

# THE LOCKEAN PROVISIO AND THE VALUE OF LIBERTY: A REPLY TO NARVESON

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## I. Introduction

“THE VALUE OF ANYTHING lies in what we can do with it.”<sup>1</sup> Jan Narveson originally wrote those words while considering the value of natural resources in the context of developing a properly liberal reading of the Lockean proviso. It would seem Narveson is largely correct. Even if one does not restrict the value of things in the world to instrumental value, it is clear this is largely what it consists in. We value stuff because we can do stuff with it. It is usually the activities themselves (and our enjoyment of them) that we see as intrinsically valuable. This account of value is especially apt when applied to liberty itself. That is, we do not value liberty per se; rather, we value “what we can do with it.” One could imagine a world in which the exercise of one’s liberty was so restricted (i.e., a world in which we could do little with our liberty) that one might as well have no liberty at all; perhaps this is a world where one in fact lacks any liberty worthy of the name. Narveson favors a reading of the Lockean proviso derived from, and only constrained by, the more fundamental principle of liberty.<sup>2</sup> He thinks this

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<sup>1</sup> “Property Rights: Original Acquisition and Lockean Replies,” *Public Affairs Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (July 1999): 221.

<sup>2</sup> See page 52 of “Would-Be Farmer John and the Welfare State,” *Libertarian Papers* 10, no. 1 (2018): 49–60.

results in a liberal theory of property that avoids requiring compensation or a social-welfare minimum for the poor. I will argue that the principle of liberty itself leads to such requirements.

This is an extension of an argument begun in my essay “Forcing Nozick beyond the Minimal State: The Lockean Proviso and Compensatory Welfare.”<sup>3</sup> Narveson recently wrote a forceful reply in this journal entitled “Would-Be Farmer John and the Welfare State: A Reply to Blincoe.”<sup>4</sup> Despite our ultimate disagreement, there is plenty of initial agreement between myself and Narveson concerning Nozick’s rendering of the Lockean proviso. The Lockean proviso constrains initial acquisition of resources; the key question is *how* it constrains this acquisition.<sup>5</sup> The proviso requires one to leave as much and as good for others.<sup>6</sup> Nozick takes this to mean that one’s acquisition is just if it does not worsen another’s plight, not with respect to the ability to appropriate resources, but rather with respect to personal welfare. Narveson agrees with me that, in focusing on welfare, Nozick (and ostensibly others) make the proviso much easier to satisfy.<sup>7</sup> This is because, apparently, those who cannot appropriate some resource can still benefit from the immense social capital produced from the use of those resources by others.<sup>8</sup> Narveson also seems to agree that this is the right reading of Nozick’s treatment, and I take it he concedes some of my case against Nozick: namely, that this focus on welfare opens Nozick up to an objection (at least in principle). I advanced this objection in my original essay, in which I argue that, if one considers certain important subjective elements of welfare, it turns out there are many poor people today that are worse off, even given all the social goods to which they have access through markets. Here is where our disagreement begins.

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<sup>3</sup> *Libertarian Papers*, 10, no. 1 (2018): 19–48.

<sup>4</sup> *Libertarian Papers* 10, no. 1 (2018): 49–60. I would here like to thank Professor Narveson for his thoughtful response.

<sup>5</sup> Initially the proviso is to constrain this acquisition from the state of nature, but Nozick shows through what has been termed the zip-back argument that this constraint extends to the present day. See *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Basic Books, 1974), 176. See also my own treatment of Nozick’s zip-back argument in “Forcing Nozick beyond the Minimal State,” p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ch. 5, section 27.

<sup>7</sup> “Would-Be Farmer John and the Welfare State,” p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 48 in “Forcing Nozick beyond the Minimal State” for a list of liberal theorists who make this point.

First, Narveson thinks my argument fails because it is clear (to him) that the contemporary poor are not worse off (in any relevant way) than they would have been in a world without the system of private property and the original resource acquisition that leads to such a system. It is here that Narveson misses the strength of my case (because of my own somewhat misleading presentation) by focusing on the more superficial sort of worsening associated with not being able to appropriate land, rather than the deeper (and more relevant), liberty-restricting worsening. I am happy to have the opportunity to clarify this point below. This clarification will lead to the consideration of a deeper disagreement that is more central to the liberal project of justifying private property and the motivations for liberalism as a whole.

