mention roads as a public good, because privately built roads already exist. It's also interesting because you are aware of the concept of a toll road, and also a private driveway. How can you call roads a public good when it is relatively easy to exclude access to people who don't pay in advance? (Well, people will have the free option to buy use of the road. I will accept that answer, but it only puts roads in the same category as McDonalds.)

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 01/25/2007 - 16:06 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

"Well, I say I recognize more than you. I recognize that, the option to buy a sandwich at a location for a particular price is a public good."

Why is it a public good?

"I say the option to walk into a bookstore and browse books, and walk out, without paying, is a public good. You get something for free, and it's quite difficult for the store to give different treatment to people who plan to buy something, and people who don't. And

the fact is that this public good exists."

As I have said before in a different post, a chance of customers spending money, is in fact money in the bank to a business with a large enough volume of customers. A 50% chance of getting 100 dollars is worth something to most businesses, so they will spend some money to get that money.

Ask yourself whether you would be willing to pay a certain amount of money to have a 50% chance of getting 100 dollars. Most people would be willing to spend something (usually less than 50 dollars) to buy that deal. Again, most people would be willing to pay SOMETHING to buy a "chance", even if it is not a guarantee of money, but a "chance" for money.

Because people will spend money to buy a "chance", a chance at winning money is worth something to the people who will spend for it.

Borders is implicitly giving customers money, by giving customers a comfortable chair and reading materials. And yes, the customer is paying for it, because the customer is giving back something very valuable to Borders: A "chance" that he will buy something. And remember, chances are valuable, so the owners of Borders are willing to spend money (provide seating) to buy the valuable chance that a customer might buy a book.

So when the owners of Borders provides seating to the public, they are not usually providing a public good, though the charitable giving of the company certainly would qualify.

"Public good problems are solved all the time, without force."

Yes. The culture does encourage people to be generous with each other, and so many (even most) public good problems are solved that way. But for some public good problems, there is no known efficient way of solving the problem. The overwhelming majority of people will vote for a publically owned defense force (a public good), enforced by taxation for example, to prevent our country from being annihilated. (It is simply too inefficient not to have a publically owned military!)

by a reader on Fri, 01/26/2007 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

Owning a Public Good is Owning the Law

If one believes in the ability of individuals to steal, then one believes in the existence of public goods, because private ownership of a public good, is private ownership of the means by which people steal.

Therefore owning a public good is equivalent to owning the ability to create laws that give and take property from others, without consent. Try to think of any classically recognized public good, and try to think of one in which this is NOT true.

So those radical libertarians who believe that traditionally labelled

public goods should be privately owned, implicitly believe that private owners should be able to write the laws of their community that effect others, without their consent.

And those who believe that private individuals should be able to write the law that effects others, without consent, are otherwise known as dictators and socialists.

Therefore, a radical libertarianism that does not recognize a distinction between public and private goods, devolves into an equivalent socialism and totalitarianism.

And radical libertarians, espousing such a doctrine, are the enemies of freedom, like their socialistic and totalitarian identical twins.

by a reader on Fri, 01/26/2007 - 02:57 | [reply](#)

Chance

The "chance" that a customer will buy something is nothing like gambling on a 50% chance to get \$100. With the gambling if you win the dice roll the house must pay you. With the book store, no one has to pay them anything. It isn't a chance, it's a decision.

Why will a person choose to pay Borders? Simple. Because they value owning one of the books more than its price.

They will not choose to pay for a book because they like the chair they already sat in. That doesn't affect the calculation of whether to buy the book or not.

A further argument that customers aren't paying for the chairs is this: no matter how many books I buy from Borders today, they can remove all the chairs tomorrow. I can make no (legal) complaint, because I have not paid for those chairs to be there.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 01/27/2007 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

Stocks Have No Value?

"The "chance" that a customer will buy something is nothing like gambling on a 50% chance to get \$100. With the gambling if you win the dice roll the house must pay you. With the book store, no one has to pay them anything. It isn't a chance, it's a decision."

So stocks, which may be worth nothing when you try to sell them, have no value at all? Look at the stock page of any newspaper. Note the prices of stocks.

Then you might wish to rethink your argument!

by a reader on Sun, 01/28/2007 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

Chairs

For each person in the world, there is a certain probability that he will buy a certain number of additional books at Borders if they offer seating compared with if they do not. This does not mean anyone is paying for chairs, but never mind that for now.

For some people, this probability is zero: these include people who would never go to Borders anyway, and people who buy a lot of books at Borders but do not value sitting down there.

But it also includes people who never buy books but do value sitting in chairs in malls, reading books free. Such people are paying Borders zero. They are free riders. And it is entirely possible for a bookstore not to be built, that would have been built if only those free riders paid for the chairs they value.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 01/28/2007 - 22:11 | [reply](#)

A Fair Coin..A Fair Chance..Flipped or Not

"For some people, this probability is zero: these include people who would never go to Borders anyway, and people who buy a lot of books at Borders but do not value sitting down there."

So if I flip a fair coin and then cover the results with my hand, so I can't see the results, are you really willing to say that I don't have a 50% chance of getting heads, because the coin was already flipped and must already be showing heads or tails underneath my hand?

