

“To Own Is To Be Perceived to Own”: A Social Cognitive Look at the Ownership of Property

Floyd W. Rudmin

*School of Business and Faculty of Law, Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6, Canada*

Although property disputes are legion, they are infrequent relative to the very high degree to which considerations of possession and ownership enter into our every action and interpersonal relationship. Wide consent occurs because property is a phenomenon of social perception based on common cognitions. The purpose of this paper is to outline the historical and theoretical foundations of this theory in order to foster further development and new empirical research. Social cognitive explanations have been used to justify both communal ownership (e.g., Pythagoras, Plato, Cicero) and private property (e.g., Locke, Hume). They now have the clearest research potential in the writings of Litwinski and of Heider.

The world is rife with property disputes, at all levels of social organization. These vary from dogs playing keep-away with sticks (e.g., Aldis, 1975), to children quarrelling over toys (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Dawe, 1934), to crimes of theft and vandalism (e.g., Van den Bogaard & Wiegman, 1991), to cases of divorce and inheritance (e.g., Allan, 1982; Bala, 1989), to issues of corporate ownership (e.g., Cho, 1977; Harbrecht & Berle, 1959), to the destruction of our common ecology (e.g., Hardin, 1968), to international conflicts and wars for territory (e.g., Laborit, 1978). *Meum* and *tuum* have rendered the world, and the noise of their quarrel reverberates everywhere, without end.

However, it is remarkable how very few disputes and disruptions there actually are relative to the ubiquitousness of property norms and to the very high degree to which considerations of possession and ownership enter into our lives and regulate our behavior. Everywhere we go, everything we do, entails at least a momentary or unconscious calculation of possessory relationships and rights. Such internal acts of quiet consent vastly outnumber those of quarrel. We cannot walk, talk, love, work, play,

Author's Note: During the preparation of this work, funding was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the Faculty of Law of Queen's University.

Rudmin, F.W. (Ed.). (1991). To have possessions: A handbook on ownership and property. [Special Issue]. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, Vol. 6, No. 6, 85-104.

© 1991 Select Press

mate, rest, sleep, fight, sing, groom, dance, or pray without encountering the bounds of property and the norms of permission. Scholars cannot even write down their thoughts without referencing to whom the ideas "belong."

We are geographic beings: we must be located on and move about the surface of the planet. But how narrow and constrained is the geography of any particular individual. We are utilitarian beings: we create and depend upon objects, foods, tools, and all types of implements. But again, how limited and constrained are the options of each individual. We know where our possessory interests and property rights reside and where they do not. We limit our behavior accordingly, and we expect others to know and do the same. Indeed, it is a paradox that the autonomy and freedom allowed by rights of private possession require conformity to norms of restraint (Rudmin, 1988a).

However, property norms are so well socialized that we little realize these constraints. We generally feel quite free as we keep to narrow sidewalks and roadways, as we live and work in those rooms to which we have keys, and as we make do with our own possessions or ask permission. The bounds and bonds of property only become salient when we live with and care for young children who are still learning the rules of property, or when we encounter people of other cultures and other property norms, or when we feel the alienation of property (Otnes, 1989), or when extremes of poverty leave people sleeping on the streets or starving. In the usual routine of life, among adults of adequate means, the institution of property is relatively invisible, and property disputes are relatively infrequent.

This is so, it will be argued, because property is, in essence, a social perceptual phenomenon. Our social world and its property structures are constellated, sanctioned, and internalized by our shared perceptions of them. To paraphrase Berkeley (1710/1963), "To own is to be perceived to own." The institution of property is invisible and disputes infrequent because we all see with the same eye. And just as Berkeley's God is the omniscient perceiver maintaining and objectifying material reality when human perception is absent or discordant, so too does Law maintain the ownership of property when human perception is absent or in irreconcilable dispute. Law sets the expert, formal criteria of what constitutes ownership. As Putnam's (1975), Ackerman's (1977), and Miller and Johnson-Laird's (1976) work have all suggested, it may require appeal to legal specialists in court to enact a formal, juristic perception of ownership, which may not concur with lay, heuristic perceptions (Ackerman, 1977; Rudmin & Berry, 1987). However, the social perception of ownership has so much consensus and is so well socialized that most people go to court rarely, if ever, over matters of property. The vast bulk of property disputes that do arise are not civil confusions of who owns what, but criminal acts of

knowingly violating property norms, or outright rebellions against the whole property regime.

The purpose of this report is to briefly review the historical expressions of social cognitive theories of ownership in the hope of exciting further theoretical development, new experimental examination, and perhaps application. Although notions that property has a social cognitive foundation are long-standing, they have yet to encounter the full force of modern cognitive science, as enacted in the research traditions, for example, of experimental social psychology or artificial intelligence. Because the social cognitive theories of Litwinski and of Heider are most contemporary, they may be most apt for such exploitation and will here receive a corresponding emphasis.

HISTORY

Social cognitive theories of property have appeared sporadically for over two millennia. In the sixth century B.C., Pythagoras invoked the myth of the three Graeae Sisters, who shared one eye between them, to argue that common perception leads to common property and few property disputes. Pythagoras said of women:

They must not destroy the reputation they had acquired through tradition and not put the writers of myths in the wrong; on the grounds of their recognition of the justice of women, because they give away clothes and adornments without witnesses when others have need of them, without this trustfulness resulting in lawsuits or quarrels, these poets created the myth that three women had but one eye between them because there was such concord among them. If one was to apply this to men and say that one who had first obtained something could easily part with it and even willingly added something of his own, nobody would believe it. For it is not in the nature of men. (DeVogel, 1966, pp.132-133)

This was encapsulated in the Pythagorean precept, "All is common among friends" (Heninger, 1974, p. 23), which became part of general Greek values and came to influence Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, the Church Fathers, and eventually Marx.