Narveson clearly disagrees with Nozick, Locke, and many others who assume (at least implicitly) a sort of joint ownership of the world prior to resource acquisition.<sup>9</sup> Narveson thinks this is the first and fatal error many (even libertarian) theorists make. It is this error that leads to the Lockean proviso's constraining later appropriation in ways that, at least in principle, might include compensation, social-welfare minimums, or both. Departing from what he deems an unfortunate trend stretching from Locke to Nozick and beyond, Narveson advocates a more pure liberalism that rejects this thesis of original joint ownership of the world's resources. Instead, Narveson favors a Lockean proviso constrained by, and derived from, nothing other than the principle of liberty itself. Narveson laments that most liberal theorists (including Locke) have failed to do this; so much the worse for their less pure forms of liberalism.<sup>10</sup> In his reply to my essay, Narveson writes,

The point is that the all-to-ready inference that libertarianism requires a system of coercively supplied support for the indigent can and should be resisted. It does not follow from any version of the proviso that is compatible with the principle of liberty from which Locke and Nozick intended to derive it.<sup>11</sup>

Below I will argue that Narveson's own rendering of the Lockean proviso fails to be compatible with the principle of liberty whence he intends to derive it. If Narveson's proviso is compatible with the principle of liberty, it is only a rather anemic form of liberty that is preserved. Hence, Narveson's form of liberalism, with its austere Lockean proviso, falls short of a main goal of, and motivation for, liberalism: the preservation of personal liberty.

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<sup>9</sup> "Property Rights," pp. 212–16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212–16. See also Narveson, "Would-Be Farmer John," p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> "Would-Be Farmer John," p. 52.

## II. It is Not about the Land (Per Se): The Deep Reason Why Farmer John Is Better Off

Narveson thinks his rendering of the Lockean proviso is not subject to the possibility of required compensation for the poor who are now unable to appropriate resources from nature; but ostensibly Nozick's rendering *is* subject to such a requirement. Nozick himself clearly acknowledges this in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*; he simply thinks this compensation has been paid many times over via the social capital produced through the system of private property itself, which is available to the poor through markets.<sup>12</sup> In my original essay, "Forcing Nozick beyond the Minimal State," I argue that this is not the case; to do so I lean heavily on a focal case involving a would-be 1990s farmer John. John cannot realize his farming dreams, because he is too poor to purchase land, and unlike a would-be farmer John in eighteenth-century North America, there is no unclaimed land to simply appropriate for this purpose. I take it Narveson concedes that Nozick's entitlement theory is in principle open to such a case, but holds that in practice my argument fails.<sup>13</sup> To make this case, Narveson leans heavily on the fact that I focus on the need for land resources and John's particular dream of farming. Narveson casts farming one's own land as a rather exotic desire for this day and age, perhaps on par with his desire to own a 747 jet.<sup>14</sup> He goes on to conjure up the rather bleak details of what would be involved in realizing such a dream for all potential John's, including the killing "off of around 90% of the American population, since that is the only way that everyone could be a Farmer John. It would also reduce them to something like the agro-technological level of their eighteenth-century forbears, which I suppose is part of the Farmer John dream, since otherwise the corner store beckons as a more sensible and much less stressful alternative."<sup>15</sup> Stated in this way, it does appear absurd; the state (or whoever) cannot have a responsibility to compensate latecomers to appropriation for just any old thing they happen to desire (but cannot now obtain).

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<sup>12</sup> See especially pp. 174–82.

<sup>13</sup> I think Narveson concedes this implicitly, because he does not call this part of my case into question in his response. More explicitly, he does refer to Nozick's "over-hasty formulations" concerning the analysis of liberty (p. 60). I take it Narveson thinks Nozick and Locke depart from what a pure and consistent liberal position should be. Such a position (like Narveson's) would not be subject even in principle to cases like my would-be farmer John.

<sup>14</sup> "Would-Be Farmer John," p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> "Would-Be Farmer John," p. 58.