From the perspective of the *owners* of Borders, each customer has a certain average chance that he will buy books, regardless of whether the individual customer knows that he will or will not buy books. The managers of Borders know that they can increase the average chance that a customer will buy books, if the store provides a comfortable place to sit.

As individuals, I have no doubt that the owners of Borders can be as altruistic as anyone else. But comfortable chairs and a nice ambience in stores are present, for the most part, to increase profit, not to increase altruism. If managers waist money on store furniture that does not improve long-term profitability, the store will lose investment money to competitors who invest their money more profitably.

by a reader on Mon, 01/29/2007 - 00:16 | [reply](#)

Free Chairs

Borders has some free riders in their chairs who will never pay.

Borders makes profit from its policies that allow free riders.

One way a public good problem can be solved is to ignore the free

riders because it's profitable to carry on anyway.

With me so far?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 01/29/2007 - 01:40 | [reply](#)

Good Post!

I changed my mind. You are right!

Good Post.

It is entirely possible that the owners of Borders are maximizing profit, but at the same time unintentionally giving away a free service, because of the cost of measuring who is a "true" customer and who is just there for the "free ride".

It actually neatly illustrates a point that I often try to make when discussing these issues. From the perspective of the owners of Borders, there is variable behavior of customers. Presumably, if they could *perfectly* tell who was going to buy, they would lavish considerably more attention on him/her....very comfortable couches!

So variability in the customers behavior, from the perspective of Borders, is a *cost* to its owners. Memes and culture probably have a role in making it easier to determine who is the real customer. Or at least, if such mechanisms existed, it would minimize the cost of "free riders" and hence the transaction costs of the business.

Thanks.

by a reader on Mon, 01/29/2007 - 02:07 | [reply](#)

Excellent

Great! I think it will interest you to now apply similar logic to a classic public good problem:

There is a valley with farmers, and this valley has yearly floods. A dam is proposed to keep more exact control over water levels and make all the farms have better yields. The dam costs many times more than the benefit to one farmer, but the benefit to all the farmers combined is much more than the cost of the dam.

The public good problem says: a few people don't actually want the dam right now. Maybe they are in too much debt to make an investment of that size. Or they think dams are ugly. Or they hate technology. If we ask everyone who wants the dam to pay their fare share, everyone has an incentive to pretend to be one of the people

who doesn't really want it. Then they won't have to pay, but they

will still get the dam.

How can Borders help us here? Well, in that case, we ignored free riders on a public good (the chairs), while making a profit on a private good (the book sales). Maybe it's better than that: we didn't just ignore the free riders, we took advantage of them being in our store: while there, they saw advertisements and book covers that could tempt them to buy a book.

In the case of the valley, one thing to do is remember that having the public good available makes the valley a more valuable place, just like the chairs make Borders a better place. So we could buy real estate there before building a dam, and its value would increase afterwards.

But getting back to the original plan, what other private goods could we sell? Well, the owners of a dam for a large valley have a lot of important decisions to make. What will the dam be named? What sort of tourism program will it have? What will be the exact schedule of releasing water, and what will be the exact target water levels in the valley on each day? Will it take various steps to be "environmentally friendly"? Who is allowed to press the big red button to release huge torrents of water?

So another thing we could do is sell the name of the dam, and give tours. We even could call it "the dam that defies public good theory" if that would impress enough people. And the farmers won't all want the same exact schedule of water releases. Having preferable water levels could be worth a lot to a major farmer. The other farmers will get non-ideal water levels for free which are better than when there was no dam. But so what? That isn't hurting us. As long as we have things we can sell, we may be able to build the dam.

It may be true that the dam is more difficult to build than Borders. Maybe it's harder to find enough things to sell for the large cost to build it. But my claim is only that we can think of both projects as, fundamentally, facing the same issues.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 01/29/2007 - 17:07 | [reply](#)

Hmm

"In the case of the valley, one thing to do is remember that having the public good available makes the valley a more valuable place"

I have a great business idea. Let's move all Border's bookstores to blighted/impoverished/high crime locations. After the move, there is more of a public good problem available, so we have more of an opportunity to make money stopping "free riders" and criminals. Better yet, let's move all the Border's stores to flood plains. That way the stores can increase in value, when we agree to lose money

in perpetuity to "free riders", who won't support the building and

maintaining of dams.

Find the greatest public good problems, and business will come!

by a reader on Tue, 01/30/2007 - 01:17 | [reply](#)

Radical Libertarianism Attacks Freedom (part II)

An "economic good" is defined as

–noun

a commodity or service that can be utilized to satisfy human wants and that has exchange value.

From Dictionary.com, Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary

Radical libertarians claim that there are no public goods. But if there are no public goods, then all goods are private goods.

If a person owns the "ability to create the law", he owns the rights to a valuable service (having property rights defined in the way he wants them to be defined). This service certainly is worth something in an economic exchange. Therefore, "the ability to create the law" is an economic good, given the meaning of "economic good" specified above.

But if the radical libertarian believes that there are no public goods, then all goods should be considered private goods, including "the ability to create the law." But the ability to create the law, owned by an individual, turns an individual into a dictator, in the standard meaning of *that* term. Therefore radical libertarians, although talking loudly about freedom, in fact (logically) support dictatorship.