Taking up the communal ideal of Pythagoras, Plato (1961 ed.) forbade private property for the guardians of his *Republic*. In the *Laws*, he restated the argument that common perception leads to common property and few disputes:

The first-best society, then, that with the best constitution and code of law, is one where the old saying is most universally true of the whole society. I mean the saying that "'friends' property is indeed common property." If there is now on earth, or ever should be, such a society—a community in womenfolk, in children, in all possessions whatsoever—if all means have been taken to eliminate everything we mean by the

word *ownership* from life; if all possible means have been taken to make even what nature has made our *own* in some sense common property, I mean, if our eyes, ears, and hands seem to see, hear, act, in the common service; if, moreover, we all approve and condemn in perfect unison and derive pleasure and pain from the same sources -in a word, when the institutions of a society make it most utterly one, that is a criterion of their excellence than which no truer or better will ever be found. (Plato, *Laws*, 739c, 1961, p. 1324)

However, Aristotle, being more of a biologist, argued in his *Politics* (1952 ed.) that natural, instinctive self-interest hinders the possibility of common identity upon which Pythagoras and Plato wished to base a common perception of ownership. Rather, Aristotle argued, private property is necessary for moral development and it is through individual moral development that sharing and social harmony are to be achieved:

When everyone has his own separate sphere of interest, there will not be the same ground for quarrels; and the amount of interest will increase, because each man will feel that he is applying himself to what is his own. And on such a scheme, too, moral goodness and not, as in Plato's scheme, legal compulsion, will ensure that the property of each is made to serve the use of all, in the spirit of the proverb which says 'Friends' goods are goods in common.' (Aristotle, 1952, p. 49)

According to Aristotle, the essence of ownership is instrumentality (Mathie, 1979). A property best belongs, as a subordinate part, to the person who has the knowledge and reason to give it telic direction. Aristotle used this argument of telic causality to justify slavery. His argument, of course, implies that the social perception of ownership is elitist and hegemonic. Certainly the perceptions of slaves did not count.

When Greek thought moved to Rome, it carried with it ideas of the social perception of ownership. For example, Cicero concurred with Aristotle that only the wise could perceive just ownership:

Only such a man can really claim all things as his own, by virtue of the decision, not of the Roman People, but of the wise, not by any obligation of the civil law, but by the common law of nature, which forbids that anything shall belong to any man save to him that knows how to employ and use it. (Cicero quoted in Schlatter, 1951, p. 24)

However, Cicero also took the egalitarian, Pythagorean view that Logos is common to all humanity and that we can all reason, if not see, with consensus (Schlatter, 1951). The Romans differentiated between conventional law and natural law, and relegated just use and communal sharing to the latter:

While everything assigned as private property by the states and the civil law shall be held as prescribed by those laws, everything else

shall be regarded in the light of the Greek proverb, "Among friends all things are common." (Cicero quoted in Schlatter, 1951, p. 25)

The paradox that property naturally belongs to everyone in common and also naturally belongs to those who best know how to use it was resolved by the concept of stewardship, which developed in Christian thought from St. Augustine to Thomas Aquinas (Avila, 1983; Schlatter, 1951). All property is God's, to serve the good of all humankind, but is entrusted to temporal owners by the rights of the state and under obligations of moral use and distribution. Tawney (1926) has argued that Marx was the last of the Churchmen. Modern communism might be considered a final outcome of the early social perception theory that social cohesion requires common perceptions of ownership, which require common ownership.

However, modern advocates of private property also developed social perception arguments, beginning most notably with Locke in the 17th century. He is known in political economics for his labour theory of property, according to which a property belongs to the person who caused it to be appropriated from the common store of nature (Locke, 1690/1952). But he is known in psychology for his epistemology of mental ideas, according to which properties belong to the objects that caused them in the perceiver. Milam (1967) has argued that Locke's two pioneering uses of the term "property" are consistent and related: a "property" belongs to its causal agent. Thus, any value added by labour to God's original natural bounty creates a property which belongs to the agent of that labor. There is social consensus on this. Everyone can see that we each empower our own body and thus own our body's labour and the fruits of that labour:

When Locke said that men naturally have certain rights, he meant that these result from the fact that nature, including the human mind which "knows" these rights, is constituted as it is. To Locke, in other words, men possess their rights epistemologically as well as practically; indeed, they possess them practically only because they possess them epistemologically. (Milam, 1967, p. 27)

Within the British empirical tradition, Berkeley (1710/1963) followed Locke and analyzed spatial perception to conclude that all reality is only perceptual. Since perceptions are stable for different perceivers and for the same perceiver at different times, then there must be an omniscient perceiver, God. Hume carried cognitive epistemology to its radical limit and argued that there is no reality other than ideas, and that the world's stability is only an inductive inference. If all reality is perceptually constructed from associations of ideas, then that must be the foundation of property as well. Furthermore, these habits of mind serve adaptive,

utilitarian functions. We find mental comfort and adaptive utility in a predictable local environment, and thus we agree to private property:

Such is the effect of custom that it not only reconciles us to anything that we have long enjoyed, but even gives us an affection for it, makes us prefer it to other objects which may be more valuable, but are less well known to us. What has long lain under our eye and has often been employed to our advantage, that we are always most unwilling to part with; but can easily live without possessions which we never have enjoyed and are not accustomed to. It is evident, therefore, that men would easily acquiesce in this expedient that every one continue to enjoy what he is at the present possessed of. (Hume, 1739/1962, p. 71)

Hume's argument confronts the central problem for private property advocates: How is it that people so easily acquiesce to distributive injustice? Part of the answer is habit of mind. We get used to seeing particular people with their particular possessions and accept differences in possessions as though they were differences in persons. Dugald Stewart similarly argued that "the same effect is accomplished in the multitude by habit and the association of ideas; in consequence of which all the inequalities of fortune are sanctioned by mere prescription" (Stewart quoted in Schlatter, 1951, p. 173). William James made the same argument: "Habit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor" (James, 1890, Vol.1, p. 121). But Hume touched on another important aspect: everyone has at least some valued possessions, or sees a future potential for them, enough to warrant self-restraint in respect to the private possessions of others.

