

Paper 2

“The minimal state is the most extensive state that can be justified. Any state more extensive violates people’s rights”
(Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, p. 149).

Many people believe that redistributive taxation is a requirement of justice. They think that the state should tax and redistribute property to ensure that no one lives in desperate poverty, to ensure that everyone has equally good opportunities in life, and so on.

Robert Nozick, by contrast, thinks that this view is simply mistaken. According to Nozick, the state may justly confiscate and return stolen goods—but any further redistribution of property is unjust.

Nozick argues for his conclusion in two ways. First, he tries to undermine the argument for more extensive redistribution. He does this by challenging all principles of justice that require a “pattern,” whether a pattern of income, or of well-being, or of opportunity, etc. Second, he argues for a historical conception of justice, according to which “[w]hatever happens from a just situation by just steps is itself just,” no matter what the resulting pattern of property, opportunity, well-being, etc.

Does Nozick succeed in showing that all redistribution, other than to return stolen goods, is unjust? Defend your answer by reconstructing and critically evaluating his two-part argument.

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