But the situation is worse than that. If an individual owns "the ability to make the law", he owns the ability to steal from others, if he chooses. But legal protection from theft, independent of this choice of someone else to steal, is what defines a private good. So if the radical libertarian does not believe in public goods, he does not believe in private goods, either. Finally, believing neither in the existence of public goods nor private goods; in other words believing in the existence of no goods at all, makes no sense at all.

Therefore, by a reduction ad absurdum argument, it is illogical not to believe in the existence of public goods.

So Elliot, do you believe in the existence of public goods, independent from private goods?

by a reader on Tue, 01/30/2007 - 03:03 | [reply](#)

pg

I didn't say there are no public goods, I said that Borders has a public good problem! They are very common. But also, as Borders illustrates, they can be solved without government.

Please don't be sarcastic. I think we misunderstand each other

enough when we are straight-forward.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 01/30/2007 - 04:41 | [reply](#)

Radical Libertarians and Public Good Problems

A reader wrote:

Radical libertarians claim that there are no public goods

Here is a chapter almost entirely devoted to the discussion of public goods and public good problems, in the textbook *Price Theory* by the anarcho-capitalist (and radically libertarian) economist David Friedman.

by **Editor** on Tue, 01/30/2007 - 12:53 | [reply](#)

But at Times...

I recently had a discussion with a certain individual whom you might know, who argued that one can never make a convincing argument that a particular economic situation represents a public good problem.

The implication of that argument was said to be that since one can never make a convincing argument that a particular situation represents a public good problem, one can not be convincing in arguing that the government should intervene to solve a public good problem.

I believe I demonstrated in other discussions that the argument is mistaken.

So there are people who have believed that one can not make a convincing argument that public good problems exist.

by a reader on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 00:23 | [reply](#)

Thanks

Yes! I think it would be good to read his chapter.

In a public meeting situation, the author describes the following:

"The long-winded speaker is underproducing the public good of brevity. Another, and equivalent, way of describing the situation is to say that he is overproducing his speech. The problem can be described either as underproduction due to the public-good problem or as overproduction due to the existence of an externality."

So someone who is a mugger is overproducing the externality called "stealing" and underproducing the public good called "public safety". Public goods and externalities are two-halves of the same

coin.

I have previously said that it is a mistake to believe that one cannot make a convincing argument for the existence of public good problems. But we can now say something stronger. If one knows that stealing is a problem, this proves the actual existence of public good problems.

by a reader on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 01:35 | [reply](#)

Who Determines?

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property."

Elliot Temple

Who determines (or how is it determined) that something has been done to one's property?

by a reader on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 04:08 | [reply](#)

Convincing Arguments

A public good problem is a situation in which the right outcome will not happen voluntarily or by market forces. However, forceful government intervention can help everyone and make the right outcome occur. The way this happens is that the right outcome is for many people to pool their money to buy something that will help them all. A few people don't want the good, so they shouldn't pay. Unfortunately, people who do want the good do not have an incentive to tell the truth: if they say they are one of the few people who doesn't want it, they will save money. They get a free ride. But if everyone acts rationally, they all try to get a free ride, and the right outcome isn't paid for until the government steps in. Technically, not everyone is helped this time -- a few were telling the truth when they said they didn't want to buy the good at this price -- but, on average, they all benefit from the government's interventionist policy.

How do you identify a public good problem in real life? Well, you need to know what the right outcome is, and you need to know it won't happen by market forces: no one could possibly invent something that puts incentives in the right places. But how can you convincingly argue for those?

If something is the morally best outcome, it is best for everyone involved. If only they understood that, they would voluntarily want to do it, because it is better for them to do so than to do anything else. So, it seems to me that it's always the case that sufficient knowledge in the right place will make people do something voluntarily -- if it really is best.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 04:23 | [reply](#)

Subjective vs. Objective

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property"

So is it a person's "subjective" sense that something has been done to change his property and this precludes the use of force to create the change? Or is there an "objective" sense in which something has been done to his property, and this precludes the use of force to create change?

by a reader on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 13:00 | [reply](#)

Objective

There is a fact of the matter about whether someone has violated your property. It isn't subjective.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 18:25 | [reply](#)

Stopping Others from Trading

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property"

Elliot Temple

If an individual's property value will not go down (objectively) and no objective damage will be done to anyone else's property values, should an individual be able to legally stop (coerce) others from making a voluntary and mutually beneficial trade, on the grounds that he thinks the trade is immoral?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 00:15 | [reply](#)

no

no

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 00:45 | [reply](#)

Even Government Immorality?

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property"

Elliot Temple

Multiple (but not all) farmers, who experience flooding on their

land, make a deal with the government to collect taxes from *all farmers* after a dam is built. The dam increases the income of all farmers (due to increased crop yields from decreased flooding), more than the taxes subsequently collected to pay back the government.

Should a libertarian farmer be able to stop this deal, just because he has moral problems with the government collecting taxes from him? Has governmental force been applied against the libertarian because he disagrees with the government decision and has to pay taxes?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 03:40 | [reply](#)

Yes

In an ideal world, he should be able to stop it: no one has a right to sign him up for some deal if he doesn't want to be part of it. But they can continue on without his money.

For all you know, his kids were in a car accident yesterday, and he doesn't have insurance, and your government taxes mean he has to choose one to die.