Following Hume in the eighteenth century, there is a bifurcation of traditions leading to twentieth century theories of the social perceptual foundations of private property. One line leads through Jeremy Bentham and Utilitarianism to the social cognitive theory of Leon Litwinski. The other line leads through Kant, to Gestalt psychology, to the social cognitive theory of Fritz Heider. However, neither of these traditions is noted for its discussion of ownership during the intervening nineteenth century when socioevolutionary and sociobiological theories of property had overwhelming preeminence (Rudmin, 1988b).

PROPERTY AS CONSENSUS

Extending Hume's arguments that psychological processes are adaptive and utilitarian, Bentham argued that people's fundamental motivation is to seek pleasure, broadly defined (McReynolds, 1968a, 1968b). But he qualified this by noting that pleasure may be either original, based

on sensation, or derivative, based on memory and imagination (Mack, 1962). This latter, also called the pleasure of expectation (Bentham, 1815/1969), is the foundation of property: "Property is nothing but a basis of expectation" (Bentham, 1950, p. 111).

Although many aspects of Utilitarianism were incorporated into the classical "economic man," the cognitive focus was all but lost during the nineteenth century. In 1913, Leon Litwinski began his efforts to revive Bentham's cognitive theory. (See Rudmin, 1990a, for greater details on Litwinski's biography and theory of property.) A Polish/Belgian economist and diplomat, Litwinski wrote extensively on the psychology of ownership in various European journals from 1913 to 1956 (Rudmin, Belk, & Furby, 1987). Litwinski (1913, 1942, 1947a, 1947b, 1949) argued that our cognitive abilities and our personalities are future oriented: objects, ideas, and social relationships are acquired for their expected utilities for anticipated problems. He differentiated between occupancy, possession, and property. Occupancy is the physical possession and use exhibited even by animals. It is inflexible, demanding, limited, and limiting. More adaptive than occupancy is possession. It is not just the use of things, but the intentional conservation and abstention from immediate use for the benefits of future use. It is essentially cognitive, and only incidentally physical:

... in the case of the peaceful attention of the happy possessor there is no question of tension without a moment of respite, but of a state of awareness which functions, ceases, to be resumed later, and is susceptible to alternation at will. It lasts as long as the subject maintains his interest in the object through the force of the idea which ties him to this object. Now to possess an object without a moment's respite is to possess it no longer; it is rather to be possessed by it, as is the case with blind and irresistible instinct. (Litwinski, 1942, pp.31-32)

Thus, Litwinski opposed those who put forward animal models of property.

In a social context, in a world with other cognitive beings, possession is insecure and its underlying expectation doubtful. The physical control necessary to secure mere possession is limited to the individual's power. It is only through the social institution of property that possessions and expectations can be secured and the cognitive costs decreased. Property is possession that has been sanctioned by social consent as formalized in law. Only when potential possessors have common perceptions and agreement of who owns what, are possessions secure. Only then do people have relative release from the cognitive demands of possession. Thus, property is relaxed anticipation, confident expectation, or in French, *attente dans la détente* (Litwinski, 1947b).

Litwinski also noted a paradox of property. The more secure a possession is, as property, the less attention the owner directs to it. At the extreme, possession entails indifference and the cessation of overt, visible acts of possessiveness:

A man's attachment to a thing is often rewarded by a feeling of detachment equivalent to indifference. It is thus that one can state that the latter, the moment it becomes predominant, brings what may be called the destruction of possessiveness, in consequence of its indifference. (Litwinski, 1942, p. 32)

In law, prolonged indifference is seen to be abandonment, and land owners can lose legal ownership to squatters by rule of prescription, known as adverse possession (Haar & Liebman, 1985). If a squatter overtly occupies and uses land and publicly acts in every way as the owner of the land, and if the legal owner does not assert ownership within a specified number of years, then the law perceives the squatter to be the new legal owner. Active possession of the land for an extended period takes precedence over the documented title to the land. In other words, the law recognizes that the active social perception of ownership is a higher order principle of ownership than the archival memory of ownership.

OWNERSHIP AS SOCIAL COGNITION

Fritz Heider was contemporary with Litwinski but worked within Gestalt rather than Utilitarian traditions (Heider, 1973, 1983). Gestalt psychology is a modern continuation of Kant's response to Hume. According to this tradition, the predictable coherence of the world is not just an inductive inference based on the habitual associations of ideas. Rather, the human mind inherently imposes order on the world; we do not perceive raw reality but an epistemologically constructed reality. For Gestalt theorists, this construction is perceptual and cognitive.

According to Heider (1946, 1958, 1987), one of the fundamental principles of perception by which the world is structured is unit formation. This is the tendency to perceive coherent "things," i.e. to perceptually unify what "belongs" together. Unit formation can be demonstrated in the triangle illusion shown in Figure 1.

Instead of three circles with pie-shaped wedges removed, we see a white triangle on top of three black circles. There should be an illusionary difference in the brightness of the white of the triangle and the white of the background because, by perceptual inference, the background must be farther away and therefore less bright. The illusion works because of unit formation tendencies: the straight-edges of the cuts in the circles are perceived to form the units of straight lines, which in turn form the unit of the triangle.