Besides the obvious point that the state need not compensate in kind,<sup>16</sup> and the fact that desire for one's own land is not all that exotic even today, there is a more central point: Narveson's focus on land (and primitive farming) misses the strength of my argument. Land is not important per se, it just happens to be the sort of resource that is especially useful for realizing the more central and pervasive goal of self-mastery.<sup>17</sup> Having land to farm and hunt allows one the liberty to live and raise a family without being subject to working for someone else. Land represents the opportunity to be one's own master instead of doing the bidding of another by engaging in the potential drudgery of wage labor.<sup>18</sup> Desire for land then is really just standing in for the more basic and pervasive desire for liberty. This is the deeper reason why the average primitive farmer on the frontier is better off than the average poor wage laborer of today. Being able to govern one's own life is a great welfare boon, the likes of which outweighs much in terms of material wealth.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, not only is self-mastery a common desire, it taps directly into the intuitions that make libertarianism so appealing. Humans seek (and will forgo much for) personal autonomy and the avoidance of being at the mercy of others. Of course, Narveson (and others) could accept most of this and still argue that the welfare good of self-mastery simply is not substantial enough to outweigh all of the social goods available today to the poor

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<sup>16</sup> Some other sort of compensation could be given. But even if sufficient compensation were practically impossible, this would not detract from my argument. It would simply show that the state and system of private property it sanctions is unjustified according to certain liberal theories. So much the worse for the Lockean theory of acquisition that leads to this conclusion (or so much the worse for states).

<sup>17</sup> I address this point in my original essay, "Forcing Nozick beyond the Minimal State," pp. 46–47. Narveson seems to miss this, though in his defense I did bury it in an objection section towards the end of the essay.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, wage labor need not be drudgery; my contention is only that it often is.

<sup>19</sup> My engagement with the work of Widerquist and McCall in their excellent book (*Prehistoric Myths in Modern Political Philosophy*, Edinburgh University Press, 2017) is relevant here. In my original essay, I only briefly highlighted some of the relevant arguments and data from their book concerning hunter-gatherers and how their lives would have been better in many important respects than many of the contemporary poor (see pp. 39–44). Narveson dismisses this comparison rather quickly (see pp. 58–59), with arguments and data that Widerquist and McCall capably treat (and respond to) at length in their book. I do not have space to treat this fully here, but I would suggest that the work of Widerquist and McCall is not so easily dismissed. They produce relevant data (both from extant hunter-gatherers and past groups) that support compelling arguments. Narveson and political philosophers in general will actually have to engage in-depth with this challenge.

through the market. I think this sort of position is the result of undervaluing the welfare boon of self-mastery and overvaluing material wealth. Absent a more extensive treatment, on this point I will just have to agree to disagree with Narveson.

However, beyond this, Narveson will be quick to point out that people (even the very poor) are welcome to try to achieve self-mastery and work to escape a life of drudgery. No one is stopping them; they are at liberty to attempt their dreams. But I wonder whether here we should put “liberty” in scare quotes. We are now in a position to approach Narveson’s more substantive case against my essay—namely, that my argument against Nozick is largely irrelevant to the (properly) liberal theorist. This is because Nozick (and Locke before him) departs from a pure and consistent liberalism. Such a liberalism does not focus on welfare results (or even opportunities), but only on the preservation of liberty. A pure liberalism is not even in principle vulnerable to compensation requirements. Any classically liberal proviso (Lockean or otherwise) must be secondary to the principle of liberty. To paraphrase Narveson: any principle governing resource acquisition should be consistent with and derived from the principle of liberty.<sup>20</sup> As long as the liberty of the poor is preserved, no compensation is called for because no properly liberal proviso is transgressed. Putting aside the issue of what liberalism should be, is Narveson right? Is his more austere rendering of the proviso effective at eliminating any requirement of compensation? I do not think so. To see why, we will need to consider just what liberty is. Any liberty worth preserving will result in a Lockean proviso that in principle admits of a compensation requirement.<sup>21</sup> If this is the case, then even Narveson’s account of resource acquisition, with its austere proviso, will have to consider what sort of compensation is required in practice.

### III. Narveson’s Austere Proviso and the Value of Liberty

It is clear that Narveson thinks Nozick and Locke (among others) go astray in their treatment of the Lockean proviso. According to Narveson, any such proviso should be consistent with and derived from the more

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Narveson’s “Would-Be Farmer John,” pp. 52, 57, and “Property Rights,” pp. 214–18.

