

Does Private Property Amount to “Enslavement by Proxy”?

Six months ago it was asked on r/Libertarian, “How are you a libertarian supporting the actions of the Canadian government?” regarding the Freedom Convoy in Ottawa. Included with the question was some commentary. u/teluetetime responded and this conversation on private property ensued. Enjoy.

teluetetime: Claiming land and other natural resources as private property is enslavement by proxy. It’s the use of violence to compel dependence.

Skyler: Oh... you’re constructing strawman arguments and then claiming that’s what ancaps believe.

teluetetime: Every capitalist believes in private ownership of land and natural resources, it’s the foundational concept of the ideology.

Skyler: Yes and you’re calling that “enslavement by proxy” which totally failed to land. You don’t have the right to other people’s property, starting with their bodies to any conflictable resources that they’ve appropriated or traded for. To claim that you are missing the right to other people’s stuff (and their right to yours) means that you’re being “enslaved by proxy” is illogical and disingenuous. Slavery is claiming the exclusive right to control other people’s bodies, by force if necessary. Property is claiming the exclusive right to control conflictable resources, defensible by force if necessary against other people’s threats or aggression. Slavery is the claim that you can own other people, property is the claim that you can’t. They are polar opposites. Anybody advocating for some people to control the property of other people are themselves the ones advocating for slavery. *Obviously.*

teluetetime: So as long as I don’t claim you as property, it’s ok if I compel you to do whatever I want by using violence to keep you from the things you need to live? What is the practical difference? What makes it “aggression” when other people try to use “conflictible resources” that I’ve claimed, but not when I make that claim? Aren’t I the aggressor by using violence to take something that wasn’t mine to begin with?

Skyler:

So as long as I don’t claim you as property, it’s ok if I compel you to do whatever I want by using violence to keep you from the things you

need to live? What is the practical difference?

Force is justified in the defense of person and property. The difference is defensive force versus aggressive force. If I have a legitimate claim to some resource and I was the first one to make that claim (or to trade for it) then anybody who threatens that claim *later* is engaged in aggression. Either the original appropriator's claim will be respected or no property is secure because every latecomer has the right to use force to take what other people have already claimed. Property rights cannot exist without the property norm of original appropriation.

What makes it "aggression" when other people try to use "conflictible resources" that I've claimed, but not when I make that claim?

You're the first. Being first means your force is defensive, theirs is aggressive, and illicit/criminal.

Aren't I the aggressor by using violence to take something that wasn't mine to begin with?

If it wasn't anybody's to begin with, then nobody had a claim to it. If somebody else had appropriated it before you then your force would be aggressive, yes, you would be the latecomer.

teluetime: Finders keepers is an absurd moral premise to base all of human civilization around, especially given that it has never actually been followed; all modern title to property originated from military conquest, not original acquisition. But even if it were followed, think of the implication; trillions of people will never have any actual liberty because they were unfortunate enough not to be born at a time when original claims could be made, or to be the heirs of those who possessed those claims. No one has a right to exclusively control something that they didn't create (or fairly buy from the creator). Just because no one else is currently controlling a given resource doesn't mean that a new claim upon it isn't theft against the entire species.

Skyler:

Finders keepers is an absurd moral premise to base all of human

civilization around

Civilization cannot exist any other way.

trillions of people will never have any actual liberty

Liberty is not having rights to other people's property. That would be slavery.

No one has a right to exclusively control something that they didn't create

Appropriating it from nature is a type of creation, but creation is a very poor source for property rights. See Kinsella:

<https://www.stephankinsella.com/2021/04/how-to-think-about-property-2019/>

Just because no one else is currently controlling a given resource doesn't mean that a new claim upon it isn't theft against the entire species.

Control is also a very poor source for property rights. I can own a resource and allow you to control it and that does not give you any property rights in it. Likewise you can discover property that I lost and have control of it but not ownership, which still belongs to me. You cannot claim that something is theft without first establishing ownership. You must establish ownership in some way. The only way I've ever seen to establish ownership that's fair and has the best chance of reducing conflict over resources is original appropriation. "Who had it first?" is the best property norm/convention to both reduce conflict and incentivize the creation of wealth. Put any other property norm/convention to this test and you will see that it will fail on both counts.

teluetime: Civilization always has existed without that premise being applied. It is a backwards attempt to justify the current ruling order—the people who run things now are the people who are supposed to run things, because they run things!—rather than a principle that the current order emerged from. I agree, liberty is not having rights to other people's property—that is slavery. And that is a perfect description of capitalism. People claiming ownership of stuff that can only morally belong to everyone.

