

0001 I want to go back to the arguments for and against the redistribution of income  
0002 but before we do that  
0003 just one word about the state  
0004 Milton Friedman the  
0005 libertarian economist  
0006 he points out  
0007 that many of the functions  
0008 that we take for granted  
0009 as properly belonging to government, don't  
0010 they are paternalist. one example he gives is social security  
0011 he says it's a good idea  
0012 for people to save for their retirement  
0013 during their earning years  
0014 but it's wrong  
0015 it's a violation of people's liberty  
0016 for the government to force  
0017 everyone  
0018 whether they want to or not  
0019 to put aside some  
0020 earnings today  
0021 for the sake of their retirement. If people want to take the chance  
0022 or if people want to live big today and live  
0023 a poor  
0024 retirement  
0025 that should be their choice they should be free  
0026 to make those judgments and take those risks  
0027 so even social security  
0028 would still be at odds with the minimal state  
0029 that Milton Friedman  
0030 argued for  
0031 it's sometimes thought that  
0032 collective goods like police protection and fire protection  
0033 inevitably create the problem of free riders unless their publicly provided  
0034 but there are ways to  
0035 prevent free riders, there are ways to

0036 restrict even seemingly collective goods like fire protection

0037 I read an article

0038 a while back about a private fire company the Salem Fire corporation in Arkansas

0039 you can sign up with this Salem Fire Corporation

0040 pay a yearly subscription fee,

0041 and if your house catches on fire

0042 they will come and put out the fire

0043 but they won't put out

0044 everybody's fire,

0045 they will only put it out

0046 if it's a fire

0047 in the home of subscriber

0048 or if it starts to spread

0049 and to threaten

0050 the home of a subscriber

0051 the newspaper article told the story of a homeowner who had subscribed

0052 to this company in the past

0053 but failed to renew his subscription his house caught on fire

0054 the Salem Fire Corporation showed up with its trucks

0055 and watched the house burn.

0056 Just making sure that it didn't spread

0057 the fire chief was asked

0058 well he wasn't exactly the fire chief I guess he was the CEO

0059 he was asked

0060 how can you stand by with fire equipment

0061 and allow a person's home to burn?

0062 he replied once we verified there was no danger to a member's property

0063 we had no choice

0064 but to back off

0065 according to our rules. If we responded to all fires, he said, there would be no incentive

0066 to subscribe

0067 the homeowner in this case tried to renew his subscription at the scene of the fire

0068 but the head of the company refused

0069 you can't wreck your car, he said, and then buy insurance for it later

0070 so even public goods that we take for granted as being within the proper province of government

0071 can, many of them, in principle

0072 be isolated, made exclusive to those who pay.

0073 that's all to do with  
0074 the question of collective goods  
0075 and the libertarian's injunction against  
0076 paternalism  
0077 let's go back now to the  
0078 arguments about redistribution  
0079 now, underlying  
0080 the libertarian's case  
0081 for the minimal states  
0082 is a worry about coercion, but what's wrong with coercion?  
0083 libertarian offers this  
0084 answer to coerce someone  
0085 to use some person for the sake of the general welfare  
0086 is wrong  
0087 because  
0088 it calls into question the fundamental fact  
0089 that we own ourselves  
0090 the fundamental moral fact  
0091 of self-possession or self ownership  
0092 the libertarian's argument against redistribution  
0093 begins with this fundamental idea that we own ourselves  
0094 Nozick says  
0095 that if  
0096 this is society as a whole  
0097 can go to Bill Gates  
0098 or go to Michael Jordan  
0099 and tax away a portion  
0100 of their wealth,  
0101 what the society is really asserting  
0102 is a collective property right  
0103 in Bill Gates  
0104 or in Michael Jordan  
0105 but that violates  
0106 the fundamental principle  
0107 that we belong to ourselves  
0108 now we've already heard a number of objections  
0109 to the libertarian argument

