Human Welfare   
Negative Case by Thomas Keith



Taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_reform_in_Zimbabwe>.

What this case tells us is simple. If we even consider violating the clear moral standard of natural rights with something as vague and puzzling as public needs, we allow ourselves to justify atrocious acts and undermine society’s ability to prosper. The way you argue it is just as simple: Maintain the links between your applications and the resolution, and make sure the judge understand the impacts.

The first application talks about slavery. Its purpose is to show that looking into the future, we can say an action upholds public needs and violate rights for its sake, even if looking back the action didn’t actually help society. The general response will be that “slavery isn’t a need of the public,” but of course that isn’t your point. Your point is that affirming this res means that future actions will be justified with something that’s been used to justify atrocities, and that will be very difficult to argue with.

The second and third applications are more clearly within the realm of “needs of the public.” They’re there to state clearly that affirming this resolution makes people die and people suffer. Responses to the “Hunger Plan” are probably going to aim at whether or not it violated private property rights—after all, Russia was communist. If that comes up, be sure to make clear that it was the people who owned the farms whose rights were violated, not those who would benefit from the food. When responding to the Zimbabwe application, Affs are probably going to argue that it wasn’t in the public needs. Whether or not that’s true depends on their definition. Be prepared to either argue their definition, or make the case that the public needs to be fed and working.

The fourth application talks about how Singapore is prosperous because of their private property protections. Affs are probably going to respond to this by saying Singapore’s prosperity was caused by something else. However, you have a case study which says that the major contributing factor to that success is that they’re #1 in the world for physical property protections, so unless they can come up with something that says property protections don’t contribute at all to economic success, you shouldn’t be too worried.

Human Welfare

Property rights are a lot like seatbelts: Refusing to put them on could kill you. That doesn’t mean that they’re perfect, and it doesn’t mean that there aren’t going to be some inconveniences with putting them on every time you drive; but for every inconvenience that the affirmative can come up with, the simple fact remains that property rights are there for a reason, and violating them will have destructive consequences for us and the rest of society. That is why I negate this resolution.

# Human Welfare

The value in today’s round should be Human Welfare, defined operationally as “the health and well-being of humans in a society.” The reason this should be the value in today’s round you can tag as:

## Reason to Prefer: Robust Measure

Public needs and private property rights are broad concepts that dabble in a wide range of areas. As a result, we need a value that is broad enough to allow us to fully understand the implications of this resolution, and that’s exactly what the value of Human Welfare provides. Let’s explore why Property Rights best meets this value, starting with…

# Contention 1: Valuing Public Needs Destroys Human Welfare

Public needs are a worthwhile goal, but they are a terrible reason to violate the rights of everyday citizens. Until we temper public needs with clear boundaries, we risk it running away from us and producing devastating consequences. A clear example of this can be found in…

## Application A: Slavery in America

I don’t think I need to explain to you how destructive the institution of slavery was—how human beings were ripped away from their families, beaten, imprisoned, abused, and sold to work their entire lives to the enrichment of those who exploited them. It destroyed their liberty. It destroyed their property. It destroyed their dignity as human beings. And it was justified by *public needs*.

The Independence Hall Association, in an article entitled the “Southern Argument for Slavery” observes that:

“Defenders of slavery argued that the sudden end to the slave economy would have had a profound and killing economic impact in the South where reliance on slave labor was the foundation of their economy. The cotton economy would collapse. The tobacco crop would dry in the fields. Rice would cease being profitable.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

They justified slavery with public needs, and since they valued those public needs over the rights of the slaves, they were able to morally justify an institution that destroyed the lives of millions.

Now, I’m not saying that affirming this resolution will lead to slavery. My point is that the resolution is unreliable. You can’t trust public needs. Time and time again throughout history, incredible atrocities have been committed because rights were valued less than what was seen as necessary for the public. Even if hundreds of years later, we can shrug and say that “maybe it wasn’t so necessary after all,” the damage has already been done. The attitude pushed by this resolution is that a ridiculously broad and unreliable concept should be valued over a clear moral standard, despite the incredible historical consequences we’ve seen come about as a result.

## Application B: The Hunger Plan

When we value the needs of the public over property rights, it can rob human beings of the things they need to sustain themselves, leading to the deaths of millions.

In 1941, Germany realized it wasn’t producing enough food to maintain its military. They realized that the only alternative to rationing food—an option that would diminish their military’s effectiveness—was to steal food from the people living in Eastern Europe. Rather than acknowledging that sometimes it’s best to sacrifice public needs, Germany’s leaders implemented the Hunger Plan and chose to cut off the food supply for Belarus and Northwestern Russia. [[2]](#footnote-2) As a result the people who needed that food to survive—over a million people[[3]](#footnote-3)—starved to death.

They owned that food. They had a right to it. And when Nazi Germany chose to value its public’s needs over their rights, it wasn’t just the rights that were trampled. It was human lives, and human potential. While maintaining a military is not only good but necessary, the consequences are devastating when we value it over peoples’ rights.