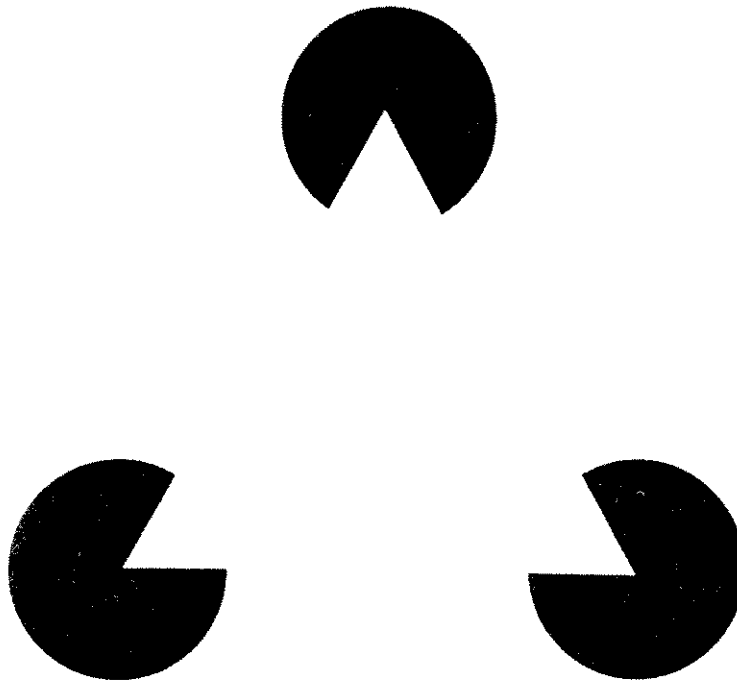
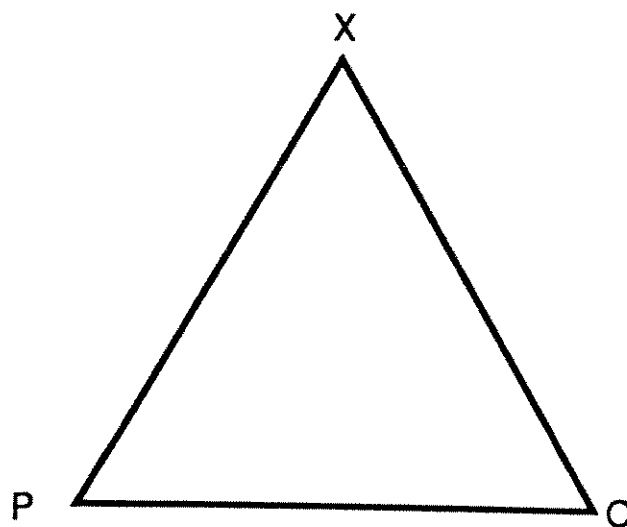


FIGURE 1 Triangle Illusion

This is an apt illustration for Heider's theorizing about interpersonal relations. He argues that the human mind is inherently ready to structure people and things into relationships, including those of possession, belonging, and ownership. The minimal relationship for purposes of theoretical discussion is the triad of person *p*, object *x*, and other person *o*, as shown in Figure 2:



P = person, X = possession, O = other person

FIGURE 2 Heider's Ownership Triad

Thus, according to Heider's theory, ownership is a social relationship rather than a private material relationship. This idea is not new with Heider. For example, Cairns (1935) writes:

The property relation is triadic: "A owns B against C," where C represents all other individuals. If it is expressed in the form "A owns B" it does not convey, except by implication, the conception of a relation between individuals, which is the essence of legal theory. (Cairns, 1935, p. 59)

This is also similar to Jordan's (1922) philosophical analysis of the meaning of possession:

Control implies that I have the power (the right would imply the legal or conventional re-enforcement or limitation of power) to modify or effect changes in the relations of a thing to other things or persons. The status of the other things or persons may be for me either conscious or unconscious, still I must take account of them in some way, otherwise I could not modify their relations. (Jordan, 1922, p. 374)

Bloch (1975) has reviewed similar ideas found in anthropological sources.

According to Heider, unit formation is the primary perceptual force underlying triadic interpersonal relationships like ownership:

The relation "unit" will be written U. Examples are: similarity, proximity, causality, membership, possession, or belonging. pUx can mean, for instance, p owns x, or p made x; p-Ux means p does not own x, etc. Other relations which, in many ways, seem to function like units are: p is familiar with, used to, knows well o or x, and p is in situation x. (Heider, 1946, p. 107)

Heider's theory is set at the extreme abstract level, and thus encompasses numerous theories and criteria that have been put forward for ownership, including proximity (Berti, Bombi, & Lis, 1982; Ellis, 1985), causality (Locke, 1690/1952), membership (Aristotle, 1952 ed.), familiarity (Hume, 1739/1962), use (Ellwood, 1927), control (Furby, 1980), recognition (Titchener, 1911), and knowledge (Cicero and St. Augustine in Schlatter, 1951). That ownership is based on a confluence of bonding relationships can even be seen in popular expression. Consider this burglary victim's statement:

If you're a victim, it's traumatic. You start looking at little things that were missing and you think, "Holy Jesus, that may only show up as \$10 for insurance purposes, but it's something you *used*, something you're *familiar with*, something that *provided some memories*." [italics added] (Toronto Star, April 7, 1985, p. A13)

Heider also proposes that a second psychological force arises from attitudes, also called sentiments:

We shall understand by attitude the positive or negative relationship of a person p to another person o , or to an impersonal entity x which may be a situation, an event, an idea, or a thing, etc. Examples are: to like, to love, to esteem, to value, and their opposites. A positive relation of this kind will be written L , a negative one $-L$. Thus, pLo means p likes, loves, or values o , or, expressed differently, o is positive for p . (Heider, 1946, p. 107)

Attitudes are motivational dispositions and are thus private and subjective. As social perceptual phenomena, they are inferred not seen. "Difference between L and U : U is objective, it can be seen, perceived" (Heider, 1987-1989, 12.32, #511). " U is the representation of existence, hard facts. L is the representation of wants, tendencies, directions" (Heider, 1987-1989, 12.32, #514). If U is the public perception of belonging together, a "clamp," then L is the private force, a "spring," presumed to empower the clamp. " L tends toward U ; U is hidden in L " (Heider, 1987-1989, 12.32, #518). To reinterpret this in light of Litwinski's work, U is the present state of possession and L is the expectation, or imagination, desire, that U will be maintained into the future or will be achieved in the future. That is what it means to "like" something.