0110 what I would like to do today  
0111 it's to give  
0112 the libertarians among us  
0113 a chance to answer the objections  
0114 that have been raised  
0115 and some have been some  
0116 have already identified themselves have agreed to  
0117 come and make the case  
0118 for libertarianism to reply to the objections that have been raised  
0119 so raise your hand if you are among the libertarians who's prepared to stand up  
0120 for the theory and response to the objections  
0121 you are? Alex Harris. Alex Harris who  
0122 he's been a star on the web blog, alright Alex  
0123 come here stand-up  
0124 we'll create a libertarian corner over here  
0125 and who else other libertarians  
0126 who will join  
0127 what's your name? John.  
0128 John Sheffield, John, and who else wants to join  
0129 other brave libertarians who are prepared  
0130 to take on yes  
0131 what's your name  
0132 Julia Roto, Julia come  
0133 join us over there  
0134 now while the,  
0135 team libertarian  
0136 Julia, John, Alex  
0137 while team libertarian is gathering over there  
0138 let me just summarize  
0139 the main objections that I've heard  
0140 in class and on the web site  
0141 objection number one  
0142 and here I'll come down too, I want to talk to team libertarian over here  
0143 so objection number one  
0144 is that  
0145 the poor need the money more  
0146 that's an obvious objection

0147 a lot more  
0148 than  
0149 than do  
0150 Bill Gates and Michael Jordan  
0151 objection number two  
0152 it's not really slavery to tax  
0153 because  
0154 at least in a democratic society  
0155 there's not a slave holder  
0156 it's congress  
0157 it's a democratic, you're smiling Alex, you're already a confident you can reply to all of  
0158 these  
0159 so taxation by consent of the governed is not coerced  
0160 third  
0161 some people have said don't be successful  
0162 like Gates  
0163 owe a debt to society for their success that they repay by paying taxes  
0164 who wants to respond to the first one the poor need the money more all right  
0165 you're John  
0166 John all right John  
0167 what's the answer, here I'll hold it.  
0168 alright  
0169 the poor need the money more, that's quite obvious  
0170 I could use money you know I certainly wouldn't mind if Bill Gates gave me a million dollars  
0171 I mean  
0172 I'd take a thousand  
0173 but at some point  
0174 you have to understand that the benefits of redistribution of wealth don't justify the  
0175 initial violation of the property right  
0176 if you look at the argument the poor need the money  
0177 more at no point in that argument you contradict the fact that we extrapolated from agreed  
0178 upon principles that people own themselves  
0179 we've extrapolated that people have property rights and so whether or not it would be a  
0180 good thing or a nice thing  
0181 or even a necessary thing for the survival of some people  
0182 we don't see that that justifies the violation of the right that we logically extrapolated  
0183 and so that also I mean

0184 they're still exist this institution of  
0185 of individual philanthropy, Milton Freidman makes this argument  
0186 alright so Bill gates can give to charity if he wants to  
0187 but it would still be wrong to coerce him  
0188 exactly  
0189 to meet the needs of the poor.  
0190 are the two of you happy with that reply?  
0191 anything to add? alright  
0192 Go ahead, Julie? Julia, ya, I think I could also ass  
0193 I guess I could add that  
0194 there's a difference between needing something and deserving something. I mean in an ideal society  
everyone's  
0195 needs would be met  
0196 but here we're arguing what do we deserve as a society  
0197 and the poor don't  
0198 deserve  
0199 the benefits that would flow from taxing Michael Jordan to help  
0200 them. Based on what we've come up with here, I don't think  
0201 you deserve something  
0202 like that. Alright let me,  
0203 push you a little bit on that Julia  
0204 the victims of hurricane Katrina  
0205 are in desperate need of help  
0206 would you say that they don't  
0207 deserve  
0208 the help that would come  
0209 from the federal government through taxation.  
0210 okay that's a, difficult question  
0211 I think  
0212 this is a case where they need help not  
0213 deserve it, but  
0214 I think again if you hit a certain level of  
0215 of requirements to reach sustenance, you're going to need help, like if you don't have food or place  
0216 to live  
0217 that's a case of need. So need is one thing  
0218 and dessert is another. exactly  
0219 who would like to reply?

