

I want to go back to the arguments for and against the redistribution of income
but before we do that
just one word about the state
Milton Friedman the
libertarian economist
he points out
that many of the functions
that we take for granted
as properly belonging to government, don't
they are paternalist. one example he gives is social security
he says it's a good idea
for people to save for their retirement
during their earning years
but it's wrong
it's a violation of people's liberty
for the government to force
everyone
whether they want to or not
to put aside some
earnings today
for the sake of their retirement. If people want to take the chance
or if people want to live big today and live
a poor
retirement
that should be their choice they should be free
to make those judgments and take those risks
so even social security
would still be at odds with the minimal state
that Milton Friedman
argued for
it's sometimes thought that
collective goods like police protection and fire protection
inevitably create the problem of free riders unless their publicly provided
but there are ways to
prevent free riders, there are ways to
restrict even seemingly collective goods like fire protection
I read an article
a while back about a private fire company the Salem Fire corporation in Arkansas
you can sign up with this Salem Fire Corporation
pay a yearly subscription fee,
and if your house catches on fire
they will come and put out the fire
but they won't put out
everybody's fire,

they will only put it out
if it's a fire
in the home of subscriber
or if it starts to spread
and to threaten
the home of a subscriber
the newspaper article told the story of a homeowner who had subscribed
to this company in the past
but failed to renew his subscription his house caught on fire
the Salem Fire Corporation showed up with its trucks
and watched the house burn.
Just making sure that it didn't spread
the fire chief was asked
well he wasn't exactly the fire chief I guess he was the CEO
he was asked
how can you stand by with fire equipment
and allow a person's home to burn?
he replied once we verified there was no danger to a member's property
we had no choice
but to back off
according to our rules. If we responded to all fires, he said, there would be no incentive
to subscribe
the homeowner in this case tried to renew his subscription at the scene of the fire
but the head of the company refused
you can't wreck your car, he said, and then buy insurance for it later
so even public goods that we take for granted as being within the proper province of government
can, many of them, in principle
be isolated, made exclusive to those who pay.
that's all to do with
the question of collective goods
and the libertarian's injunction against
paternalism
let's go back now to the
arguments about redistribution
now, underlying
the libertarian's case
for the minimal states
is a worry about coercion, but what's wrong with coercion?
libertarian offers this
answer to coerce someone
to use some person for the sake of the general welfare
is wrong
because
it calls into question the fundamental fact
that we own ourselves

the fundamental moral fact
of self-possession or self ownership
the libertarian's argument against redistribution
begins with this fundamental idea that we own ourselves
Nozick says
that if
this is society as a whole
can go to Bill Gates
or go to Michael Jordan
and tax away a portion
of their wealth,
what the society is really asserting
is a collective property right
in Bill Gates
or in Michael Jordan
but that violates
the fundamental principle
that we belong to ourselves
now we've already heard a number of objections
to the libertarian argument
what I would like to do today
it's to give
the libertarians among us
a chance to answer the objections
that have been raised
and some have been some
have already identified themselves have agreed to
come and make the case
for libertarianism to reply to the objections that have been raised
so raise your hand if you are among the libertarians who's prepared to stand up
for the theory and response to the objections
you are? Alex Harris. Alex Harris who
he's been a star on the web blog, alright Alex
come here stand-up
we'll create a libertarian corner over here
and who else other libertarians
who will join
what's your name? John.
John Sheffield, John, and who else wants to join
other brave libertarians who are prepared
to take on yes
what's your name
Julia Roto, Julia come
join us over there
now while the,

team libertarian
Julia, John, Alex
while team libertarian is gathering over there
let me just summarize
the main objections that I've heard
in class and on the web site
objection number one
and here I'll come down too, I want to talk to team libertarian over here
so objection number one
is that
the poor need the money more
that's an obvious objection
a lot more
than
than do
Bill Gates and Michael Jordan
objection number two
it's not really slavery to tax
because
at least in a democratic society
there's not a slave holder
it's congress
it's a democratic, you're smiling Alex, you're already a confident you can reply to all of
these
so taxation by consent of the governed is not coerced
third
some people have said don't be successful
like Gates
owe a debt to society for their success that they repay by paying taxes
who wants to respond to the first one the poor need the money more all right
you're John
John all right John
what's the answer, here I'll hold it.
alright
the poor need the money more, that's quite obvious
I could use money you know I certainly wouldn't mind if Bill Gates gave me a million dollars
I mean
I'd take a thousand
but at some point
you have to understand that the benefits of redistribution of wealth don't justify the
initial violation of the property right
if you look at the argument the poor need the money
more at no point in that argument you contradict the fact that we extrapolated from agreed
upon principles that people own themselves
we've extrapolated that people have property rights and so whether or not it would be a

