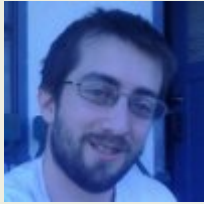


# Tilting the Scale



Send him mail.

*“Coexisting with Coercion” is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by qyj0L. qyj0L is a thinker, a writer, an artist, a dreamer, and a believer. Archived columns can be found [here](#). CWC-only RSS feed available [here](#).*

Hello again, freedom lovers. The time has come once again to loosen the valve a bit, and let out some of what’s been steaming.

My personal time has been spent gardening lately, or more accurately, preparing to garden. I’ve set up a raised bed for vegetables, and established a strip of what will become a flower bed along the sides of my house. The work is hard, yet it is so much more rewarding than I could have ever thought possible from such a simple action.

In an effort to bring you along the wavelength that is my thought process, I feel I should begin at the proverbial beginning.

My place of residence (please notice that I don’t refer to this parcel of land as my property, and for more reasons than the obvious “I don’t own this house”) has gone through several phases over the years. I mow the grass, I trim the trees, I do what is asked of me to maintain the visual aspect of keeping up the image of what this society has deemed to be acceptable. There have been times where I chose to let the lawn grow unchecked, promptly followed by notices from the city urging that this eye-sore/fire hazard/property value diminishing trait be sorted. Throughout this adventure of “keeping up with the Joneses” under threat of action, I have come to understand a few of the intricacies of the state. The first of which I have been touching on since I began to put words down: the ideas of property, of life, and of domination.

**Property**, as defined at Dictionary.com, reads as follows:

1. that which a person owns; the possession or possessions of a particular owner: *They lost all their property in the fire.*
2. goods, land, etc., considered as possessions: *The corporation is a means for the common ownership of property.*
3. a piece of land or real estate: *property on Main Street.*

4. ownership; right of possession, enjoyment, or disposal of anything, especially of something tangible: to have property in land.
5. something at the disposal of a person, a group of persons, or the community or public:  
*The secret of the invention became common property.*

From this we can fairly say that in one form or another, everything can be considered property, would you agree? By state law this rings true, and yet there are still complications, there are still grey areas in the understanding of what exactly it is that this means. My mind, while processing this idea, drifts immediately to the question of who decides what is whose property, and what exactly is required to establish “ownership” of a thing.

There are a great many minds that have addressed these questions, baffling as they are, and yet the common understanding still is centered on the concept of purchasing that which, until the moment of purchase, belonged to another person... but is that good enough? Surely this confusion here was the motivating factor behind the state law that says buying stolen property is a crime; this much I believe all could agree with. If Larry steals Jack’s wallet, Larry has committed a crime we call theft, or stealing, along with other associated words to describe the manner in which the object was stolen. To continue this example, if Larry sells Jack’s wallet to Steve, Steve is now in possession of stolen property, and is subject to be charged with a crime if Steve is unwilling to return the stolen property to its rightful owner (and maybe even if he does return it). But wait, we’ve reached another layer of confusion, haven’t we? If Larry leaves town and Steve returns the wallet to Jack, is Steve compensated for the value of the wallet that he traded to Larry? The state sure isn’t going to pay him. Neither is Jack going to be interested in paying to get back what was his to begin with!

Hmm... to begin with? That sentence there is misleading. To begin with, that wallet was attached to another life form; perhaps a cow, if the wallet is leather, perhaps a plant if it’s woven from hemp or cotton fibers. Were the materials gained prior to the production of this wallet justly gained? Were they paid for? If so, who sets the price to be paid? Who decides what is fair? Does the reality that a cow isn’t able to stand up and say, “Hey there buddy, I think my skin is doing nicely right where it is, thank you very much. I’d prefer it if you left it where it belongs,” mean that we have permission to use the materials? Surely on *some* level, human assumptions that we have the right to restructure our surroundings using the materials at hand, simply because we have the ability to, must be an act of aggression!

**Life**, as defined at Dictionary.com, reads as follows:

1. the condition that distinguishes organisms from inorganic objects and dead organisms, being manifested by growth through metabolism, reproduction, and the power of adaptation to environment through changes originating internally.

2. the sum of the distinguishing phenomena of organisms, especially metabolism, growth, reproduction, and adaptation to environment.
3. the animate existence or period of animate existence of an individual: to risk one's life; *a short life and a merry one*.
4. a corresponding state, existence, or principle of existence conceived of as belonging to the soul: *eternal life*.
5. the general or universal condition of human existence: *Too bad, but life is like that*.