Skyler:

It is a backwards attempt to justify the current ruling order

The current ruling order originated in the violent conquest of people and property, the *violation* of property rights. See Oppenheimer:

<https://mises.org/library/state-its-history-and-development-viewed-sociologically>

I agree, liberty is not having rights to other people's property—that is slavery. And that is a perfect description of capitalism.

It's not. Capitalism is the "private ownership of the means of production", ie. *private* property. Owning other people is violating their private property in their bodies, and stealing their resources is violating their private property in their stuff. Your definition is Orwellian doublespeak.

People claiming ownership of stuff that can only morally belong to everyone.

There's no reason to believe a resource that has never been appropriated by anyone belongs to everyone. That's absurd, and you haven't justified why that should be the case. See Rothbard: <https://mises.org/library/justice-and-property-rights-failure-utilitarianism>

teluetime: If you invented a device which could somehow capture all sunlight before it reached Earth, and which could then let it pass through as you desired, would you be stealing from the rest of humanity by deploying the device? No one else has any claim to the sunlight, after all. It's brand new, and you would be the first person to interact with it. Of course it would mean that every person on Earth would depend on your consent to let them live. Would that not make them your slaves, for all practical purposes?

Skyler: I think it's been well established that everybody on Earth has already homesteaded some part of the sun. As it stands sunlight is not a scarce resource and so we have not been forced to assign property rights to it in order to avoid conflict. In your fantasy that need would arise and all we would have to ask regarding sunlight is "who had it first?" and the answer would not be the guy who's trying to block it out. You can give me any possible human conflict and the solution will always be "who had it first?" You cannot say that for any other property norm/convention.

teluetime: No one has homestead the sun lol. You mention “parts” of the sun, as if by receiving sunlight each of us has staked a claim to one tiny plot of the sun’s surface; how would that be divided? We’re receiving light from different parts of the surface at different parts of the year; do I owe somebody money because I used sunlight from the part of the sun that they are the oldest person on Earth to have been illuminated by? Can I sell my right to my section of the sun?

And none of the sunlight that would be blocked has ever been used before. It’s brand new energy being beamed at us every day.

The fact that a resource becomes scarce does not morally justify some people denying it to others. It practically justifies it, sure. It makes perfect sense why society had evolved in this fashion. But that doesn’t make it right, especially if we’re not talking about survival. No one needs to be the exclusive owner of land in order to provide for themselves and their family—it’s not a “one of us has to suffer so I can’t be blamed for not wanting it to be me” situation. There could just be less suffering overall through cooperative management of shared natural resources.

Skyler:

No one has homestead the sun lol. You mention “parts” of the sun, as if by receiving sunlight each of us has staked a claim to one tiny plot of the sun’s surface; how would that be divided?

We depend on and have been receiving the sun’s rays our entire life. Humanity has not had to decide what to do with sun rays because they have not been a scarce resource (scarce is here defined as: Insufficient to meet a demand or requirement; short in supply.) Same with the air we breathe. Until a resource becomes scarce it does not become conflictable (rivalrous), so until then, property rights do not need to be assigned.

The fact that a resource becomes scarce does not morally justify some people denying it to others.

You are correct that some people are not morally justified in preventing other people from appropriating resources that have never been appropriated before. You are incorrect if you believe that some people may use force to take resources already appropriated by others. That’s plunder, and to a further extent, slavery.

No one needs to be the exclusive owner of land in order to provide for

themselves and their family

But land is a rivalrous resource, a conflictible resource. Two people, or two families can't control the same parcel of land at the same time without necessarily interfering with each other. Somebody's will must prevail on how any given parcel of land is to be used. This is true for all physical, conflictible resources. We can't both use the same car for own purposes without preventing the other. It's *impossible*.