good thing or a nice thing
or even a necessary thing for the survival of some people
we don't see that that justifies the violation of the right that we logically extrapolated
and so that also I mean
they're still exist this institution of
of individual philanthropy, Milton Freidman makes this argument
alright so Bill gates can give to charity if he wants to
but it would still be wrong to coerce him
exactly
to meet the needs of the poor.
are the two of you happy with that reply?
anything to add? alright
Go ahead, Julie? Julia, ya, I think I could also ass
I guess I could add that
there's a difference between needing something and deserving something. I mean in an ideal
society everyone's
needs would be met
but here we're arguing what do we deserve as a society
and the poor don't
deserve
the benefits that would flow from taxing Michael Jordan to help
them. Based on what we've come up with here, I don't think
you deserve something
like that. Alright let me,
push you a little bit on that Julia
the victims of hurricane Katrina
are in desperate need of help
would you say that they don't
deserve
the help that would come
from the federal government through taxation.
okay that's a, difficult question
I think
this is a case where they need help not
deserve it, but
I think again if you hit a certain level of
of requirements to reach sustenance, you're going to need help, like if you don't have food or
place
to live
that's a case of need. So need is one thing
and dessert is another. exactly
who would like to reply?
Come back to that first point
that he made about the property rights of the individual
the property rights are established and enforced by the government

which is
a democratic government and we have representatives
who enforce those rights,
if you live in a society that operates under those rules
then it should be up to the government
to decide
how
those resources that come about through taxation are distributed because it's through the consent
of the governed
and if you disagree with it
you don't have to live in that society where
that operate. Alright, good so, and tell me your name.

Raul

Raul is pointing out actually Raul is invoking
point number two
if the taxation is by
the consent of the governed
it's not coerced
it's legitimate

Bill Gates

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

their policy convictions
just like everybody else
who would like to take that one on? John?

Basically what the libertarians are
objecting to in this case is the middle eighty percent deciding what the top ten percent
are doing for the bottom ten percent with wait wait wait,
John, majority, don't you believe in democracy?

well right but at some point,
don't you believe in the, I mean, you say eighty percent ten percent, majority, majority
rule is what? majority!

exactly but, in a democracy aren't you for democracy? Yes I'm for democracy but, hang on,
democracy and mob rule are not the same thing. Mob rule? mob rule. But in an open society, you
have recourse

to address that through your representatives
and if the majority of the consent
of those who are govern doesn't agree with you
then you know, you're choosing to live in the society
and you have to operate under what
the majority of the society concludes

Alright, Alex, on democracy, what about that? The fact

I have, you know, one five hundred thousandth of a vote for one representative in congress
is not the same thing as my

having the ability to decide for myself
how to use my property rights. I'm
a drop in the bucket
and you know while.. You might lose the vote
exactly and they might take? and I will, I mean I don't have
the decision right now of whether not to pay taxes if I don't get locked in jail or
they tell me to get out of the country. Now Alex,
let me make a small case for democracy
and see what you would say.
why can't you
we live in a democratic society with freedom of speech
why can't you take to the hustings,
persuade your fellow citizens
that taxation is unjust and try to get a majority?
I don't think that people should be, should have to convince two hundred and eighty million
others
simply in order to exercise
their own rights, in order to not have their self ownership violated. I think people should be
able to do that without having to convince
two hundred eighty million people. Does that mean you're against democracy as a whole?
No I just believe in a very limited form of democracy whereby we have a constitution that
severely limits
the scope of what decisions
can be made democratically
Alright so you're saying that democracy is fine
except where fundamental rights are involved, and
I think you could win if you're going on the hustings
let me add one element to the argument you might make
maybe you could say, put aside the economic debates
taxation
suppose the individual right to religious liberty were at stake
then
Alex you could say on the hustings,
surely you would all agree
that we shouldn't put the right to individual liberty
up to a vote
yeah that's exactly right
and that's why we have constitutional amendments and why we make it so hard to amend our
constitution.
so you would say
that the right to private property
the right of Michael Jordan to keep all the money he makes
at least
to protect it from redistribution
is that same kind of right

with the same kind of weight
as the right to freedom of speech
the right to religious liberty, rights that should trump
what the majority wants
absolutely the reason why we have a right to free speech is because we have a right
to own ourselves, to exercise our voice
in any way that we choose.
alright, good.
alright who would like to respond to that argument about
democracy being, alright there stand up
I think comparing religion and economics, it's not the same thing
the reason why Bill Gates was able to make so much money is because we live in an economically
and socially stable
society
and if the government didn't provide for the poorest ten percent
as you say,
through taxation then
we would need more money for police to prevent
crime and so either way there would be more taxes taken away to provide what you guys calling
and then necessary things
that the government provides. What's your name? Anna.
Anna let me ask you this
why
is the fundamental right to religious liberty
different
the right Alex asserts
as a fundamental right
to private property
and to keep what I earn
what's the difference between the two?
because you wouldn't
have
you wouldn't be able
to make money, you wouldn't
be able to own property
there wasn't socially like if society wasn't stable.
and that's very different from religion that's like something personal, something you can practice
on your own
in your own your own home
whereas like me practicing my religion isn't going to affect another person, whereas if I'm poor
and I'm desperate,
I might commit a crime to feed my family
and that can affect others. Okay thank you
would it be wrong for someone
to steal a loaf of bread

