

In response to complaints about economic inequality, some libertarians and conservatives will maintain that the wealthy have a right to all of the resources they control, no matter how much they have, provided that they've acquired it through legitimate means.

They seem to be assuming this claim:

(NL) There are no limits on just property acquisition.

In other words, there are no limits on how much property you can acquire and still have it count as justly owned property—resources you have a right to control.

I think this claim is false, however, and I'm going to present an argument against it.

(L1) If there are no limits on just property acquisition, then one person could (in principle) come to *justly* own all the ownable resources on Earth.

(L2) But one person could not (in principle) come to *justly* own all the ownable resources on Earth.

(L3) So, there *are* limits on just property acquisition.

Suppose someone who owns a significant means of producing food kept trading that food to people for the resources they own, while claiming all the remaining bits of unowned resources for himself.

In principle, this process could continue until this person came to own all the ownable resources on Earth.

Everyone else on Earth would be forced to obey the whims of this property owner in order to acquire the means to live.

And according to the “limitless” view of property rights, this situation would be just.

I consider this to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of the limitless view, and I expect most of you to agree.