

## SELFISHNESS

The Essential Selfishness of the Single Tax  
Proposition—Ogreism—Egoism—  
Altruism—Pietism

(An address by John R. Waters, delivered before the Brooklyn, N. Y., Single Tax league, April 10, 1903; manuscript furnished for Henry George Edition of The Independent by E. B. Swinney, secretary of the league.)

In view of the somewhat peculiar and, perhaps to some of you repellent title of my lecture, and of the fact that I am personally not as well known to you as are most of the speakers who have addressed your league, I will preface what I have to say by briefly defining my personal economic appreciation of the so-called single tax proposition, thus enabling you, as I think, to follow, without too much doubt or ambiguity, the argument and object of my discourse.

I am in favor of the expropriation by the commonwealth of all ground rent value. I would not except from this expropriation any valuable land whatsoever, whether owned or controlled by nation, state, county, municipality, religious or charitable organization, corporation, association, partnership or individual. If, after providing for legitimate communal expenses, there should be left unexpended any of the proceeds of this expropriation, the surplus should be paid out in cash, per capita, to the men, women and children of the commonwealth, for their own personal, absolute use.

There was a time when such a scheme as this would have been most repugnant to my mind. There may come a time, hereafter, when some other plan of raising funds for commonwealth uses may seem to me to be preferable to this one. If ever man should arrive at a point where his intellectual progress or conversion is no longer possible, he will have ceased to be man, for the essence of humanity is free agency in the domain of the intellect.

I am not a single taxer in the strict definition of that term, for I am not sure that I would approve the wiping out of all taxation other than the ground rent value levy. For example direct taxes aimed at the suppression or abatement of nuisances, as a superfluity of dogs or organ-grinders, might righteously and advantageously continue to be imposed.

With this preamble I will proceed to my subject: "The essential selfishness of the single tax proposition." My object is in delivering this address to satisfy a craving which possesses me to be helpful, if I can, in a practical way, in imbuing my fellows with the desirableness of the single tax movement as a corrective of social and economic disorder.

Different persons appear to be decided by different influences in their acceptance of single tax teachings. This one admires them from the religious standpoint, and still another from a standpoint of physical welfare. What I shall try to demonstrate is that whatever the apparent or ostensible incentive, it is, and in the very fundamental nature of things must be, an absolutely selfish one.

Unselfishness as a motive for action does not and cannot exist in sane minds. Moods generally alluded to as unselfish are, when analyzed, perceived to be selfish in the highest degree, inasmuch as the subject of these moods are found to be aiming invariably for the finest satisfactions. To use a common expression, "the best is good enough" for them. For example, the Scriptures say of the Almighty that for His pleasure we are and were created. And why not? It is not reasonable to suppose that He created us with His pain or regret, rather than His pleasure, as the objective. Jesus declared that all power in heaven and earth and a seat at the right hand of the Father would accrue to Him as some of the results of His mission. The Christian of today hugs the New Testament text which assures him that his afflictions in the flesh are only momentary and that they will be compensated hereafter by a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and sings with unctious of the good time when he will come into the possession of mansions in the skies and revel in a land of pure delight, where pleasures banish pain. Egoistic selfishness thinks that it can best achieve happiness by looking out first and always for "number one;" altruistic selfishness has discovered that happiness comes rather reflectively than directly, and that greater satisfaction can be realized by and through the satisfaction of others. Both are essentially selfish, although on different planes.

If either can be said to be more selfish than the other it is the altru-

ist, for he is consciously striving for what he considers to be higher and more valuable results than he thinks the egoist can reach. He has the same sort of regard for the egoist as the cultured musician who delights in Wagner has for the boor whose musical perception cannot soar above Yankee Doodle. Nothing is clearer to a candid mind than that all sane human effort is aimed either at the direct satisfaction of human instincts, desires and appetites, or else at the frustration of influences which appear to be inimical to that satisfaction. In short, unselfishness pure and simple does not, cannot exist. There is no such thing.

We can see then that associated inseparably with all sane human effort there is an element of selfishness or self-interest. This is because in the last analysis the pursuit of happiness, which our Declaration of Independence so stoutly stands for, is what man is made for and what he exists and lives for; in other words, it is his prime, orderly, rightful function. This element of selfishness is diverse in its motives and expressions, and is susceptible of classification into degrees.

I have attempted to outline this classification with the following result:

1. Ogreism. The delight of the pursuit of happiness through the sufferings of others, or in wanton destruction. Examples of this degree are seen in Nero, in Jack the Ripper, in children who tear the wings from flies or torture dogs and cats and other children.

2. Egoism. The delight of the pursuit of happiness through ministering to one's own desires or in procuring others to minister to them, with indifference as to the result, one way or the other, to the welfare of others. Napoleon Bonaparte is an extreme example of this degree.

3. Altruism. The delight of the pursuit of happiness through ministering to others from a perception that satisfaction comes rather by way of reflection through the welfare and happiness of others than by the egoistic way. This is the prevailing trend of the human mind, the theological doctrine of original depravity and the present inverted state of society notwithstanding.

4. Pietism. The delight of the pursuit of happiness through altruism, but enhanced by the perception that this method is in accord with the will of a supreme power and runs in the channels of a divine order and desire. To Christian peoples Jesus of Nazareth, the Darwin of ethical science, is the most conspicuous exemplar of this mood. He is also the greatest exponent in history of the philosophy of self-interest. All His teachings aim at the practical pursuit and achievement of beatific satisfaction, although He points out that ogreism and egoism are not without their rewards. We are not yet trained to the fullest appreciation of His doctrines, but some of us feel that we can already perceive, by and through our own limited experience in altruistic ways, how His exhortations to resist not evil, to turn the other cheek, and to do good to them that hate us, may indicate the very caviar of self-interest.