0220 Come back to that first point

0221 that he made about the property rights of the individual

0222 the property rights are established and enforced by the government

0223 which is

0224 a democratic government and we have representatives

0225 who enforce those rights,

0226 if you live in a society that operates under those rules

0227 then it should be up to the government

0228 to decide

0229 how

0230 those resources that come about through taxation are distributed because it's through the consent of the governed

0231 and if you disagree with it

0232 you don't have to live in that society where

0233 that operate. Alright, good so, and tell me your name.

0234 Raul

0235 Raul is pointing out actually Raul is invoking

0236 point number two

0237 if the taxation is by

0238 the consent of the governed

0239 it's not coerced

0240 it's legitimate

0241 Bill Gates

0242 and Michael Jordan are citizens of the United States, they get to vote for congress and they

0243 get to

0244 vote

0245 their policy convictions

0246 just like everybody else

0247 who would like to take that one on? John?

0248 Basically what the libertarians are

0249 objecting to in this case is the middle eighty percent deciding what the top ten percent

0250 are doing for the bottom ten percent with wait wait wait,

0251 John, majority, don't you believe in democracy?

0252 well right but at some point,

0253 don't you believe in the, I mean, you say eighty percent ten percent, majority, majority

0254 rule is what? majority!

0255 exactly but, in a democracy aren't you for democracy? Yes I'm for democracy but, hang on,

0256 democracy and mob rule are not the same thing. Mob rule? mob rule. But in an open society, you have

recourse

0257 to address that through your representatives  
0258 and if the majority of the consent  
0259 of those who are govern doesn't agree with you  
0260 then you know, you're choosing to live in the society  
0261 and you have to operate under what  
0262 the majority of the society concludes  
0263 Alright, Alex, on democracy, what about that? The fact  
0264 I have, you know, one five hundred thousandth of a vote for one representative in congress  
0265 is not the same thing as my  
0266 having the ability to decide for myself  
0267 how to use my property rights. I'm  
0268 a drop in the bucket  
0269 and you know while.. You might lose the vote  
0270 exactly and they might take? and I will, I mean I don't have  
0271 the decision right now of whether not to pay taxes if I don't get locked in jail or  
0272 they tell me to get out of the country. Now Alex,  
0273 let me make a small case for democracy  
0274 and see what you would say.  
0275 why can't you  
0276 we live in a democratic society with freedom of speech  
0277 why can't you take to the hustings,  
0278 persuade your fellow citizens  
0279 that taxation is unjust and try to get a majority?  
0280 I don't think that people should be, should have to convince two hundred and eighty million others  
0281 simply in order to exercise  
0282 their own rights, in order to not have their self ownership violated. I think people should be  
0283 able to do that without having to convince  
0284 two hundred eighty million people. Does that mean you're against democracy as a whole?  
0285 No I just believe in a very limited form democracy whereby we have a constitution that  
0286 severely limits  
0287 the scope of what decisions  
0288 can be made democratically  
0289 Alright so you're saying that democracy is fine  
0290 except where fundamental rights are involved, and  
0291 I think you could win if you're going on the hustings  
0292 let me add one element to the argument you might make



0293 maybe you could say, put aside the economic debates  
0294 taxation  
0295 suppose the individual right to religious liberty were at stake  
0296 then  
0297 Alex you could say on the hustings,  
0298 surely you would all agree  
0299 that we shouldn't put the right to individual liberty  
0300 up to a vote  
0301 yeah that's exactly right  
0302 and that's why we have constitutional amendments and why we make it so hard to amend our constitution.  
0303 so you would say  
0304 that the right to private property  
0305 the right of Michael Jordan to keep all the money he makes  
0306 at least  
0307 to protect it from redistribution  
0308 is that same kind of right  
0309 with the same kind of weight  
0310 as the right to freedom of speech  
0311 the right to religious liberty, rights that should trump  
0312 what the majority wants  
0313 absolutely the reason why we have a right to free speech is because we have a right  
0314 to own ourselves, to exercise our voice  
0315 in any way that we choose.  
0316 alright, good.  
0317 alright who would like to respond to that argument about  
0318 democracy being, alright there stand up  
0319 I think comparing religion and economics, it's not the same thing  
0320 the reason why Bill Gates was able to make so much money is because we live in an economically  
0321 and socially stable  
0322 society  
0323 and if the government didn't provide for the poorest ten percent  
0324 as you say,  
0325 through taxation then  
0326 we would need more money for police to prevent  
0327 crime and so either way there would be more taxes taken away to provide what you guys calling  
0328 and then necessary things  
0329 that the government provides. What's your name? Anna.

