

The Rule of Reason & Geodemocracy

Analysis by
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- Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) performed a great service to the law by putting the immense weight of his authority behind Natural Law, belief in which continued up to the end of the 18th century. This encouraged kings to aim at justice to the extent their education would allow, and led to what historians call the Age of Enlightenment.
- Then came the Rule of Reason in France. The Terror caused the death of 40,000 Frenchmen,

17,000 of them under the guillotine, shocked Europe, caused a suppression of radical thought, and many in the professional classes abandoned religion. Constitutional historian Albert Dicey was to write: "The Constitution of 1791 proclaimed liberty of conscience, liberty of the press, the right of public meeting, the responsibility of government officials. But there never was a period in the recorded annals of mankind when each and all of these rights

were so insecure, one might almost say so completely non-existent, as at the height of the French Revolution."

- The idea of natural law withered throughout the 19th century. In the Church, Traditionalism denied that natural law can be known by unaided human reason, while Rationalism denied its dependence on God as the author of nature. Its very existence is denied by many modern philosophers.

THREE of the defining slogans of the modern world were embedded in the tripartite motto of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. Though Mao Tse-tung is said to have pointed out that it was still too soon to assess the Revolution's effect, the surprisingly tepid celebrations in France of its bicentenary in 1989 suggest that there is some doubt as to whether its three objectives have been realised.

Since the Revolution much blood has been shed to defend and attack its three goals; much ink has been spilt in their discussion. The attractiveness of these slogans is nowadays rarely denied; but their practicability, and their compatibility, often are. In particular, liberty and equality are held to be in conflict: if people are free, then they will perform unequally well. In response, it has been asserted that equality means 'equality of opportunity', rather than 'equality of outcome'. As for fraternity, it tends to be lost sight of in the debate over liberty and equality.

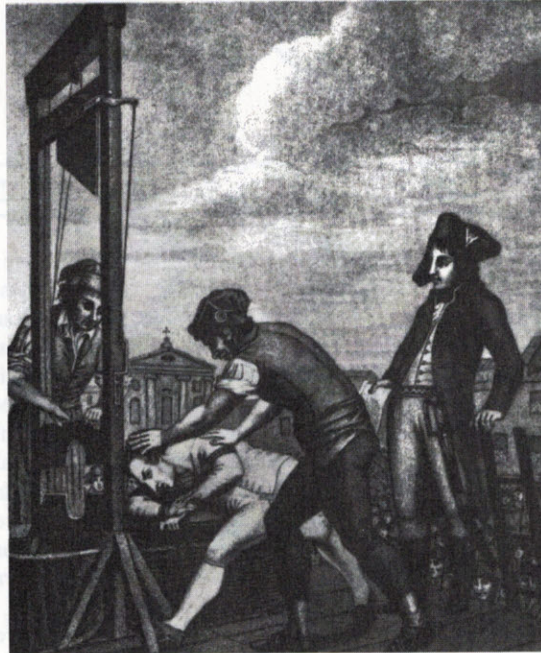
CAN GEODEMOCRACY contribute to this debate? Geodemocracy (also known as Georgism, The Single Tax, Land Value Taxation, etc.) is a system in which public finance is based on the collection of unearned increment rather than (as at present) on the taxation of value added. Unearned increment is the increase in the value of land (and natural resources) due to the activity of society as a whole but appropriated by the landowner. It is indeed unearned by the landowner but earned by society, to which it rightfully belongs. Value added is the increase in the value of goods or services due the application to them of the labour or capital of an identifiable individual or group. (Unearned increment is thus actually the value added to land and natural resources by society.) Geodemocracy makes possible Progress without Poverty; and the abolition of involuntary poverty is perhaps a necessary condition for the realisation of the hopes expressed in the slogan Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

Citizens of a geodemocratic society would be at liberty to enjoy all the fruits of their individual labour (wages) or collective labour (the interest on their capital). Of course, these fruits would still be to some extent distributed unequally, depending on what people were willing to pay. Even in a geodemocracy, Andrew Lloyd Webber might be richer than Harrison Birtwhistle.

Yet at the same time the equality of everyone in a geodemocracy would be recognised substantively in at least two ways.

- ◆ Everyone would have equal access, if not to land and natural resources as such, then at least to their value, which would be the source of public revenue collected for the benefit of all.

- ◆ Everyone would eventually be entitled to an equal Geodemocratic Dividend through the following chain of development. As technology progressed whilst poverty diminished, the state would come to require less financial support rather than more. Less coercion would be needed in a society felt to be fair, and less welfare provision would be needed in a society of universal real prosperity. (Aneurin Bevan was right to believe that the National Health Service could in time become less expensive to run – but only if it were part of a genuinely just society!) In such circumstances, an increasing proportion of the increasing unearned increment actually earned, and at last collected, by society could be returned to each citizen as a Geodemocratic Dividend (also called a Guaranteed Basic Income). Since it is almost impossible to calculate the contribution of any specific individual to this unearned increment, the fairest as well as the easiest way to apportion the Geodemocratic Dividend is to distribute it equally to everyone. So at any given time in any given place the Geodemocratic Dividend of Lord Lloyd-Webber, you and me would be the same.



WHAT IS fraternity? It is a way of being together based on feelings of mutual respect and affection. Fraternity arises from the conscious recognition of the underlying geodemocratic principle.

Land and natural resources are created by no one, but their value is created by everyone. The value of a piece of land is enhanced not only by those who provide it with roads, buses, gas, electricity and water, but also by those who live in its vicinity and consume the goods and services produced on or from it, and by their mere presence make it more pleasant to live on or near.

Sartre and Malthus may have believed that hell is other people, but for geodemocrats, people are part of the solution, not part of the problem. All the world's

religions may agree that this is so, but for geodemocracy it is not an abstract moral principle but a concrete economic one: the basis of public finance. In a geodemocracy, people passing each other will doff their hats in recognition of each other's contribution to the socially created value of land and natural resources that is the basis of the prosperity they all share.

So geodemocracy puts flesh and bones on the abstract notions of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, and gives to each a substantive reality in the very foundation of the new and better society it enables to exist.

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