<sup>21</sup> By “compensation requirement” here I mean to highlight the sort of compensation that may be owed to poor people unable to appropriate resources such as land (and hence achieve a level of self-mastery) because of the late stage of the private property system. I am not referring to the sort of compensation everyone accepts as appropriate—that is, for things such as theft and assault.

fundamental principle of liberty. So how should a classical liberal read Locke's proviso concerning resource acquisition? In his essay on this topic, "Property Rights: Original Acquisition and Lockean Provisos," Narveson begins with Nozick's rendering of the proviso: "A process normally giving rise to a permanent bequeathable property right in a previously unowned thing will not do so if the position of others no longer at liberty to use the thing is thereby worsened."<sup>22</sup> Narveson then asks the key question, "Made worse how?"<sup>23</sup> In other words, what is the relevant sort of worsening for the liberal? Narveson considers five possibilities, settling on the most austere with respect to the potentially worse-off person.

For Narveson, the relevant sort of worsening only applies to someone's liberty. One's acquisition runs afoul of the (properly understood) Lockean proviso only if it restricts, or interferes with, the liberty of others. The Lockean proviso then just restates the principle of liberty in the context of resource acquisition. Several quotes from Narveson concerning resource appropriation make this clear. In his response to my original essay, he writes concerning John (who is unable to appropriate land) that "all we owe him is that we not intervene in his life to prevent him from even trying, provided the restriction that he respect others' rights. Success is not part of the bargain. Liberty is."<sup>24</sup> Further down, Narveson seems to equate freedom itself simply with freedom from the violence of others.<sup>25</sup> Narveson is explicit about what this nonviolence involves a few pages on, writing,

Locke's law of nature... bids us that we not deprive anyone of his (or her) health, life, liberty, or property, all of which deprivations are ways of attacking him (or her). But so long as we refrain from depriving anyone of those things, we are home free as far as fundamental Lockean justice is concerned, and doing so does not leave people with a farm as their fair share. And if someone has very little health, liberty, or property, then that is very sad, and it will be very easy for us not to deprive him of the little that he has (you cannot take from somebody what he does not have), but we do not violate the Lockean law by not taking steps to improve his situation.<sup>26</sup>

Narveson thinks all the principle of liberty requires is that we not interfere with what others already possess as property, including themselves.

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<sup>22</sup> *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, p. 178, quoted in Narveson's "Property Rights," p. 207.

<sup>23</sup> "Property Rights," p. 207.

<sup>24</sup> "Would-Be Farmer John," p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Anything else is fair game; acquiring anything not already in the possession of the person in question will apparently not deprive them of their liberty in any relevant way. According to Narveson, the Lockean proviso (read in light of Locke's principle of liberty) requires nothing more than that. Hence, according to Narveson, little else besides outright theft or assault will fail to satisfy the proviso (properly understood). However, even if we grant that the Lockean proviso be read in light of the more fundamental principle of liberty, Narveson is still mistaken concerning the potential extent of its constraint. This is because Narveson is working with a rather anemic conception of liberty.

It actually is possible to deprive someone of their liberty without stealing their property or assaulting their person. To see how this could be, consider a few examples from Eric Mack.<sup>27</sup> Imagine a scenario in which a peaceful group of large men form a circle around a woman (Zelda) sleeping in the woods. None of the land is previously owned. No trespass occurs. But upon waking, Zelda finds she cannot escape the circle and the men accuse her of assault when she attempts to break through their peaceful circle. Consider another scenario, in which Zelda lives on an island with Adam. Adam encases all of the valuable, useful resources in his own justly obtained and constructed shells. Zelda cannot get at the resources without breaking the shells, whereby Adam can accuse her of destruction of his property.

In the first scenario, it appears Zelda has been deprived of liberty despite there being no assault on her person or theft of her property. But perhaps Narveson would be fine including such a case of imprisonment in his list of possible deprivations of liberty. The second case is more troubling for Narveson because it involves someone depriving another not just of resources, but of their liberty.<sup>28</sup> This is because, as Narveson said, "the value of anything lies in what we can do with it."<sup>29</sup> Mack's cases highlight that liberty requires space to act, and stuff in the world to act with and on; otherwise, liberty of action is no liberty at all. Mack himself focuses not on liberty but on self-ownership and its extension through the use of world-interactive powers; though, he ends up making the same point I wish to make concerning liberty. The use of one's liberty to act *is* the use of one's world-interactive powers (to use Mack's term), and this involves use of, and

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<sup>27</sup> "The Self-Ownership Proviso: A New and Improved Lockean Proviso," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 12 no. 1 (1995): 195–96.