Again drawing on Gestalt ideas that the human mind is inherently driven to prefer complete, coherent and stable perceptual structures, Heider argues that if U and L are incompatible, as happens when one possesses what is not wanted ($+U-L$) or when one lacks what is desired ($-U+L$), then there will be cognitive imbalance which will motivate the person to change the valence of U or L :

By a balanced state is meant a situation in which the relations among entities fit together harmoniously; there is no stress towards change. A basic assumption is that sentiment relations and unit relations tend toward a balanced state. It also means that if a balanced state does not exist, then forces toward this state will arise. If a change is not possible, the state of imbalance will produce tension. (Heider, 1958, p. 201)

Heider explicitly argued that " p owns x induces p likes x " (Heider, 1958, p. 194) and cited Irwin and Gebhard's (1946) experimental study showing that children prefer what that they own. Nuttin (1987) has provided similar evidence with adults from different nationalities. That p likes x induces p owns x needs little discussion.

Cognitive balance empowers the dynamics not only of the dyadic relationships between p , x , and o , but also of the overall ownership triad:

A dyad is balanced if the relations between the two entities are all positive (L and U) or all negative ($-L$ and $-U$). Disharmony results when relations of different sign exist. A triad is balanced when all

	U	L	B	U	L	B	U	L	B	U	L	B	U	L	B	U	L	B	U	L	B	
	1	9	17	25	33	41	49	57														
P,x	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	P,x	
O,x	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	O,x	
P,o	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	P,o	
B	s	w	s	w	s	s	s	3	s	s	3	s	s	3	s	s	3	w	s	1	B	
	2	10	18	26	34	42	50	58														
P,x	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	P,x	
O,x	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	O,x	
P,o	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	P,o	
B	s	w	3	w	w	1	s	w	3	s	w	1	s	w	3	s	w	1	w	w	1	B
	3	11	19	27	35	43	51	59														
P,x	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	P,x	
O,x	+	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	O,x	
P,o	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	P,o	
B	s	w	3	w	w	1	s	w	3	s	w	3	s	w	1	s	w	1	w	w	1	B
	4	12	20	28	36	44	52	60														
P,x	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	P,x	
O,x	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	O,x	
P,o	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	P,o	
B	s	w	3	w	w	1	s	w	3	s	w	1	s	w	3	s	w	1	w	w	1	B

FIGURE 3 Heider's 64 Generic Property Triads

U = Union, L = Liking, B = Balance, p = person, x = thing, o = other person, s = strong, w = weak

P,x	5	13	21	29	37	45	53	61	P,x
O,x	+ + s	+ + s	+ + s	- + w	+ + s	- + w	- + w	- + w	O,x
P,o	+ - w	+ - w	- - w	+ - w	- - s	- - s	+ - w	- - s	O,x
B	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	- - s	- - s	P,o
	s s 3	w s 3	w s 3	w s 1	s s 5	s s 3	s s 3	w s 3	B
	6	14	22	30	38	46	54	62	
P,x	+ - w	+ - w	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	- - s	- - s	- - s	P,x
O,x	+ - w	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	- - s	- - s	+ - w	- - s	O,x
P,o	+ + s	- + w	+ + s	+ + s	- + w	+ + s	- + w	- + w	P,o
B	s s 3	w s 1	w s 3	w s 3	s s 3	s s 5	s s 3	w s 3	B
	7	15	23	31	39	47	55	63	
P,x	+ - w	+ - w	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	- - s	- - s	- - s	P,x
O,x	+ + s	+ + s	- + w	+ + s	- + w	- + w	+ + s	- + w	O,x
P,o	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	- - s	- - s	P,o
B	s s 3	w s 3	w s 1	w s 3	s s 3	s s 3	s s 5	w s 3	B
	8	16	24	32	40	48	56	64	
P,x	+ - w	+ - w	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	- - s	- - s	- - s	P,x
O,x	+ - w	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	- - s	- - s	+ - w	- - s	O,x
P,o	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	+ - w	- - s	+ - w	- - s	- - s	P,o
B	s w 1	w w 1	w w 1	w w 1	s w 3	s w 3	s w 3	w w 3	B
	ULB	ULB	ULB	ULB	ULB	ULB	ULB	ULB	

FIGURE 3 (cont.) Heider's 64 Generic Property Triads

three of the relations are positive or when two of the relations are negative and one is positive. Imbalance occurs when two of the relations are positive and one is negative. The case of three negative relations is somewhat ambiguous. (Heider, 1958, pp. 202-203)

For example, it is cognitively uncomfortable if a friend (p+U+Lo) dislikes my dog (o-U-Lx), which I happen to love (p+U+Lx). The situation would become balanced if I were to come to dislike and dispossess my dog (p-U-Lx) or to dislike and dispossess my friend (p-U-Lo).

Heider (1958, p. 197), citing Spinoza, has argued that the situation of two people both liking the same object could result in either positive or negative bonds between them. On one hand, they could tend to be positive towards one another due to a shared aesthetic sense. Pines and Larkin (1989, 1990) have provided experimental evidence that we are attracted to people with possessions similar to our own. But because "pL(pUo) is assumed to be coordinated to pLo" (Heider, 1987-1989, 12.3, #356), there is the danger that people with shared aesthetics will become competitive for possession of the same object and thus hostile to one another.

Heider's theorizing postulates that there are 64 generic ownership relationships. With two values of U and of L for each of three dyads, there are 64 possible combinations. These are displayed in Figure 3. The cognitive balance of the dyads is indicated on the right side of each cell, and the triadic balance at the bottom. The sum of the strong (s) relationships appears in the lower right hand corner. However, it has yet to be established whether or not the psychological forces of dyadic and triadic balance sum in this simple way. It may be that the interpersonal dyadic relationship (p-o), the site of attraction forces and of reciprocity in the established social psychological literature, is more important in determining triadic stability than are the dyadic object relationships (p-x, o-x) or the overall triadic relationships.