There is a huge variety of milder circumstances. But the point is, taking people's wealth matters. And if they don't want to sign up for the deal which you think is in their interest, they will have a reason. And it could be a good one. And if it isn't, you could persuade them it isn't so there is no need to use force.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 07:32 | [reply](#)

Wealth Increased

"There is a huge variety of milder circumstances. But the point is, taking people's wealth matters."

But his wealth is not being taken. The increase in yields from his crops is greater than the tax subsequently collected to build the dam.

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 12:11 | [reply](#)

Taken

You take his money now, and according to your predictions, if he continues with the same lifestyle, which you don't know if he will, then he will make more later. That could ruin someone's life.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

Libertarian Objections

"You take his money now and according to your predictions..."

The tax can be collected, for example on the sale of his produce, if he produces it. So the tax can be collected only when we are as objectively sure (as possible) that the libertarian has made a net profit. Making a net profit would take into account his entire tax obligation as one of the farmers benefitting from the socialized dam.

If this arrangement occurs, but the libertarian objects to having to pay taxes, has he been coerced or forced to do so? Should it be legally OK to collect taxes in this way?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

Objections

I am trying to isolate the cause of the sense that the libertarian has been coerced.

If you do think it should be illegal to tax the libertarian farmer, is it because even if all the assumptions are true, so the libertarian's net profit increases, the libertarian is being forced to involuntarily *change his behavior* (e.g. write a check to the government) though he does not want to?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 18:43 | [reply](#)

Tax

You could be wrong about why his profits increased.

Your dam may increase his profits less than another dam which he would have preferred to pay for.

Your dam may have policies he doesn't like. If you were a private company, he wouldn't buy from you, b/c he'd rather give his business to another company with policies he prefers.

He may think the flood control isn't helpful. Even if he's wrong, you need to persuade him, not force him, b/c you could be wrong as well.

He may object to reporting his income to you, so that you know how much to tax him. Privacy...

He may think the dam is ugly, and not worth the profit, and doesn't want to pay to support it.

He may prefer not to do business with you. Being selective about who we do business with is important. What if the dam project doesn't work out? Perhaps because of resistance from people like

him, even. Well, then you might have a half-finished dam sitting around (plus angry bureaucrats). That could be worse than no dam.

The main point: if the dam is a good idea, persuade him. Then he will happily consent to pay for it out of his profits. As Godwin said (quoted on the front page of my website):

Let us consider the effect that coercion produces upon the mind of him against whom it is employed. It cannot begin with convincing; it is no argument. It begins with producing the sensation of pain, and the sentiment of distaste. It begins with violently alienating the mind from the truth with which we wish it to be impressed. It includes in it a tacit confession of imbecility. If he who employs coercion against me could mould me to his purposes by argument, no doubt he would. He pretends to punish me because his argument is strong; but he really punishes me because his argument is weak.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 19:41 | [reply](#)

Mistake?

1. "In an ideal world, he should be able to stop it (the dam)"

Elliot Temple

2. If an individual's property value will not go down (objectively) and no objective damage will be done to anyone else's property values, should an individual be able to legally stop (coerce) others from making a voluntary and mutually beneficial trade, on the grounds that he thinks the trade is immoral?

a reader

"No"

Elliot Temple

Argument number 1 applies to the dam. So you are saying that the dam should be able to be legally stopped by the libertarian in an ideal world.

Argument number 2 also applies to the dam. So you are saying that the dam should not be able to be stopped by the libertarian in an ideal world.

Which of your statements is mistaken?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 22:22 | [reply](#)

re: mistake

arg 2 does not apply for reasons including:

- the trade involves him, not just "others"
- he isn't objecting on purely moral grounds

- it isn't voluntary if he objects

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 22:55 | [reply](#)

Does Apply

A few farmers are trading with the government. Nobodies property values go down, though all are being taxed. The tax has increased the libertarian's wealth. Are you saying the libertarian has been coerced because he has been given money?

Perhaps you are saying that the libertarian has been coerced because he has to change his behavior?

What is it that is "objectively" coercive about the new arrangements?

Number 2 precisely applies.

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 23:07 | [reply](#)

doesn't

umm i edited my post above FYI (before seeing that you replied)

can you reply to my reasons i've now spelled out that arg 2, as written, does not apply?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

Libertarianism and its Twin, Socialism

"The trade involves 'him,'" (The libertarian, therefore, is involved in the trade but his objections are not taken into account.)
Elliot Temple

If a government sells a road to a businessman and everyone's property values go up and everyone's time to work decreases, should a socialist be able to legally object to the trade on the grounds that the roads should be owned by the government? Can the socialist object to the trade on the grounds that he used to have to pay the government, but now has to pay a private individual (the road owner)? So the socialist feels "coerced" because there are now a few private roads. As usual, the libertarian and the socialist are on the same page. Both want to socialize morality at the expense of property.

"he (the libertarian) isn't objecting on purely moral grounds"

Elliot Temple

What other grounds is he objecting on?

"it isn't voluntary if he objects"

Elliot Temple

If a Best Buy buys a small local grocery store near me, and my property values go up, should I be able to legally object on the grounds that I am opposed to business? Should I be able to stop the trade, on the grounds that the "people" have not agreed to this? The libertarian and the socialist, once again, share this concern that everyone has to be on the same page before anything is done. So they are willing to steal property by preventing exchange in real time, in the name of socializing morality.

