

Nature's Gifts: excavating Henry George for the wealth of the commons.

Emily Sims

In the late nineteenth century, the popular American philosopher Henry George was preoccupied with the great paradox of the industrial age: why hadn't the astounding technological progress resulted in general prosperity? Why had the industrial revolution resulted in Dickensian cities, colonial appropriation and the age of robber barons? The current era finds us contemplating an eerily familiar set of problems. As Paul Chatterton puts it we are witnessing "...a particularly virulent form of primitive accumulation ushering in forms of enclosure akin to those seen in the early 19th century, which is expanding into a whole host of new areas such as the Internet, plant patents and most recently the carbon cycle." (Re)building the commons has emerged as an important theme for addressing spatial inequalities, a theme which echoes the thinking of the nineteenth century. In developing his theory of justice, George's starting point was recognition of the inalienable right of all people to "nature's gifts", or the commonwealth. He argued, that until we recognise that all land and natural resources belong to the commons, wealth will be unequally distributed. I propose to present a short paper outlining the classic Henry George Theorem and how by understanding the co-production of space and economic rent, we can appropriate community-created value and resist the commodification of land and natural resources.

Conference Themes: Our relationship with the natural world

Bio:

Emily Sims is part of the team of Prosper Australia, an independent think-tank and tax reform lobby group based in Melbourne. Prosper's mission is to shift the base of public revenue from labour and capital to land and natural resource rents. Emily holds a B.A. majoring in political science from Monash and is currently undertaking the M.A. in Urban Planning at Melbourne University