<sup>28</sup> This is really just a minor extension of Mack's own argument in "The Self-Ownership Proviso."

<sup>29</sup> "Property Rights," p. 221.



interaction with, some bit of the world. One could construct many other cases (indeed Mack has several more) in which an Adam-like character denies a Zelda-like character her liberty while avoiding any assault or theft; he simply denies her interaction with the world such that she is effectively deprived of her liberty of action. If Narveson thinks a Lockean proviso may constrain acquisition when it deprives another of her liberty, then he must be open to some simple appropriations (involving neither theft nor assault) being so constrained.

Thus far, this is largely an in-principle point and is not too troubling for Narveson on its face. Narveson will surely want to argue that in practice such a concession (that some non-theft, non-assault appropriations may be constrained by the Lockean proviso) will make little to no difference.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Mack is no friend of welfare compensation schemes himself; though he acknowledges that in principle some activities of mere appropriation may call for compensation, in practice the more pervasive and mundane appropriations will not. Mack cites a reason for this, with which Narveson surely agrees: the private property system as a whole, and the modern market order, are on the whole enabling of people's world-interactive powers, rather than disabling.<sup>31</sup> The modern market allows people to enter into complex economic relationships and introduces a vast array of diversity into how one might employ one's world-interactive powers. People are not offered merely as much and as good in opportunities to utilize their world-interactive powers (i.e. their liberty) but much more and much better.

But now I can run the same argument against Mack that I originally advanced against Nozick (and against Narveson above). Once we in principle allow that one can be deprived of liberty without theft or assault, we can ask whether one is deprived of liberty in practice. Narveson and Mack would say no. However, my case involving Farmer John and his inability to appropriate land suggests otherwise. Mack is right to point out that the modern market economy has created a vast swath of opportunities to exercise one's world-interactive powers; the sheer number of new ways to be *at liberty* in economic action dwarfs those that have been put out of reach of the contemporary poor (such as farming one's own land). However, we have to ask just what

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Narveson seems to say this much in a note in which he acknowledges Mack's "Self-Ownership" approvingly. He justifies omitting a treatment of Mack's proviso because he thinks practically it would come to much the same as his own austere proviso in terms of compensation required. See endnote 2 in Narveson's "Property Rights."

<sup>31</sup> "The Self-Ownership Proviso," pp. 212–16.

sort of opportunities are available and whether they are not merely more refined forms of liberty deprivation. It is my contention that the live options left to many of the poor in contemporary market economies amount to work of mind-numbing drudgery under the close control of someone else. Many have no choice but to work at such jobs or be homeless (some lack even that choice).<sup>32</sup> In other words, for many people the private property system as a whole, including the markets open to their economic activity, have been on net disabling rather than enabling with respect to their world-interactive powers (i.e., they can no longer be masters of their own lives as they could if land was available to appropriate). Their autonomy is greatly limited by being stuck in a cycle of poverty and low-wage labor. What the system has enabled them to do is work long hours for low pay by serving fast food, cashiering at Walmart, digging ditches, telemarketing, and so on. This list is indeed longer for the contemporary poor person in an advanced market economy than it was for a pioneer farmer on the frontier; but offering someone a thousand new ways to be less at liberty is still offering them to be less at liberty.

As I see it, Narveson has three potential ways to respond to this argument, none of which seem promising. First, he could revise his reading of the Lockean proviso to something more like Nozick's rendering, which focuses on individual welfare as the relevant sort of worsening. I have already argued (in my original paper) why this will result in a requirement of compensation: the welfare boon of self-mastery simply outweighs the welfare gained for much of the contemporary poor through the market. Furthermore, Narveson has made it very clear such an option is a non-starter. Such a reading of the proviso is precisely how *not* to be a consistent liberal theorist. Second, Narveson could deny that people stuck in a cycle of poverty and low-wage labor are in fact deprived of their liberty by being denied self-mastery to any substantial degree. I cannot treat such a contention here at length and am happy to rest on the *prima facie* strength of my case given the plight of much of today's poor in contemporary market economies.<sup>33</sup> Third, Narveson could deny that the sort of liberty I am focusing on is at all relevant for the liberal theorist.