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 23:57 | [reply](#)

the socialist has no grounds

the socialist has no grounds for complaint -- he doesn't have to trade with the road owner if he doesn't want to. *except* that the government has various duties to its people, and shouldn't irresponsibly mess up reasonable access to the roads it built. if he makes that objection, he can complain to the government, not to the new owner.

"What other grounds is he objecting on?"

I gave a list of reasons people might object in a previous post. If no one objects, then go ahead.

regarding voluntary: part of the deal is the government takes my money to pay for it. your grocery store example lacks that aspect.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 00:43 | [reply](#)

Socialists and Libertarians

"the socialist has no grounds for complaint -- he doesn't have to trade with the road owner if he doesn't want to."

If the businessman-road-owner owns the only road out of a cul-de-sac, then it becomes very difficult for a homeowner not to exchange with him. Now, a homeowner could take a helicopter out, or he could develop a new road.

But the same is true of the libertarian farmer. He does not have to plant crops, and he therefore does not have to pay the government (for the dam) from taxation of his crops. So like the homeowner who uses a helicopter to leave his house, the libertarian can decide

to not pay for the dam by not planting crops (not using the benefit

from the dam).

Creating new solutions to flooding may take some time, but it will take the homeowner time to build alternative roads, in the cul-de-sac. I'm afraid there is exact symmetry between the socialist and the libertarian. Both are trying to prevent trade that objectively increases the wealth of everyone, including themselves. Note that there is even a physical symmetry between a river that runs between farms, and a road that runs between homes in a cul-de-sac.

"You could be wrong about why his profits increased."

If the government sells the road to a businessman and everyone's property values increase, and if the best economic theory suggests that the cause was placing the road in the hands of private individuals who value efficiency; the socialist could nonetheless claim that the analysis is mistaken. Perhaps the increased housing values occurred for other reasons.

Imagine the consequences if the socialist and the libertarian should have the legal right to stop any trade because there is uncertainty about the outcome, even though the best economic theory says that a private road and a public dam increase the wealth of everyone.

There is always going to be some uncertainty in trading. So stopping trade because of uncertainty amounts to stopping all trade. And this amounts to a defense of the status quo, because there are inevitably uncertainties. Once again, the libertarian and the socialist are restricting free exchange between people, this time because of fears and pessimism.

"regarding voluntary: part of the deal is the government takes my money to pay for it."

Actually if everyone's wealth increases, the private/government actions are in net creating wealth, not taking it.

"Your dam may have policies he (the libertarian) doesn't like. If you were a private company, he wouldn't buy from you, b/c he'd rather give his business to another company with policies he prefers."

The policies of the private owner of the cul-de-sac road may not agree with everyone, either. Some may disagree about the placement of the lights, for example.

The socialist homeowner and the libertarian farmer may need to help create alternatives that increase the value of their own properties, without decreasing the value of their neighbor's property. But "command and control" libertarians restrict the wealth of everyone, by stopping an efficient public dam from being built. And "command and control" socialists do likewise, if they prevent efficient, privately owned roads that benefit everyone.

"He (the libertarian) may prefer not to do business with you."

The socialist homeowner may not prefer to do business with the

private owner of the cul-de-sac road, either. As you can tell, socialist homeowners and libertarian farmers have a lot of objections in common.

"He may think the flood control isn't helpful. Even if he's wrong, you need to persuade him, not force him, b/c you could be wrong as well."

The socialist homeowner may not think that the private road is more efficient, either. But even if our best economic theories say the socialist is wrong, are you really claiming that the cul-de-sac road should not be privately owned, even if everyone becomes wealthier as a consequence?

Does it really make sense for a libertarian farmer to think that if he judges any trade anywhere in the United States to adversely affect his property values, he has a right to stop it, until he is convinced that it doesn't? Does he have a right to stop every single trade, even if our best economic theories suggest that the trading of others helps, not hurts him?

Well, now I think the libertarian farmer is worse than the socialist homeowner. For if the libertarian can stop every trade in the United States, until he says that it does not hurt him, that libertarian is no socialist; he's a plain dictator!

"He may object to reporting his income to you, so that you know how much to tax him. Privacy..."

If the tax is based on the total cost of the dam to the private individual, collected after he sells his produce, the amount that he pays in tax is fixed. Income information is not shared.

"He (the libertarian farmer) may think the dam is ugly, and not worth the profit, and doesn't want to pay to support it."

If a libertarian can stop any trade because he thinks the results are ugly, then he can stop all trades in the United States (when he says they create something ugly). Do you see, as you listen to these arguments, how libertarian conceptions of people's rights amount to a defense of dictatorship? One libertarian is demanding the right to restrict every other person's trade, on the grounds that he thinks the results are ugly.

"The main point: if the dam is a good idea, persuade him."

Should the privatization of roads not be allowed, unless every socialist has been persuaded? Indeed, should no trade take place in the United States, unless there is unanimous rule? Should therefore no trade take place, at all, because every single person in the United States does not 100% agree about what is right?

