

EXPLAIN HOW NORMATIVE CONSIDERATIONS ENTER, EITHER EXPLICITLY OR TACITLY, INTO THE REASONS WHY THE PROBLEM ADDRESSED IN THE ARTICLE OR BOOK IS AN IMPORTANT ONE.

For the article of empirical study, I chose one I read last semester for the Scope of Political Science course, *The Politics of Property Rights*, in APSR. The author of this article argued that development scholars' focus on the ideal structure of property rights obscures a more fundamental problem of land reform, that of enforcement. Her argument lies in a case study of Akyem Abuakwa, a small state in the Gold Coast Colony (now Ghana). The empirical problem this article addresses is that the economic success of Akyem Abuakwa in the 1940's resulted from the enforcement of property rights at two fronts: coercive authority and credible commitment.

Before proceeding to explain the role of normative considerations in the reasoning of the importance of this enforcement problem, I think it should be advisable to make clear what "normative" means exactly. It is "in general, concerned with rules, recommendations, or proposals, as contrasted with mere description or the statement of matters of fact ... [it] tends to imply that the standards or values involved are those of some social group rather than of an individual"(Bullock 1988). So normative considerations refer to what ought to be instead of what is, while the other way round is true for empirical studies.

Why is the empirical problem of enforcement of property rights important? The reasons can be stated in normative terms as the following three points: first, this problem greatly influences, if not determines, the societal values; second, the enforcement of property rights is related to the fundamental question of how much power the government

can have over the citizen's interests; third, this problem concerns the citizen's obligations to the state.

Even if not believing in Marxism, one can hardly fail to recognize the importance of the problem of the enforcement of property rights. To Marxists, property rights, in terms of the material relationship of production between individuals, determine the superstructure of the society: political institutions, laws, religions, values and also norms. As a result, if the property rights system is effectively and efficiently enforced, the societal values on which we make normative judgement will be gradually changed over time. This point is clear in the article. Before the paramount chief of Akyem Abuakwa enforced the innovated customary land tenure system, there were no such concepts among citizens as, say, public goods; even individual property was not distinguished from stool property. But after that, people exchanged taxes for public goods, and enjoy full rights to their land. So one of the reasons why the problem of enforcement is important is that it influences the value judgement itself, on which normative considerations are to be made.

Now in enforcing the new property rights system, the paramount chief exerted a lot of coercive authority on his subjects. He used force to quell those advocates of an alternative, more distributionally favorable property rights system. This brought about good effects such as the prosperity of Akyem Abuakwa, however, is this coercion thus justified? If so, we seem to believe in "the end justifies the means", as Macchiavelli did. This enforcement of property rights touches on one of the most outstanding problems of politics: that of how much power the government ought to have over its citizens. From the empirical narration of the article, it seems that the paramount chief's actions were good, as in this way the chief ended internal conflict over the definition and distribution of

property rights and thus ensuring a stable environment for economic development. But did we not also see free expression and assembly suppressed? In this Akyem Abuakwa experience as well as many other cases, we can discern this weighing between government power and economic prosperity. Which one should prevail? This depends on our value judgement. That is just what the author wanted to emphasize in her discussion of the problem of enforcement of property rights. Much of the importance of this problem lies in the normative assertion that the government's coercive authority should not go unbalanced and into abuses of their power. A ruler powerful enough to suppress advocates of alternative property rights system might also be powerful enough to violate these rights and infringe on the interests of the citizens. That is why the above-mentioned two fronts are necessary.

Now we come to the question of citizens' obligations to the state. Are these obligations absolute, even if the state fails to furnish the public goods? In this article, the author seems to indicate a negative answer. In her empirical analysis of the State Treasury Revenue Sources (1940-1949), she blames the initial reluctance of the citizens on the failure of the government to establish a credible commitment, instead of on their evasion of civil duties. So it seems that citizens ought not to pay their taxes if taxes are bound to be appropriated by the chiefs, not to be provided as public goods. This makes clear the importance of the other aspect of the enforcement problem: credible commitment. In the Akyem Abuakwa case, the government created institutions of joint decision making and delegated significant power to citizens. This amounts to "tying the king's hands" and ensured the citizenry's confidence in investing in the land and paying taxes to the treasury. The normative consideration about citizens' obligation to the state here serves as a basis of

the reason why credible commitment is important in the problem of enforcement of property rights.

It is interesting to see how value judgements and abstract concepts enter into empirical problems. In this article such considerations enter into the reasons why enforcement of property rights is important in three aspects: that norms of social groups as such are influenced by it; that considerations about government's power require that it be balanced and that norms about citizenry obligation make it imperative that enforcement includes credible commitment.

References

Bullock, Alan and Stephen Trombley ed.. 1988. *The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Fermin-Sellers, Kathryn. 1995. "The Politics of Property Rights" in *American Political Science Review* 89:867-881.

Lacey, A.R.. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Speake, Jennifer ed.. 1979. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

