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Nozick's Voluntary State

Robert Nozick was an amazing philosopher who argued against John Rawls while they worked together at Harvard. Rawls argued for the difference principle and the redistribution of goods across the state based on natural or social disadvantages. This would allow (in theory) for all involved to be benefitted by the work each member of a state adds to the market. Nozick says this is wrong and that taking from someone, whether with good intent or not, would violate the rights of those they were taking from. Nozick stated, "Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights)" (Nozick, p. 9). He argues that since each member of the state has rights to their property, it would be infringing on their rights for the state to take their property even to be redistributed. He argues that this would take away from some extent of the profit of a firm in the state, or the profit of individual members. This isn't only because of the loss of property, but the changes to natural distribution of wealth can cause the firms to lose profit, and members of society to be unfairly disadvantaged when the goal of the redistribution is to equally advantage all members of the state. Nozick says the state is a thief because it cannot redistribute the wealth of its members in the most effective way. Nozick however is not arguing against the use of charity and strongly encourages the use of private charities and the donation to these charities for voluntary redistribution of wealth.

Simply by understanding Nozick's opinion of redistribution in the state, it wouldn't be surprising if he was a supportive anarchist. This however isn't the case and Nozick argues that the state should exist but in a minimal state and that any more than a minimal state is unjustified. He summarizes his thesis with this, "Our main conclusions about the state are that the minimal state limited to the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, fraud, enforcement of contracts, and so on, is justified; that any more extensive state will violate persons' rights not to be forced to do certain things, and is unjustified; and that the minimal state is inspiring as well as right." (Nozick, pg. 9). Nozick strengthens his claims with if different theories for how this can be achieved. He claims states may not force people to act in a certain way, even if it is in their own benefit. This means a state cannot ban the sale of tobacco products after they are found to give cancer because it would take away from the freedom of decision that each member of a state has. Next, the state may not force people to act for the good of other people. This reassesses the first point, and provides reasoning for why the state cannot tax in order to donate even if this is theoretically a good cause. Nozick's "Entitlement Theory" of justice has three rules. First, that any person who acquires a holding justly is entitled to it. This means that when someone makes \$1, then they own \$1. Next, if any person who receives a holding by a just transfer, this may be through some kind of voluntary trading (just transfer), or by a gift, then this person is entitled to it. No one is entitled to any holdings outside of the first two methods. This discourages theft and other unjust means of redistribution. Nozick says that any holdings which have been acquired through just means are themselves justified and that it would be unjust to redistribute goods which were acquired through just means.

Nozick's Principle of Rectification of past injustices states that if a society were to justify all past injustices through redistribution, then no other redistribution should be permitted. This means that if the entire town gets robbed so wealth is redistributed to cover their losses, then no more money can be distributed once their losses have been paid off. Nozick does not support arguments which he finds to be unhistorical or to have failed in historical practice. He argues that Rawls's Difference Principle is unhistorical and that in no time in history has forced redistribution been necessary nor beneficial to a society. Nozick sees this as not taking the separation of people's liberties into account when redistributing wealth. Nozick says that if people's property is redistributed then this is unjustly forcing satisfaction of the difference people. Nozick argues that because of taxation, companies in the United States need to keep track of their income and all fiscal goods. Without taxation, this company wouldn't need to keep track of their wealth and could then take the efforts that would take or the fiscal loss that would result and direct them to other sources of income instead.

Redistribution to an extent has become a necessity within states today. All goods are taxed and then from this taxation, redistribution. If this is effective or not is another question, but there is an initial understanding that redistribution to some extent is occurring in all modern states. The United States is one of the strongest supporters of capitalism in its truest form but even they make use of redistribution for education, transportation, and many other fields which are funded entirely from this net loss of its citizens. Nozick argues that in the most minimal sense, this can be a good thing, but when the country is collection trillions of dollars yearly through these taxes, the question must be asked of if this is just to all those in the state. To an extent, Nozick is right, redistribution of goods, especially forced, is an infringement on the

property rights and liberty of each member of the state. Each member of the state however is agreeing to this taxation when they are transferring goods between parties. While the taxation may overextend its reach in cases, it has been almost entirely beneficial to businesses and persons alike within a state. So, Nozick is right that forced redistribution, especially at the state level, is an infringement on the property goods of its members, but not that redistribution of goods is always forced within any level, again especially state level. Because there is the understanding of what goods are and are not taxed, then in theory, each member of the society is making an active choice to participate in the redistribution of goods and thus they are voluntarily redistributing goods, not to satisfy Nozick's principle.