But property is created *because of exchange*. So should we have no property, at all, because of a totalitarianism that insists that everyone first agree? In other words, is the libertarian arguing that we should have no property at all, unless we can first create totalitarian unanimity of mind? But this implies that everyone must own a little bit of all property, if everyone must be persuaded for

any piece of property to be exchanged. But this sounds exactly like the mantra of the socialist, indeed is the mantra of the socialist. The libertarian is implicitly arguing, in his insistence on universal consent, that everyone owns a little bit of every piece of property. In other words, the libertarian is insisting that all property is socialized. And like the socialist, the libertarian claims this creates freedom.

by a reader on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 05:00 | [reply](#)

Who Must Consent?

It isn't universal consent that is required for a trade, it is consent among all participants of a trade. Your dam+taxes trade involves everyone in the valley. So it's very hard to organize. You have to convince everyone that you want to pay you.

You say it doesn't count as paying you because they become richer. But what if something goes wrong? Say a blight takes all their crops. Then what?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 20:10 | [reply](#)

You Have to Pay for Services

Actually, it involves only those people who use the services of the dam. So yes, those who use the dam have to pay for it. If the farmer does not plant crops, so gains no benefit, or can objectively demonstrate that he has his own method of flood control, then the farmer wouldn't pay (be taxed).

If the socialist homeowner does not use the (only) road exiting the cul-de-sac, then he wouldn't pay the private road owner, either.

"Your dam+taxes trade involves everyone in the valley."
Elliot Temple

It involves everyone in the valley only as much as private ownership of a cul-de-sac road involves everyone living in the cul-de-sac.

So why is the libertarian farmer a "participant" in the trade but the socialist homeowner is not?

by a reader on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 22:26 | [reply](#)

not the same

with the valley, people come to my door, ask for money, and put me in jail if i refuse. just for growing crops on my land. with the cul-

de-sac, that does not happen -- they only ask for money if i use

their land w/out an easement. why do you think they are the same?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 22:54 | [reply](#)

Identical Situation

If there is an easement or not in the cul-de-sac is irrelevant. If people put a toll booth on the road and if I use the private road and don't pay, I get thrown in jail for stealing.

Similarly, if I use the dam and I don't pay (taxes), I also get thrown in jail.

The situations are identical.

by a reader on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 23:43 | [reply](#)

using

You are counting me as "using" the dam even if i carry on with my life as normal from before it existed. Even if I didn't know it exists, you'd count me as using it. Even if I don't want it, and I think it is making me poorer, you'll send me a bill for it. Right?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 02/03/2007 - 01:07 | [reply](#)

Substitute "Dam" for "Road" and "Libertarian" for "Socialist"

The libertarian: "You are counting me as "using" the dam even if i carry on with my life as normal from before it existed. Even if I didn't know it exists, you'd count me as using it. Even if I don't want it, and I think it is making me poorer, you'll send me a bill for it. Right?"

The socialist: "You are counting me as "using" the road even if i carry on with my life as normal (using the road) from before the road was privatized. Even if I don't know the road is private, you'd count me as using it. Even if I don't want the private road, and I think it is making me poorer, you'll charge me for it (when I get to the toll booth). Right?"

I do think that people should be informed that the road is private and there will be charges. I think the same is true for the dam.

Elliot, your argument is essentially declaring a "right" to the status quo. But nobody has such a right. Otherwise one person can stop all other people from trading based on his subjective sensibilities. And

that is immoral.

by a reader on Sat, 02/03/2007 - 03:41 | [reply](#)

it should be the same lifesty

it should be the same lifestyle from before the road existed to make the claim it doesn't use the road.

in the dam case, i stick to my property. in the road case, i leave it.

what is your claim that i'm using your dam? that *you* affect water flow onto my property. you are spilling water (or dryness) onto my land. that i didn't want, and that i think is hurting me. then you have the nerve to charge me for it. if anything, you owe me.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 02/04/2007 - 20:13 | [reply](#)

Socialists are People Too

Libertarian "It should be the same lifestyle from before the road existed?"

Socialist "Well, it's not! I bought my house and positioned the driveway precisely so I can have a very direct route to work. As you correctly point out, my property came with an easement (the road itself which I shared with my neighbors.) The law protected my use of my driveway and the easement. I bought a package of rights when I bought my home, and you are taking them away from me and making me pay for the same thing I used to do for free! Disrupting my route to work, and the way I wanted to use of my driveway, which I just repaved, disrupts my lifestyle. What's more, you have the nerve to ask me to pay for these changes that I don't want. Now *I*, a freedom loving socialist, have to pay a businessman to drive the same route I did before? You should pay me for taking away my right to use the driveway as it functioned before and the easement as it functioned before!

And libertarian farmer, I have no sympathy for you. You are using your property in virutally exactly the same way as you did before. You are farming the same land, just having an easier time of it, according to objective economic analysis. So your lifestyle is the same, except you get more money for doing what you already are doing. On the other hand, you have not had to change your route out of your housing complex to avoid paying capitalists. How can you say your "lifestyle" has changed, certainly not to the degree that mine has. So the government has given you money, despite virtually identical behavior on your part, yet you complain and desire to deprive everyone else of money. Typical capitalist thief!

by a reader on Mon, 02/05/2007 - 15:04 | [reply](#)

P.S.