Of all 64 ownership triads, only two types show complete cognitive balance: communal ownership (#1, #46) and private ownership (#37, #55). Communal and private ownership are both represented from inside (#1, #37) and outside (#46, #55) the possessive bond. Communal and private ownership, of course, are the dominant topics in the history of political economic theory and debate. There is an elegance and a source of confidence in this display that Heider's theorizing would so identify the most salient property relationships, or rather, that a long history of political economic theorists were responsive to the good-figure forces that Heider focussed upon. With this comes the realization that traditional property theory has neglected 60 other property relationships (Rudmin, 1990b).

Indeed, the other 60 triads are imbalanced and entail tensions that drive them towards communal or private ownership. For example, in triad #8, if p and o are spouses and x is their house, then the marriage and residency are not likely to last. However, if all three U relationships were to become negative (#64), there would still be the cognitive tension of the estranged spouses sharing a common dislike and common dispossession of the house. Heider's theory would predict that post-divorce cognitive balance would be greatest if one spouse changed attitudes towards the house and came to like it and to maintain possession (#37, #55). However, Heider acknowledges that less than final states may endure. Indeed, it may be that people seek tensions, such as those that arise in cognitive imbalance, as a form of cognitive arousal (Rudmin, 1990a).

In many ways Heider's work should be considered more an algebra than a theory. It is a system of notation that allows theory to be developed and subsequently tested in numerous directions. Heider (1958, p. 197, 1987-1989, 12.3, #351-#354) has indicated that the possessory triad could become reflexive, such that the object of possession, x , is not a material object but a relationship, e.g., $(p+U+Lx)$. This might help resolve, for example, the paradox of gifting. If p received object x from o as a gift, then the full possession and ownership of x by p would tend to require a negative p - o relationship, as in triads #37 and #55. How is it that we give private property which becomes the receiver's private property, with a net effect of positive affiliation between the giver and the receiver? Using the reflexive options of Heider's theory, it may be that it is not object x that is the focus of concern, but the *relationship* $(p+U+Lx)$. Thus, p has $(+U)$ and likes $(+L)$ the relationship, as does o . Since they are both positive towards the same "object," there are inherent forces to be positive towards one another, as in triad #1. Thus, in societies structured on private property, it would seem important that recipients display liking and keeping of gift objects.

This reflexivity may also be extended to the level of political economic theory. For example, from Pythagoras and Plato, to the early Church, to Marx, one of the strongest arguments against private property has been that it is socially divisive (Rudmin, 1988b). This appears in the p - U - Lo dyad in the private property relationships of triads #37 and #55. George Herbert Mead (1982) has argued that such hostility is particularly marked in the possession of abstract properties that can belong to anyone. How is it that the inherent hostility of ownership does not burst forth everywhere in societies structured on private property? Is property conflict contained only by state violence, as Hobbes (1651/1924) hypothesized? Or are there indeed natural property regimes arising from human nature?

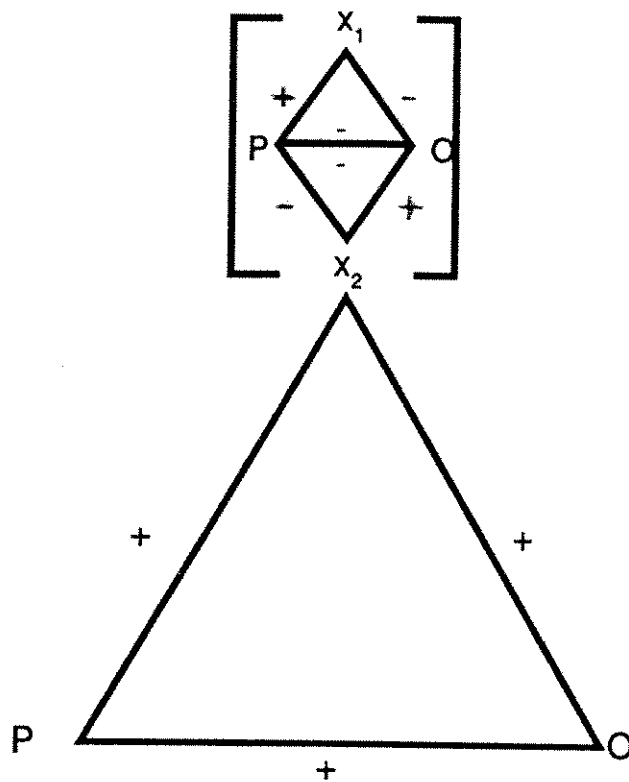


FIGURE 4 The Configuration of Consensual Private Property

Heider's algebra suggests an answer, as shown in Figure 4. If p has private ownership of some x , as in triad #37, then o may have ownership of some different x , as in triad #55. With respect to each possessed object, there is an inherent negative relationship between p and o . However, the *relationship* of p and o each having some private property may be a necessary "possession" for both p and o if they are to have other than hostile relationships, and if they are indeed to secure their private possessions. If p and o have (+U) and prefer (+L) the relationship of them each having some private possessions, then that can be a basis of positive (+U+L) relationship between them, mitigating their negative relationships in reference to specific physical possessions. Thus, while owners and potential owners compete for possessions and must be ever defensive, they share a common attachment and liking for the regime of private possession. This is Hume's theory of consensual private property. It is the dispossessed who should be doubly feared and defended against.

