[06]	Libertarianism ~ Do We Own Ourselves
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

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0036
      restrict even seemingly collective goods like fire protection
0037
      I read an article
      a while back about a private fire company the Salem Fire corporation in Arkansas
0038
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
      but they won't put out
0043
0044
      everybody's fire,
0045
      they will only put it out
      if it's a fire
0046
0047
      in the home of subscriber
0048
      or if it starts to spread
0049
      and to threaten
      the home of a subscriber
0050
      the newspaper article told the story of a homeowner who had subscribed
0051
      to this company in the past
0052
      but failed to renew his subscription his house caught on fire
0053
0054
      the Salem Fire Corporation showed up with its trucks
      and watched the house burn.
0055
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
      can, many of them, in principle
0071
0072
      be isolated, made exclusive to those who pay.
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that's all to do with
0073
0074
      the question of collective goods
      and the libertarian's injunction against
0075
      paternalism
0076
      let's go back now to the
0077
      arguments about redistribution
0078
0079
      now, underlying
0080
      the libertarian's case
0081
      for the minimal states
      is a worry about coercion, but what's wrong with coercion?
0082
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
      that we own ourselves
0089
      the fundamental moral fact
0090
      of self-possession or self ownership
0091
      the libertarian's argument against redistribution
0092
      begins with this fundamental idea that we own ourselves
0093
0094
      Nozick says
      that if
0095
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
     now we've already heard a number of objections
0108
0109 to the libertarian argument
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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
      that have been raised
0114
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
      he's been a star on the web blog, alright Alex
0122
      come here stand-up
0123
      we'll create a libertarian corner over here
0124
      and who else other libertarians
0125
      who will join
0126
      what's you're name? John.
0127
      John Sheffield, John, and who else wants to join
0128
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
     the poor need the money more
0145
0146 that's an obvious objection
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0147
      a lot more
0148
     than
     than do
0149
      Bill Gates and Michael Jordan
0150
      objection number two
0151
      it's not really slavery to tax
0152
0153
      because
0154
      at least in a democratic society
0155
     there's not a slave holder
0156
      it's congress
      it's a democratic, you're smiling Alex, you're already a confident you can reply to all of
0157
0158
      these
0159
      so taxation by consent of the governed is not coerced
0160
      third
      some people have said don't be successful
0161
      like Gates
0162
      owe a debt to society for their success that they repay by paying taxes
0163
      who wants to respond to the first one the poor need the money more all right
0164
     you're John
0165
0166
      John all right John
      what's the answer, here I'll hold it.
0167
0168
      alright
      the poor need the money more, that's quite obvious
0169
      I could use money you know I certainly wouldn't mind if Bill Gates gave me a million dollars
0170
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
      or even a necessary thing for the survival of some people
0181
0182
     we don't see that that justifies the violation of the right that we logically extrapolated
0183 and so that also I mean
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0184
      they're still exist this institution of
0185
      of individual philanthropy, Milton Freidman makes this argument
      alright so Bill gates can give to charity if he wants to
0186
      but it would still be wrong to coerce him
0187
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
      Go ahead, Julie? Julia, ya, I think I could also ass
0192
      I guess I could add that
0193
0194 there's a difference between needing something and deserving something. I mean in an ideal society
everyone's
      needs would be met
0195
0196
      but here we're arguing what do we deserve as a society
0197
      and the poor don't
0198
      deserve
      the benefits that would flow from taxing Michael Jordan to help
0199
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
      the victims of hurricane Katrina
0204
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
      and dessert is another. exactly
0218
0219
     who would like to reply?
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Come back to that first point
0220
      that he made about the property rights of the individual
0221
      the property rights are established and enforced by the government
0222
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
      you don't have to live in that society where
0232
      that operate. Alright, good so, and tell me your name.