Socialist to Libertarian

To maintain my lifestyle (where I don't have to stop at toll booths just to drive), I have to pave my backyard and put a hole in the back of my garage to drive my car through, to avoid the businessman's toll booths. Yes, if I do all that I can find a ridiculous dirt road behind my house which is called the new 'easement' leading out of my complex, and avoid toll-booths. Anyone can see that having to do so much just to maintain the lifestyle I had, I am worse off. In other words, *my lifestyle has been disrupted*, if I don't want to use the capitalist toll booths. Yet you, libertarian farmer, claim your "lifestyle" has been disrupted, yet you do virtually the same behaviors as before, just make more money doing them. That makes no sense. On what grounds do you say *your lifestyle* has been disrupted?

by a reader on Mon, 02/05/2007 - 15:41 | [reply](#)

My kids preferred to swim in

My kids preferred to swim in the old level of flooding. To me, that's worth a million dollars. Stop changing my life and telling me I should prefer it. Caring about swimming conditions is reasonable. You are assuming you are right about what I should want, without addressing why I want it.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 02/05/2007 - 19:53 | [reply](#)

Political Economy

"My kids preferred to swim in the old level of flooding. To me, that's worth a million dollars. Stop changing my life and telling me I should prefer it. Caring about swimming conditions is reasonable. You are assuming you are right about what I should want, without addressing why I want it."

No I am not assuming that you are wrong for what you want. I am assuming you have to pay for what you want.

Of course the socialist can also say, "My kids preferred to use our driveway as it had been, and use our easement without having to stop at a toll booth. That is worth 1,000,000 dollars to me. The government should not sell the road to a private businessman without my consent. Stop changing my life and telling me I should prefer it. Caring about how I travel to work, the sites I see, the way I go to work: All of these concerns are reasonable. You are assuming you are right about what I should want, without addressing why I want it."

Now, with a million dollars, you might be able to change many

people's minds, but without compensating them, you usually should not be allowed to use your moral claims (your children "like swimming"), to damage the property and productivity of others. This is precisely why we have the police and government in the United States, to protect people from libertarians (and socialists) trying to impose their moral standards on everyone else.

You may not want me to paint my house a particular color because the photons entering your family's eyes, as you stand on your property, bother your children or you an awful lot. But we have the police to protect us from individuals who want to impose their moral values on the rest of us, while taking our property. If your property values do not fall when I paint my house, in general, you do not have a right to complain about the color of my house. And if you want me to change the color of my house, you have to pay me.

Now, should objective economic efficiency trump all questions of morality. Obviously not! The real question is how should it be decided which issues are questions of morality, in which it is sometimes OK to involuntarily take property from others, and which are not.

Mantra's about "coercion" and "force" being "bad" usually don't solve many real-world problems. The reason is that one person's "stealing" of property is another person's "justified ownership" of the same property. Both sides will perceive that their property has been forcefully taken, no matter what the outcome, as the examples of the "socialist" and the "libertarian" demonstrate, discussed above. By assumption, property values and income of both increased but the socialist and the libertarian wanted their moral claims to trump the economic ones (the efficiency claims).

So the real question is not about "force" and "coercion", because one person's "justified force" is another person's "stealing". We can all agree that no one likes bad things to happen. But rather, the real issue is how should free people decide which goods should be subjected to efficiency analysis, and which should be subjected to ethical analysis. The two sometimes go together, but as the examples above show, not always.

Such discussions are the beginning of a discussion of political-economy.

by a reader on Tue, 02/06/2007 - 00:06 | [reply](#)

Re: Political Economy

one person's "justified force" is another person's "stealing"

Is this true too? One person's freedom fighter, is another person's terrorist.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 02/06/2007 - 00:25 | [reply](#)

"what is your claim that i'm

"what is your claim that i'm using your dam? that *you* affect water flow onto my property. you are spilling water (or dryness) onto my land."

The condition of the road is spilling over onto everyone's house in the cul-de-sac. How do we know this? Because economic analysis shows that property values will increase when the "spill-over" effect from the ugly road is changed. Predictably, when the road is repaired by the private entrepreneur, everyone's property values increase. And certainly, the private entrepreneur is changing the way the road affects the visual perception of those standing on their own property.

Now, a socialist may say that his children and he appreciated the "old rustic road" (the spill-over effect that damages property values), but they do not have a right to take people's property for that "want" (their sense of aesthetics), unless they pay for it.

"one person's 'justified force' is another person's stealing"
a reader

"Is this true too? One person's freedom fighter, is another person's terrorist."
Elliot Temple

People do disagree about who is a freedom fighter and who is a terrorist. But I think there is an ethical answer in each case, although we might not know what is correct at this point in time. As I said, "the real issue is how should free people decide which goods should be subjected to efficiency analysis, and which should be subjected to ethical analysis."

Most of the time one person's ethical principles should not allow him to stop other people's trades. However, this is not true all the time! Many people who call themselves "freedom-fighters" should be stopped, even if in some way they improve the local economy (think Hezbollah!) I think it is OK to take the property of those who support Hezbollah.

by a reader on Tue, 02/06/2007 - 13:57 | [reply](#)

efficiency vs ethics

the real issue is how should free people decide which goods should be subjected to efficiency analysis, and which should be subjected to ethical analysis.

I take it that by "efficiency analysis" you mean considering whether it meets people's preferences as much as the alternatives. And by ethical analysis, you mean to consider not just what people do prefer today, but also what they ought to prefer. I put it to you that an ethical analysis is always the best one.