## Application C: Land Confiscation in Zimbabwe

These consequences extend not only to the lives of individuals but the well-being of societies. For decades, Zimbabwe was known as the “jewel” of Africa. They had low crime, good courts, a stable government, and a strong economy. However, once President Robert Mugabe began to seize the large commercial farms that were the foundation of the nation’s agriculture, everything fell apart.

The reason is that before the property was confiscated, these commercial farms had strong property titles that gave owners an incentive to efficiently manage and irrigate their lands. When Mugabe seized these farms and made them communally owned for public use, the incentive to take care of that property went away, and so people stopped doing so.

As a result, their economy began to tank. By 2003, Zimbabwe’s economy was shrinking faster than any other in the world, at negative seventeen percent a year according to the World Bank.[[4]](#footnote-4) Inflation was running at 500 percent, and their currency lost more than 99 percent of their real exchange value.[[5]](#footnote-5) A study from the Cato Institute in 2005 notes that:

“The lesson learned here is that well-protected private property rights are crucial for economic growth and serve as the market economy’s linchpin. Once those rights are damaged or removed, economies may be prone to collapse with surprising and devastating speed.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

# Contention 2: Property Rights Are Necessary for Human Welfare

The alternative to this resolution is a world where we acknowledge that too much of a good thing isn’t always good. It’s a world where we say that limits are sometimes necessary and that there are lines that we shouldn’t cross. One of those lines is private property rights—and in my next application I’m going to show you that when society restructures itself so that it facilitates property rights rather than exploiting them, it not only improves human welfare but creates a better and more prosperous society.

## Application A: Singapore

A study conducted by the Southeast Asia Network for Development examined six nations in Southeast Asia—including Singapore, which is #1 in the world in physical property protection[[7]](#footnote-7)—and found that there is a clear link between consistently protecting property rights and improved human welfare. I quote from the conclusion of that report:

“From the example of Singapore, other ASEAN states should ponder again and again, that when private property is secured and protected, more trade, investments, finance and tourism will come from many countries abroad.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

When we value public needs over private property rights, those rights are no longer secure or protected. It diminishes the prosperity of a nation, and that’s something we can’t afford. What matters at the end of the day is that nations are given the tools they need to improve the human welfare of their citizens, and what the example of Singapore shows us is that we can’t do so until we acknowledge that property rights are more valuable than public needs.

Thank you.

Affirmative Brief

This is an impacts-heavy case, so try to either delink the applications from the resolution/your value, or be prepared to outweigh the Neg’s impacts with your own. The fact that this case is so impacts-heavy will make things interesting because the impacts themselves are based in applications that can more or less easily be delinked from the resolution, depending on your definitions. A narrow definition of property rights can kill the second application, and a narrow definition of public needs can kill the third application. The issue with trying to out-define with narrow definitions is that these are extremely broad concepts, and it won’t be difficult for Neg to win a definitions war if challenged.

Let’s explore the applications used in this case for a second and identify how they aren’t consequences of the resolution.

First, the “Slavery” application. Right off the bat, your immediate response is that slavery isn’t in the public needs. Afterward, make clear that just because an action is justified with public needs, doesn’t mean it is. I can shoot my dog and scream out the window that the public needed it, but that doesn’t mean it was legitimately in the needs of the public.

Second, the “Hunger Plan” application. It will be hard to argue that “feeding the troops” aren’t in the public needs, but it won’t be hard to argue that it didn’t violate private property rights. After all, everything in the Soviet Union was owned by the state. Of course, Aff may respond that—like in the British monarchy—all property may belong to the King but people still exercise ownership over things, and that’s where we get private property from. However, it’s still a strong argument to show that in a communist society, there are no private property rights for an invading force to violate.

Third, the “Zimbabwe” application. If you can make the case that confiscating farms don’t violate private property rights, then by all means, go for it. However, I’d bank on a narrow definition of public needs and then argue that confiscating farms to turn into communal farms is more of a “public want” than a “public need.”

Fourth, the “Singapore” application. The best you can do is argue that their prosperity was caused by something other than property rights. Singapore is known for low taxes, limited regulations, and strong free trade policy. As long as you have a counter-application of a country that failed to succeed despite good property rights, then the case can be made that there was an alternate cause to Singapore’s success.

1. Independence Hall Association, “Southern Argument for Slavery” <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27f.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Academia, “Food and Genocide: Nazi Agrarian Politics in the Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union” <http://www.academia.edu/10016777/Food_and_Genocide_Nazi_Agrarian_Politics_in_the_Occupied_Territories_of_the_Soviet_Union> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Guardian, “The Reich’s Forgotten Atrocity” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/oct/21/secondworldwar-russia> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=ZW> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cato Institute, “How the Loss of Property Rights Caused Zimbabwe’s Collapse” <http://www.cato.org/publications/economic-development-bulletin/how-loss-property-rights-caused-zimbabwes-collapse> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Southeast Asia Network for Development, “Case Study: Property Rights Protection in 6 ASEAN Countries — Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam.” <https://s3.amazonaws.com/ipri2015/ASEAN+Case+Study1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)