0233
0234
      Raul
      Raul is pointing out actually Raul is invoking
0235
0236
      point number two
      if the taxation is by
0237
      the consent of the governed
0238
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,
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!
      exactly but, in a democracy aren't you for democracy? Yes I'm for democracy but, hang on,
0255
      democracy and mob rule are not the same thing. Mob rule? mob rule. But in an open society, you have
0256
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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
      having the ability to decide for myself
0266
      how to use my property rights. I'm
0267
      a drop in the bucket
0268
      and you know while.. You might lose the vote
0269
      exactly and they might take? and I will, I mean I don't have
0270
      the decision right now of whether not to pay taxes if I don't get locked in jail or
0271
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 from 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
      I think you could win if you're going on the hustings
0291
0292
      let me add one element to the argument you might make
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maybe you could say, put aside the economic debates
0293
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.
      so you would say
0303
      that the right to private property
0304
0305
      the right of Michael Jordan to keep all the money he makes
0306
      at least
      to protect it from redistribution
0307
      is that same kind of right
0308
      with the same kind of weight
0309
      as the right to freedom of speech
0310
      the right to religious liberty, rights that should trump
0311
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
      crime and so either way there would be more taxes taken away to provide what you guys calling
0327
0328
      and then necessary things
      that the government provides. What's your name? Anna.
0329
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0330
     Anna let me ask you this
0331
      why
      is the fundamental right to religious liberty
0332
      different
0333
      the right Alex asserts
0334
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
      to make money, you wouldn't
0342
0343
      be able to own property
      there wasn't socially like if society wasn't stable.
0344
0345
      and that's very different from religion that's like something personal, something you can practice on
your
0346
      in your own your own home
      whereas like me practicing my religion isn't going to affect another person, whereas if I'm poor
0347
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
      to steal a loaf of bread
0352
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
     you have to look at
0365
     violating the right that we've already agreed exists, the right of self-possession and the
0366
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0367
      possession of
      I mean, your own things we agree on property right. Alright, we agree it's stealing
0368
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,
      don't make the action just
0374
      well what would you say Julia?
0375
      Is it right to
0376
      steal a loaf of bread to feed a starving family or to steal a drug that
0377
      your child needs to
0378
0379
      to survive
      I think I'm okay with that honestly, even from the libertarian standpoint, I think that
0380
0381
      okay saying
      that you can just take money arbitrarily from people who have a lot to go to this pool of people who
0382
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
     there is not a debt to society in a sense that how did people become wealthy? they did something that
society valued
0398
     highly
      I think that society has already been providing for them
0399
0400
      if anything I think it's everything is cancelled out, they provided a service to society
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and society responded by somehow they got their wealth
0401
      well be concrete, in the case of Michael Jordan, some,
0402
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,
      but those you're saying, but they've all been paid for their services
0407
0408
      exactly
      and society derived a lot of benefit and pleasure from watching Michael Jordan play
0409
0410
      and I think that that's how he paid his debt to society
      good, who would, anyone like to take up that point?
0411
0412
      I think that there's a problem here
      that we're assuming that a person has self-possession when they live in a society
0413
      I feel like when you live in a society you give up that right. I mean if I wanted
0414
      personally
0415
      to kill someone because they offend me that is self-possession.
0416
      Because I live in a society, I cannot do that
0417
      I think it's kind of an equivalent to say,
0418
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
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
      isn't wholly
0437
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0438
     their own doing
      it's the product of a lot of luck
0439
      and so we can't claim that they
0440
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,
      toward the end of the discussion just now
0452
0453
      Victoria challenged
0454
      the premise of this line of reasoning this libertarian logic
      maybe, she suggested, we don't own ourselves
0455
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
0473
      can we do without that idea
0474
      and still of avoid
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0475
     what libertarians want to avoid
      creating a society and an account of Justice
0476
      where some people
0477
      can be
0478
      just used
0479
      for the sake
0480
      of other people's welfare
0481
      or even for the sake
0482
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
      that we are the proprietors of our own person
0491
      That's Alex and Julia and John,
0492
      and Robert Nozick
0493
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