An ethical analysis is the general case of analysing what choices

people ought to make. It must, therefore, take into account everything relevant, including efficiency, but also including anything else. It will be capable of judging how important efficiency is in each situation, and each other factor as well. By contrast, an efficiency analysis is not universal, and isn't self-aware: it can't tell if it was the right type of analysis to use. So it is bound to sometimes mislead us, if we sometimes start with it.

Something that dominates many ethical analyses is property rights. This is partly because they exist in our society, so you'll do as well ignoring them as ignoring road signs. But it's also because they help humans to cooperate. Property rights tell us how to resolve many disputes about the use of goods, and as an evolved tradition in our society, they are sufficiently clear that they can be resolved in court. Our courts would have no trouble at all deciding who violated whose rights in the case of the unwanted-dam-and-charges, or the case of the terrorist "freedom fighter", if the parties involved were all just citizens.

There is one thing that is considered to change the analysis: when government takes an action, like charging people for a dam they didn't want, that is deemed legitimate, even though if a private citizen did the same thing it would be clearly illegal. It remains illegal even if the perpetrator proves in court that his action was economically beneficial. The government is a special case: it is thought right to use force "for our own good", (as are parents with their children), but private citizens aren't.

What's the purported justification for these exceptions, and is it reasonable?

Is this way of considering the issue agreeable to you so far?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/07/2007 - 01:00 | [reply](#)

Such Efficiency is Inefficient

"I take it that by "efficiency analysis" you mean considering whether it meets people's preferences as much as the alternatives."

No. But wouldn't it be nice if we could do that! The problem is the information cost (the transaction cost) of accurately figuring out everyone's wants and then trading goods (given those wants) is far too high.

So everyone's incentive is to NOT want everyone else's preferences to be optimally met, because if these preferences are discovered, the cost of this process will cause each person to receive less overall from trade. So no one will vote for a system that only allows a trade if everyone in the entire society feels happier about it. Virtually everyone is willing to sacrifice having his own preferences

optimally met, as long as everyone else does the same, because overall that makes everyone wealthier. Not having everyone's preferences considered in any transaction, therefore, is a public good.

Instead, when many speak of efficiency, they refer to the idea that objectively determined property values of everyone's goods should not be decreased by others' transactions.

Obviously, this is not a perfect rule, either, but it does have the advantage of protecting objective property values.

I agree with you that asserting that efficiency analysis is often "good", is a moral claim.

by a reader on Wed, 02/07/2007 - 22:53 | [reply](#)

Unanimous Rule Takes Freedom

"What's the purported justification for these exceptions, and is it reasonable?"

Virtually every transaction that is made involves people doing things that at least some people do not want. So when things happen which people do not want, it is the norm, not the exception!

What is the ethical justification for

1. ruining the subjective quality of a socialist's property easement, though his wealth increases when an entrepreneur buys and repairs a dangerous road.
2. allowing people to smoke cigarettes in their own homes, though others would prefer they did not,
3. repainting one's house to a color that helps property values but annoys one neighbor,
4. having a dam that increases everyone's property values and wealth by preventing flooding, though one libertarian objects...

What is the justification for not demanding unanimous rule about every decision? People understand that demanding unanimous rule takes so much property from everyone (to discover what everyone actually wants), that everyone's choices become impoverished because of the cost of this process. People understand that the ability to choose is valuable and that money can sometimes provide people with choices. People therefore reject socialism and libertarianism because of the ethical principle that it is important to value freedom.

So why do we allow the government to build dams to prevent flooding? Why do we allow a private entrepreneur to own a road to make it safer, citizens to smoke cigarettes in their own homes, and neighbors to paint their houses utilizing their own imagination?

Because these decisions increase our freedom. And freedom is an

important ethical value.

It is only an immature person who demands everything that he wants and expects everyone else to accommodate. Adults understand that one can't have everything that one wants. But if we are willing to compromise with each other, often we all can have much more than what any one of us can create alone. And that's an important ethical value, as well.

by a reader on Thu, 02/08/2007 - 20:48 | [reply](#)

Adults

It is only an immature person who demands everything that he wants and expects everyone else to accommodate. Adults understand that one can't have everything that one wants.

Where do adults (presumably as contrasted with children (non-adults)) come into it?

-- Elliot Temple

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Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 02/09/2007 - 22:36 | [reply](#)

Enforcement of Rules is Sometimes Good

"The government is a special case: it is thought right to use force "for our own good", (as are parents with their children), but private citizens aren't."

When a private entrepreneur buys a cul-de-sac, according to a socialist, force was utilized.

Indeed, when virtually any trade is made, someone's behavior is involuntarily altered. It is not a sign of immaturity to desire government intervention in certain circumstances.

Rather, immature political philosophies do not recognize the freedom-promoting potential of enforceable rules.

by a reader on Mon, 02/12/2007 - 15:30 | [reply](#)

Re: Enforcement of Rules is Sometimes Good

Freedom is Slavery

Voluntary Trade is Coercion

War is Peace

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 02/12/2007 - 23:01 | [reply](#)

Contradictory Claims

Being unable to defend a position is not the same as being able to defend it.

by a reader on Fri, 02/16/2007 - 22:33 | [reply](#)

Huh?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 02/17/2007 - 02:24 | [reply](#)