Gardening is a dichotomous act, at its very core. It can be easily said that when one is clearing away the stones and weeds that once inhabited the location of the garden a person is planting, is in essence, paving the way for life to flourish; yet the very act of pulling weeds is a destructive act, is it not? The phrase "playing favorites" comes to mind. Certain plants produce things that humanity has deemed *beneficial*. Most garden-grown crops have a variety of health benefits to them; it's not at all surprising that over time, we collectively figured this out, and began to prioritize the success of one plant over another. The drive to stay alive is embedded in our psyche, and has manifested itself in every aspect of our culture; from the clothes that we wear, to the wars that we wage, and everything in between.

As I prepared my garden areas, digging through the soil, loosening up what time and gravity have compressed, I began to let my mind wander. I thought about the astounding resilience of the plants that I understand to be "weeds", the journey that a plant goes through, the great lengths that are gone to just for a slightly better lit resting place. I'd like you, brave reader, to consider this idea as you go about your day. The forks along a tree as it branches out; the dying rose bush with a single stalk leaning over and out of the shade; the ivy vine that must push its way out from behind the shadow of its brethren; consider these things and ask yourself a question: "Am I so different from these plants?"

I thought of these things as I dug, and felt compelled to help out the creatures that were distraught at the actions I was taking. I picked up several "rolie-polies", and carried them out of harms way. Next I found spiders, desperately fleeing my trowel as it destroyed their hunting grounds; I saw this and thought to myself "How many of them will survive? How many of them will be able to find a new hunting ground, a new shady spot where smaller bugs like to relax?" The idea filled me with a sense of cruelty. I was destroying an entire ecosystem. And for what? Aesthetic appeal? My own selfish gains? The idea rung louder in my mind, so I did the only thing I could think of: I picked up the spiders and moved them to a nearby tree, feeling satisfied with myself that I could, with such a simple action, better the survival rate of the creatures I was robbing of their property. Lucky for me, wolf spiders and rolie-polies don't have a legal system through which they can punish me. I'm sure if you allow yourself to, you can imagine an instance in which humanity has destroyed ecosystems for the sake of "making it better," leaving other creatures, including other

humans, to fend for themselves; and if you really let yourself, you can even think of an example where those left in the wake of these improvements were relocated somewhere safe and out of the way.

I thought of these things and found myself frustrated, trying to connect the pieces in a way that made more sense to me, and I failed. Grocery stores are continually filling up with more and more products that are a far cry from the ideology that food is medicine; yet in order to take the steps necessary for me to avoid these modified and chemically treated foods, I have to push my distress, my unwanted situation, on “lesser creatures.” The cycle is vicious, and seems to have no end. Our society seems to be focused on the idea that for one being to prosper, another must suffer. Is it possible that this is just the way things are? That by nature, all creatures are inherently struggling against the odds for survival, scratching and clawing at everything they can just to get a leg up on the competition? It’s a terrible thought, but it seems to be true.

**Dominate**, as defined at Dictionary.com, reads as follows:

1. to rule over; govern; control.
2. to tower above; overlook; overshadow: *A tall pine dominated the landscape.*
3. to predominate, permeate, or characterize.
4. Mathematics. (of a series, vector, etc.) to have terms or components greater in absolute value than the corresponding terms or components of a given series, vector, etc.
5. Linguistics. (of a node in a tree diagram) to be connected with (a subordinate node) either directly by a single downward branch or indirectly by a sequence of downward branches.

There are two possibilities in any interaction between any entities. One is fueled by fear, presumption, cowardice, and the ego; while the other stems from love, empathy, and the desire to both understand, and to be understood. The first is domination. A child smiles at an adult as they walk past each other on the street. This adult sees the joy, the love, and the compassion that is flowing from the child’s eyes, and can’t seem to connect with it. This adult frowns back at the child, sending the dominating message that “no, the world is not happy and pleasurable, not from my perspective. You are wrong.” From this moment on, the child may begin to second-guess smiling at anyone else they meet, and the cycle of cynicism has begun anew. As the scales begin to tip from one side to another, domination gives way to equality, and the opinions being expressed by the child’s smile begin to have value in the eyes of the adult. The adult returns the smile to the child. Children bring with them into this world a sense of wonder and excitement for the seemingly mundane. This child smiles at an adult and shares with them a small piece of their world, their openness, their desire to connect with others. This adult accepts that what they have seen of the world is not everything, it is merely the surface layer of things that they have become

obsessed with; this adult lets in the light shining from the youth before them, and is given the opportunity to swing on a different spiral.

Voluntary actions, if nourished and cherished, sprout other voluntary actions. Love and peace beget love and peace, where the viewer allows love and peace to take root. I encourage you, brave reader, acolyte of truth and acceptance, to embrace the light that shines from all around you. To remove the barriers that have been placed that cast shadows into the depths of our lives. Seek out understanding, and you will in turn be understood.