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<sup>32</sup> And Widerquist and McCall highlight just how many liberties are off limits to the homeless in particular, who often have no legal place to urinate, have sex, sleep, etc. See *Prehistoric Myths in Modern Political Philosophy*, p. 190.

<sup>33</sup> Here I am thinking of an advanced economy akin to the one we have in the United States. My case becomes much stronger if we consider the poor person living in a shanty town in modern-day Mumbai or Rio de Janeiro. My case also becomes much stronger if I consider a fictional libertarian state that lacks the social-welfare programs already aimed at alleviating the effects of poverty.

I take it that this last sort of response is most likely. Narveson may acknowledge the plight of the poor, and acknowledge it to be a sad plight indeed, but maintain it is not one in which they have been deprived of liberty. They are at liberty to engage in the market economy such as it is and apply themselves as best they can. If the most likely result of this is a life of drudgery through wage labor, that is sad; but no one is depriving them of their liberty (in the relevant sense), so no properly liberal proviso is transgressed. But Mack's cases have already shown that one can be deprived of liberty through mere appropriation (without imprisonment, theft, or assault), so one can ask just what sort of appropriations leave others at liberty. And to see whether an advanced market economy (and all the appropriations that have led to it) still leaves others at liberty, we are driven to ask: just what is liberty (in the relevant sense)? We could define liberty in a rather minimal way, wherein as long as one has access to a market economy, one is at liberty to act. Never mind that the economic activity open to many is exhausting, mind-numbing drudgery in which one is under the close control of others for the majority of one's life. Or we could define liberty in a more substantial way that involves not a guarantee of, but at least a decent shot at, gaining and maintaining a level of self-mastery. Liberty is, after all, not valuable merely for giving one any old opportunity at self-mastery; rather, it is valuable when it can be used to pursue opportunities that have a reasonable chance of success. This is why the liberty to play the lottery is of such little value. It has been my contention that the live opportunities for many contemporary persons in market economies are ones that deny the sort of self-mastery that would be available in the absence of these economies and the appropriations that led to them.

If Narveson goes with the first, minimal definition of liberty, then he can indeed escape the strength of my argument. However, the result is a position that lacks much of what makes liberalism or libertarianism attractive in the first place. Classical liberalism is supposed to preserve personal liberty; this is a powerful motivation for liberal theory. But we value liberty because of what we can do with it. Being free to pursue plans that have little chance of success, or a life that is devoid of self-mastery, is not really to be *at liberty* in the relevant sense. The attraction of liberalism is that it secures the liberty of individuals to pursue (at least) modest life plans in such a way that there is a decent chance of success. Why care about liberty if in practice it amounts to the functional equivalent of servitude? A liberalism that secures only an anemic sense of liberty has ceased to be properly liberal. A more plausible liberalism would employ a more robust conception of liberty, and this in turn results in a more morally plausible Lockean proviso. Such a proviso would recognize that we have not left "as much and as good" for others if whole swaths of the population are "free" to be homeless, live a life of low-wage

drudgery, or play the lottery in hopes of escaping this dilemma. Such a proviso would require some compensation to be given to those who, because of the level of development of our market economy, can no longer simply appropriate land and thereby gain self-mastery.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In my original essay, I argued that the implications of Nozick's entitlement theory end in a welfare state that seeks to advance the welfare of its poorer citizens as a form of compensation for the lack of genuine opportunity for self-mastery. Narveson thinks he can avoid all of this by rendering the Lockean proviso in such a way that it neglects welfare altogether and only focuses on liberty. However, the same sort of argument can be advanced against even this austere proviso. In contemporary market economies, whole swaths of people are deprived of their liberty of action in the world to a significant degree. They have little hope of achieving self-mastery. Narveson can deny the empirical accuracy of this contention, or he can retreat to an anemic conception of liberty. I am satisfied that the former tack is *prima facie* implausible and the latter results in a liberalism that has abdicated that which made it distinctive and attractive. Narveson's liberalism does preserve liberty, but only a sort that one is substantially not at liberty to use. The value of something rests in what we can do with it. If Narveson's liberalism does little to preserve *substantive* liberty, then I can admit it is a consistent view, though I fail to see its value.