With the presumption that we all engage the same Gestalt principles of perceptual and cognitive organization, Heider's theory would predict that disputes of ownership (U) would not be rampant. And disputes that did arise would derive more from conflicts of sentiment (L) than

disagreements of fact (U). We can see and agree upon perceptual facts; sentiments are secreted. However, that would be the very reason that property disputes focus on facts. Possession *is* nine points of the law. If p and o and the community or court can "see" whether or not (pUx) is the case, then that is where the evidence and argument will be mustered. Heider's theory is not solipsistic for p, from p's perspective only. Unit formation is publicly perceptible. The difficult property disputes are those of sentiment and intention, as arise, for example, in gifting and testate.

CONCLUSION

Heider's theorizing on ownership is only now beginning to be studied (e.g., Nuttin, 1987; Rudmin, 1990b). This may seem an unusual claim, considering that his cognitive balance theory is one of the most well known and established topics in social psychology. The literature on cognitive balance is so vast that is not possible to even begin to review it here. (See Feather, 1967; Markus & Zajonc, 1985, or any social psychology textbook for reviews.) Many consider Heider's balance theory to be *passé* or "mined-out," even though his magnum opus, with one full volume on balance, has only just been published (Heider, 1987-1989). Indeed, Heider considered the material relationships of ownership and possession to be among the fundamental, interpersonal relationships. Social psychology, as a field, failed to notice this in his writings and failed to follow his lead. Rather, the study and elaboration of cognitive balance theory quickly focussed on issues of interpersonal attraction and attitudinal dynamics. Furthermore, there seems to be a widespread misconception that processes of attraction, positivity, reciprocity, agreement, and emotions generally are somehow external to, or in competition with, or unaccountable by, Heider's algebra of interpersonal relations and his discussions of cognitive balance.

Heider's work is a good place to begin a revival of cognitive theorizing on possession and ownership. As already noted, his work on interpersonal relations encompasses much of the historical discussion and established theory of possession and ownership. For example, Heider could concur with Pythagoras, Plato and others that private property is divisive and alienating. He could also concur with Locke that labour is a fundamental justification for ownership, and also with Hume that a stable private property regime must rest on social consensus. Certainly, Litwinski's emphasis on expectancy as the motive behind ownership is compatible with Heider's development of the attitude relationship. Taking Heider as a transducer, various traditional theories are expressible in a format that has an established literature and established research paradigms.

However, neither Heider's work, nor social cognitive and perceptual theories generally, should be considered wholly adequate to explain ownership. The classic Plato-Aristotle property debate represents within property theory the fundamental distinction between social communion values and individual agency values described by Bakan (1966) and others. Property may serve motives of social connection *and* of power (Rudmin, 1990c). Thus, social cognitive theories, based on a rather passive "looking" at the world, may overly focus on the "belonging" aspects of property and may fail to appreciate the demands and motives of "acting" in the world. The eventual validity and value of social cognitive and perceptual theories of ownership and possession await determination.

REFERENCES

- Ackerman, B.A. (1977). *Private property and the Constitution*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Aldis, O. (1975). *Play fighting*. New York: Academic Press.
- Allan, G. (1982). Property and family solidarity. In P.G. Hollowell (Ed.), *Property and social relations* (pp. 165-182). London: Heinemann.
- Aristotle (1952). *The Politics of Aristotle* (E. Barker, Trans.). London: Oxford University Press.
- Avila, C. (1983). *Ownership: Early Christian teaching*. London: Sheed & Ward.
- Bakan, D. (1966). *The duality of human existence*. Boston: Beacon.
- Bala, N. (1989). Recognizing spousal contributions to the acquisition of degrees, licences and other career assets: Towards compensatory support. *Canadian Journal of Family Law*, 8, 23-59.
- Bentham, J. (1969). A tale of the springs of action. In P. McReynolds (Ed.), *Four early works on motivation* (pp. 477-512). Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles Press. (Original work published 1815)
- Bentham, J. (1950). *The theory of legislation* (C.K. Ogden, Ed.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Berkeley, G. (1963). *Principles of human knowledge*. Cleveland: World Publishing. (Original work published 1710)
- Berti, A.E., Bombi, A.S., & Lis, A. (1982). The child's conceptions about means of production and their owners. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 12, 221-239.
- Bloch, M. (1975). Property and the end of affinity. In M. Bloch (Ed.), *Marxist analysis and social anthropology* (pp. 203-228). London: Malaby Press.
- Cairns, H. (1935). *Law and the social sciences*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trubner.
- Cho, J.H. (1977). Moral implications of acquisitive instinct under the separation of ownership and control. *Review of Social Economy*, 35, 143-148.
- Cooley, C.H. (1902). *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Scribners.
- Dawe, H.C. (1934). An analysis of two hundred quarrels of preschool children. *Child Development*, 4, 139-157.
- DeVogel, C.J. (1966). *Pythagoras and early Pythagoreanism*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Ellis, L. (1985). On the rudiments of possessions and property. *Social Science Information*, 24, 113-143.
- Ellwood, C. (1927). *Cultural evolution: A study of social origins and development*. New York: Century.
- Feather, N.T. (1967). A structural balance approach to the analysis of communication effects. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 3, pp. 99-165). New York: Academic Press.
- Furby, L. (1980). The origins and early development of possessive behavior. *Political Psychology*, 2, 30-42.