to feed
his starting family
is that wrong?
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.
it violates
property rights it's wrong.
even to save the starving family? I mean there there definitely other ways around that
and by justifying
now hang on hang on before you laugh at me
before
justifying the act
of stealing
you have to look at
violating the right that we've already agreed exists, the right of self-possession and the
possession of
I mean, your own things we agree on property right. Alright, we agree it's stealing
so property rights are not the issue, alright so why is it wrong to steal even to feed your starving
family?
sort of the original argument that I made in the very in the very first question
you asked, the benefits
of an action
don't justify,
don't make the action just
well what would you say Julia?
Is it right to
steal a loaf of bread to feed a starving family or to steal a drug that
your child needs to
to survive
I think I'm okay with that honestly, even from the libertarian standpoint, I think that
okay saying
that you can just take money arbitrarily from people who have a lot to go to this pool of people
who need
it
but you have an individual who's acting on their own behalf
to kind of save themselves
I think you said
from the idea of self-possession they are also in charge of protecting themselves and keeping
themselves alive
so therefore even from a libertarian standpoint that might be okay
Alright that's good, that's good. Alright
what about number three up here
isn't it the case
that the
successful, the wealthy
owe a debt, they did do that all by themselves they had to cooperate with other people

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

okay this one, I believe that

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

highly

I think that society has already been providing for them

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

and society responded by somehow they got their wealth

well be concrete, in the case of Michael Jordan, some,

I mean to illustrate your point

there were people who helped him make money, teammates

the coach

people taught him how to play,

but those you're saying, but they've all been paid for their services

exactly

and society derived a lot of benefit and pleasure from watching Michael Jordan play

and I think that that's how he paid his debt to society

good, who would, anyone like to take up that point?

I think that there's a problem here

that we're assuming that a person has self-possession when they live in a society

I feel like when you live in a society you give up that right. I mean if I wanted personally

to kill someone because they offend me that is self-possession.

Because I live in a society, I cannot do that

I think it's kind of an equivalent to say,

because I have more money I have resources that that could save people's lives

is it not okay for the government to take that from me?

it's self-possession only to a certain extent because I'm living in a society where I have to take account of people around me. so are you questioning, what's your name? Victoria.

Victoria, are you questioning

the fundamental premise of self-possession?

Yes. I think that you don't really have self-possession if you choose to live in a society

because you cannot just discount the people around you.

Alright I want to quickly get a response

of

the libertarian team

to the last point.

the last point

builds on,

well maybe it builds on Victoria's suggestion that we don't own ourselves

because it says

that Bill Gates is wealthy

that Michael Jordan makes a huge income

isn't wholly

their own doing
it's the product of a lot of luck
and so we can't claim that they
morally deserve
all the money they make.
who wants to reply to that, Alex?
You certainly could make the case that
it is not, that their wealth is not appropriate to the goodness of their hearts
but that's not really the more the morally relevant issue. the point is that
they have received what they have through the free exchange of people who have given them
their holdings usually in exchange for providing some other service.
good enough
I want to try to sum up what we've learned from this discussion but first let's thank
John Alex and Julia for a really wonderful job,
toward the end of the discussion just now
Victoria challenged
the premise of this line of reasoning this libertarian logic
maybe, she suggested, we don't own ourselves
after all
if you reject
the libertarian case against redistribution
there would seem to be
an incentive
to break into the libertarian line of reasoning
at the earliest, at the most modest level
which is why a lot of people
disputed
that taxation
is morally equivalent to forced labor
but what about
the big claim
the premise, the big idea
underlying the libertarian argument,
is it true that we own ourselves
or
can we do without that idea
and still of avoid
what libertarians want to avoid
creating a society and an account of Justice
where some people
can be
just used
for the sake
of other people's welfare
or even for the sake

of the general good
libertarians combat the
utilitarian idea
of using people
as means
for the collective happiness
by saying the way to put a stop to that utilitarian logic of using persons
is to resort to the intuitively powerful idea
that we are the proprietors of our own person
That's Alex and Julia and John,
and Robert Nozick
what are the consequences
for a theory of justice
and an account of rights
of calling into question
the idea of self-possession
does it mean that we're back to utilitarianism
and using people
and aggregating preferences
and pushing the fat man off the bridge?
Nozick doesn't
himself,
fully develop the idea of self-possession he borrows it from an earlier philosopher
John Locke
John Locke
accounted
for the rise of private property
from the state of nature
by a chain of reasoning very similar to the one that Nozick and the libertarians use
John Locke said
private property arises
because
when we mix our labor
with things
unowned things
we come to acquire a property right in those things
the reason?
the reason is that we own our own labor
and the reason for that
we're the proprietors the owners
of our own person
and so in order to examine
the moral force of the libertarian claim that that we own ourselves
we need to turn
to the English political philosopher John Locke

and examine his account of private property
and self ownership
and that's what we'll do next time