0330 Anna let me ask you this

0331 why

0332 is the fundamental right to religious liberty

0333 different

0334 the right Alex asserts

0335 as a fundamental right

0336 to private property

0337 and to keep what I earn

0338 what's the difference between the two?

0339 because you wouldn't

0340 have

0341 you wouldn't be able

0342 to make money, you wouldn't

0343 be able to own property

0344 there wasn't socially like if society wasn't stable.

0345 and that's very different from religion that's like something personal, something you can practice on  
your own

0346 in your own your own home

0347 whereas like me practicing my religion isn't going to affect another person, whereas if I'm poor

0348 and I'm desperate,

0349 I might commit a crime to feed my family

0350 and that can affect others. Okay thank you

0351 would it be wrong for someone

0352 to steal a loaf of bread

0353 to feed

0354 his starting family

0355 is that wrong?

0356 I believe that it is. let's take let's take a quick poll of the three of you, you say yes it is wrong.

0357 it violates

0358 property rights it's wrong.

0359 even to save the starving family? I mean there there definitely other ways around that

0360 and by justifying

0361 now hang on hang on before you laugh at me

0362 before

0363 justifying the act

0364 of stealing

0365 you have to look at

0366 violating the right that we've already agreed exists, the right of self-possession and the

0367 possession of

0368 I mean, your own things we agree on property right. Alright, we agree it's stealing

0369 so property rights are not the issue, alright so why is it wrong to steal even to feed your starving family?

0370 sort of the original argument that I made in the very in the very first question

0371 you asked, the benefits

0372 of an action

0373 don't justify,

0374 don't make the action just

0375 well what would you say Julia?

0376 Is it right to

0377 steal a loaf of bread to feed a starving family or to steal a drug that

0378 your child needs to

0379 to survive

0380 I think I'm okay with that honestly, even from the libertarian standpoint, I think that

0381 okay saying

0382 that you can just take money arbitrarily from people who have a lot to go to this pool of people who need

0383 it

0384 but you have an individual who's acting on their own behalf

0385 to kind of save themselves

0386 I think you said

0387 from the idea of self-possession they are also in charge of protecting themselves and keeping themselves alive

0388 so therefore even from a libertarian standpoint that might be okay

0389 Alright that's good, that's good. Alright

0390 what about number three up here

0391 isn't it the case

0392 that the

0393 successful, the wealthy

0394 owe a debt, they did do that all by themselves they had to cooperate with other people

0395 that they owe a debt to society and that that's expressed in taxation. DO you want to take that on Julie?

0396 okay this one, I believe that

0397 there is not a debt to society in a sense that how did people become wealthy? they did something that society valued

0398 highly

0399 I think that society has already been providing for them

0400 if anything I think it's everything is cancelled out, they provided a service to society