- Haar, C.M., & Liebman, L. (1985). *Property and law* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Little, Brown.
- Harbrecht, P.P., & Berle, A. (1959). *Toward the paraproprietal society: An essay on the nature of property in twentieth century America*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund.
- Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. *Science*, *162*, 1243-1248.
- Heider, F. (1946). Attitudes and cognitive organization. *Journal of Psychology*, *21*, 107-112.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: Wiley.
- Heider, F. (1973). Gestalt theory: Early history and reminiscences. In M. Henle, J. Jaynes, & J. Sullivan (Eds.), *Historical conceptions of psychology* (pp. 63-73). New York: Springer.
- Heider, F. (1983). *The life of a psychologist: An autobiography*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press.
- Heider, F. (1987-1989). *The notebooks* (M. Benesh-Weiner, Ed.). Munich: Psychologische Verlag Union.
- Heninger, S.K. (1974). *Touches of sweet harmony: Pythagorean cosmology and Renaissance Poetics*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library.
- Hobbes, T. (1924). *Leviathan*. London: Dent. (Original work published 1651)
- Hume, D. (1962). A treatise of human nature. Book III: Of morals. In H. Aiken (Ed.), *Hume's moral and political philosophy* (pp. 31-169). New York: Hafner. (Original work published 1739)
- Irwin, F.W., & Gebhard, M.E. (1946). Studies in object preferences: The effect of ownership and other social influences. *American Journal of Psychology*, *59*, 633-651.
- James, W. (1890). *Principle of psychology*. New York: Dover. (Original work published 1890)
- Jordan, E. (1922). Possession and individuality. *Philosophical Review*, *31*, 369-387.
- Laborit, H. (1978). The biological and sociological mechanisms of aggression. *International Social Science Journal*, *30*, 727-749.
- Litwinski, L. (1913). Qu'est-ce que la propriété? [What is property?]. *Revue Internationale de Sociologie*, *21*, 427-452.
- Litwinski, L. (1942). Is there an instinct of possession? *British Journal of Psychology*, *33*, 28-39.
- Litwinski, L. (1947a). The psychology of 'mine.' *Philosophy, Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, *22*, 240-241.
- Litwinski, L. (1947b). Une nouvelle théorie psychologique du lien possessoire: L'attente dans détente [A new psychological theory of possession: Attention in relaxation]. *Journal de Psychologie Normale et Pathologique*, *40*, 432-454.
- Litwinski, L. (1949). La psychologie de "mien" [The psychology of 'mine']. *Acta Psychologica*, *6*, 190-212.
- Litwinski, L. (1956). Belongingness as a unifying concept in personality investigation. *Acta Psychologica*, *12*, 130-135.
- Locke, J. (1952). *The second treatise of government*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill. (Original work published 1690)
- Mack, M.P. (1962). *Jeremy Bentham: An odyssey of ideas 1748-1792*. London: Heinemann.
- Markus, H., & Zajonc, R.B. (1985). The cognitive perspective in social psychology. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 138-230). New York: Random House.
- Mathie, W. (1979). Property in the political science of Aristotle. In A. Parel & T. Flanagan (Eds.), *Theories of property: Aristotle to the present* (pp. 12-32). Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier Press.
- McReynolds, P. (1968a). The motivational psychology of Jeremy Bentham: I. Background and general approach. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, *4*, 230-244.
- McReynolds, P. (1968b). The motivational psychology of Jeremy Bentham: II. Efforts towards quantification and classification. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, *4*, 349-364.
- Mead, G.H. (1982). *The individual and the social self* (D. Miller, Ed.). Chicago: Chicago University Press.

- Milam, M. (1967). The epistemological basis of Locke's idea of property. *Western Political Quarterly*, 20, 16-30.
- Miller, G.A., & Johnson-Laird, P. (1976). *Language and perception*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nuttin, J.M. (1987). Affective consequences of mere ownership: The name letter effect in twelve European languages. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 17, 381-402.
- Otnes, P. (1989, September). *The key*. Paper presented at the Second Conference on the Sociology of Consumption, Vuoranta, Helsinki.
- Pines, H.A., & Larkin, J.E. (1989, April). *Interpersonal attraction and possessions: A dissimilarity-repulsion effect*. Paper presented at Eastern Psychological Association meeting, Boston.
- Pines, H.A., & Larkin, J.E. (1990, March). *The things we have in common: Possession and interpersonal attraction*. Paper presented at Eastern Psychological Association meeting, Philadelphia.
- Plato (1961). *The collected works of Plato* (E. Hamilton & H. Cairns, Eds.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, H. (1975). The meaning of "meaning." In K. Gunderson (Ed.), *Language, mind and knowledge. Vol. 7: Minnesota studies in the philosophy of science* (pp. 131-193). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rudmin, F.W. (1988a). Dominance, social control, and ownership: A history and a cross-cultural study of motivations for private property. *Behavior Science Research*, 22, 130-160. [Note: The first two galleys were reversed during printing. The paper should begin on paragraph 5 on page 132. Paragraphs 1 through 4 should follow paragraph 8 on page 133.]
- Rudmin, F.W. (1988b). *Ownership as interpersonal dominance: A history and three studies of the social psychology of property*. Doctoral thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.
- Rudmin, F.W. (1990a). The economic psychology of Leon Litwinski (1887-1969): A program of cognitive research on possession and property. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 11, 307-339.
- Rudmin, F.W. (1990b). Heider's cognitive theory of property and the problem of unnamed and unrecognized property relationships. In R. Kevelson (Ed.), *Law and semiotics* (Vol. 3, pp. 321-334). New York: Plenum Press.
- Rudmin, F.W. (1990c). German and Canadian data on motivations for ownership: Was Pythagoras right? In M.E. Goldberg, G. Gorn, & R.W. Pollay (Eds.), *Advances in Consumer Research* (Vol. 17, pp. 176-181). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Rudmin, F.W., Belk, R.W., & Furby, L. (1987). *Social science bibliography on property, ownership and possession: 1580 citations from psychology, anthropology, sociology, and related disciplines*. Monticello, IL: Vance Bibliographies.
- Rudmin, F.W., & Berry, J.W. (1987). Semantics of ownership: A free-recall study of property. *Psychological Record*, 37, 257-268.
- Schlatter, R. (1951). *Private property: The history of an idea*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Tawney, R.H. (1926). *Religion and the rise of capitalism: A historical study*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Titchener, E. (1911). *A textbook of psychology* (Rev. ed.). New York: Macmillan
- Van den Bogaard, J., & Wiegman, O. (1991). Property crime victimization. In F. Rudmin (Ed.), *Handbook of possession, ownership and property* [Special issue]. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6(6), 329-362.