To my attempt at gradation some of you will doubtless retort that what I have called altruism and pietism is the same as unselfishness, and that I am juggling with terms to no useful purpose.

Henry George, the Darwin of political economy, whose writings have made delectable what was formerly a dismal science, shows how the terminology of that science has been sadly mixed by its professors, with the result that erroneous teachings in national economics have been the rule rather than the exception. Similar confusion and error exist in the domain of religion and ethics, keeping men from a proper understanding of themselves and of each other. Anybody who will contribute to the correction of the disorder will surely perform a useful work, although in doing so he may play havoc with some of the figments which masquerade as Christian virtues.

If it can be generally understood that self-interest is the righteous, orderly incentive in all human effort, and that a man can act from regard to his Creator and at the same time from regard for himself, it will bring about a house-cleaning in the department of spiritual thought and ethics, which will vastly help the human race to ascertain their true relations to Him, and intensify our love and affection for Him, inasmuch as the idea that He demands of us a blind, unconditional, unreasonable and purposeless love and obedience, will be obliterated, and we may thenceforth be called by Him not servants but friends.

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ducted on egoistical lines, or, what is the same thing, on the plan of everybody for himself and the devil take the hindmost, provided only that every human being is first guaranteed equal access to natural resources, of which our planet offers such a superabundance that even the hindmost could roll in wealth if he cared to. Belief in this superabundance is what makes men single taxers who desire that governments shall assume the function of guaranteeing and enforcing the right of each individual to this equal access. However much these single taxers may plead justice, morality or religion, their motives at bottom are purely selfish.

It is possible to advocate the single tax on the solidest ground and thoroughly to uphold the argument if only selfish motives and aims are set forth and justified, because selfishness is a universal instinct requiring no demonstration, whereas justice, morality and religion are not fixed quantities, but largely matters of geography, tradition, training and personal opinion. Take, for example, my own case. Although at present in comfortable circumstances, I fear poverty for myself and my children in the future. The battle of life, the struggle for existence do not chime with my intuitive estimate of the proper order. I do not like poverty and squalor, even in other people; it offends me to have a ragged, malodorous person intrude betwixt the wind and my nobility. I am persuaded that by the single tax involuntary poverty can be abolished and every human being enabled to possess not only an abundance of the necessities of life, but as much as he cares for of the so-called luxuries as well. I do not expect to live to see the single tax in full force, but this does not take away from the selfishness of my motives. I want it for my children, who are my flesh and blood, and for whom I am endowed, in common with the wolf and the anaconda, with an instinctive parental affection. Even if I knew that my children could not enjoy the single tax in fruition, or if I were childless, I would still be a single taxer for the sake of the minor betterments which may result from the propaganda, and for the delight which my mind experiences in the effort to uncover the truth. There is nothing but selfishness in my heart, some of it altruistic perhaps, but still selfishness.

Unselfishness, duty, patriotism, heroism, glory, merit, thrift, and many similar expressions are simply fetishes which have been evolved out of our hereditary false training and inverted social conditions. The cant and gush which flow from them are shrewdly employed by the egoist-monopolist in the furtherance of his schemes for exploiting the masses. Before the single tax in action they will banish as factors in civilization, and eventually as words in our vocab-

ulary.

Shall we then, as single tax advocates, say to ourselves, let us throw down all consecrated ideals of justice and morality, let us give up all notion of an exalted mission, in short, let us unhitch our wagon from the star? Not necessarily. But it will be well for our cause and for ourselves if we will realize and freely admit that whatever our real or fancied inspiration or incentive, it is, and in the very fundamental, orderly nature of things must be, and properly, rooted in selfishness. So shall we be the better equipped to sustain the single tax proposition against its opponents, especially such of them as denounce it as a utopian or visionary, and incidentally relieve ourselves of a load of false, moist-eyed sentimentality.

### Single Tax in Nebraska

In Nebraska is found a striking exemplification of the theory of the single taxers. In the constitution of the state there is a provision reserving sections 16 and 36 of each township for the benefit of the public schools. Several years ago this school land was withdrawn from sale, and all school lands are leased by the state, to the highest bidder, for a term of years. The system has proven successful and now hundreds of families are now paying single tax rent to the state. Most of these lands have been leased, although in the western part of the state considerable tracts yet remain. Deeded lands can be purchased at very low prices; leases can be made direct with the state for any school lands not yet leased and in many cases the leases can be bought at a reasonable price. There is no place in America that offers such excellent opportunities for men with small means to secure comfortable homes and engage in profitable business. It will pay any one interested to write to Weber & Faris, Lincoln, Neb., and tell them about what you want. They will submit some tempting bargains.

The Post-Clark debate in full may be had by sending 25c for the Spring Number of the Single Tax Review, 11 Frankfort st., New York, N. Y.

Literature explaining the single tax idea mailed free on request. Address F. H. Monroe, president Henry George association, 356 Dearborn st., Chicago.

For the republic which we have I care nothing; it is the new republic that is coming to which I bow. Not a republic of millionaires and tramps! A republic where one man has the power of the czar, where women faint and little children go hungry, is not worthy of the name. But a republic of God; a republic of America; a republic such as was founded by Thomas Jefferson.—Henry George.