0401 and society responded by somehow they got their wealth  
0402 well be concrete, in the case of Michael Jordan, some,  
0403 I mean to illustrate your point  
0404 there were people who helped him make money, teammates  
0405 the coach  
0406 people taught him how to play,  
0407 but those you're saying, but they've all been paid for their services  
0408 exactly  
0409 and society derived a lot of benefit and pleasure from watching Michael Jordan play  
0410 and I think that that's how he paid his debt to society  
0411 good, who would, anyone like to take up that point?  
0412 I think that there's a problem here  
0413 that we're assuming that a person has self-possession when they live in a society  
0414 I feel like when you live in a society you give up that right. I mean if I wanted  
0415 personally  
0416 to kill someone because they offend me that is self-possession.  
0417 Because I live in a society, I cannot do that  
0418 I think it's kind of an equivalent to say,  
0419 because I have more money I have resources that that could save people's lives  
0420 is it not okay for the government to take that from me?  
0421 it's self-possession only to a certain extent because I'm living in a society where I have  
0422 to take account of people around me. so are you questioning, what's your name? Victoria.  
0423 Victoria, are you questioning  
0424 the fundamental premise of self-possession?  
0425 Yes. I think that you don't really have self-possession if you choose to live in a society  
0426 because you cannot just discount the people around you.  
0427 Alright I want to quickly get a response  
0428 of  
0429 the libertarian team  
0430 to the last point.  
0431 the last point  
0432 builds on,  
0433 well maybe it builds on Victoria's suggestion that we don't own ourselves  
0434 because it says  
0435 that Bill Gates is wealthy  
0436 that Michael Jordan makes a huge income  
0437 isn't wholly

0438 their own doing

0439 it's the product of a lot of luck

0440 and so we can't claim that they

0441 morally deserve

0442 all the money they make.

0443 who wants to reply to that, Alex?

0444 You certainly could make the case that

0445 it is not, that their wealth is not appropriate to the goodness of their hearts

0446 but that's not really the more the morally relevant issue. the point is that

0447 they have received what they have through the free exchange of people who have given them

0448 their holdings usually in exchange for providing some other service.

0449 good enough

0450 I want to try to sum up what we've learned from this discussion but first let's thank

0451 John Alex and Julia for a really wonderful job,

0452 toward the end of the discussion just now

0453 Victoria challenged

0454 the premise of this line of reasoning this libertarian logic

0455 maybe, she suggested, we don't own ourselves

0456 after all

0457 if you reject

0458 the libertarian case against redistribution

0459 there would seem to be

0460 an incentive

0461 to break into the libertarian line of reasoning

0462 at the earliest, at the most modest level

0463 which is why a lot of people

0464 disputed

0465 that taxation

0466 is morally equivalent to forced labor

0467 but what about

0468 the big claim

0469 the premise, the big idea

0470 underlying the libertarian argument,

0471 is it true that we own ourselves

0472 or

0473 can we do without that idea

0474 and still of avoid

0475 what libertarians want to avoid  
0476 creating a society and an account of Justice  
0477 where some people  
0478 can be  
0479 just used  
0480 for the sake  
0481 of other people's welfare  
0482 or even for the sake  
0483 of the general good  
0484 libertarians combat the  
0485 utilitarian idea  
0486 of using people  
0487 as means  
0488 for the collective happiness  
0489 by saying the way to put a stop to that utilitarian logic of using persons  
0490 is to resort to the intuitively powerful idea  
0491 that we are the proprietors of our own person  
0492 That's Alex and Julia and John,  
0493 and Robert Nozick  
0494 what are the consequences  
0495 for a theory of justice  
0496 and an account of rights  
0497 of calling into question  
0498 the idea of self-possession  
0499 does it mean that we're back to utilitarianism  
0500 and using people  
0501 and aggregating preferences  
0502 and pushing the fat man off the bridge?  
0503 Nozick doesn't  
0504 himself,  
0505 fully develop the idea of self-possession he borrows it from an earlier philosopher  
0506 John Locke  
0507 John Locke  
0508 accounted  
0509 for the rise of private property  
0510 from the state of nature  
0511 by a chain of reasoning very similar to the one that Nozick and the libertarians use

0512 John Locke said  
0513 private property arises  
0514 because  
0515 when we mix our labor  
0516 with things  
0517 unowned things  
0518 we come to acquire a property right in those things  
0519 the reason?  
0520 the reason is that we own our own labor  
0521 and the reason for that  
0522 we're the proprietors the owners  
0523 of our own person  
0524 and so in order to examine  
0525 the moral force of the libertarian claim that that we own ourselves  
0526 we need to turn  
0527 to the English political philosopher John Locke  
0528 and examine his account of private property  
0529 and self ownership  
0530 and that's what we'll do next time

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