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Section 324
11:00 Tues

A King's Castle Is His Home

Should the strong be required to support the weak? How does a society "distribute" wealth among its members? These are the questions of Distributive Justice. There are three basic sides to this issue. The Permissive system entitles individuals to a subsistence income simply for existing as a human. The Puritan system requires that people at least be willing to contribute to society in order to receive a subsistence income. Finally, the Individualist view holds the property rights of the individual to be sacred: no one may forcibly deprive him of his goods.[1] I will argue for the last alternative.

Individualism is an extension of Locke's idea of property rights.[2] An Individualist believes each person owns his own life, the fruits of his labor, and his property. No one may deprive him of these property rights. He is free to act as long as his actions do not interfere with the property rights of others.[3]

At this point it is important to define what *money* is. Money is an exchange of value. Money has value because it represents labor, or value, one has created but not yet used. Money in my pocket is what I have created but not yet consumed. Money is not a natural resource; it does not grow on trees. Men can make money by their physical or mental labor.[4] Do I not, then, have full claim to my earnings?

Govier says no. She questions the very idea of causality. If **A** discovers a cure for AIDS, it surely was not solely a product of **A**. Society's framework made the discovery

[1] M & Z, pp. 373-376
[2] Locke, pg. 8
[3] M & Z, pp 352-353
[4] Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, pp. 410-415

possible: **A** had to build on previous knowledge; she had to use a laboratory she probably did not own. All of these factors make society a partner in the discovery. Therefore, she does not have the right to all of the benefits of her discovery; she must give up some of her benefits to society at large.

It is true that **A** did not personally create every piece of equipment she used to make the discovery; however, the point missed by Govier in this situation is that property is held by individuals, and **A** had to exchange value in the form of money buy or rent the equipment she used. The owners have already been paid for the use of their equipment. Business agreements occur between individuals; there is no entity, "society," that handed her a gift. If **A** were to have to pay more to "society," then she would, in effect, be paying twice!

If a Permissivist responds with "but she will get rich selling the cure for a high price while thousands are dying," there are two responses. The first is that this phenomenon displays the actual *value* of her product – the price paid in a free market. The second is that any attempt to take her money simply because "she has a lot of it" is simply robbery.

In a state of nature, I cannot get something for nothing. I cannot reap what I do not sow. If I do not invest effort planting and caring for my crops, there will be nothing at harvest time. Fish are not going to jump into my boat; I have to catch them! Govier and others who argue for Permissivism or Puritanism seem to forget that the wealth they want to redistribute must have a source, because money represents value already created. Thus they cannot dole out wealth as if there were an inexhaustible supply of it; Govier calls it "manna from heaven." The only solution they have to this problem is to rob those who already have money!

Govier's response to this is the "causality argument" which has already been dealt with. Her next objection is that the Individualist ignores the problem of "just what would constitute a good reason for giving **A** a higher income than **B**. Level of need, degree of responsibility, amount of training, unpleasantness of work – all these have been proposed and all have some plausibility."[5]

She is still looking at wealth as "manna from heaven," not as value that has been created. If the "Central Distributor," as she calls it, did indeed dispense wealth as he pleased, we would think there would be some primary quality he would look for.[6] In reality, however, the value of my creations is determined by what I can exchange with others. This is called "free market value." There is no need to use artificial attributes such as need, responsibility, or training because there is a *natural distribution* of wealth, which occurs when individuals freely exchange products whose worth is determined by the traders involved. This is a "natural distribution" because no man has the value he created, his wealth, taken by force.

A common objection to the Individualistic viewpoint is: "Who will take care of the poor people?" This brings up the important point that Govier also made, "many people will suffer tremendously. Some would even die as a result."[7]

In response to this question, the Individualist says, "You may help them if you wish, and I may help them if I wish, but no one may be forced to help them." When Govier forces me to help the poor, she is trying to spend more value than she has the right to – she tries to spend more than she has created. John Hospers illustrated this well,

> "I enjoy seeing operas; but operas are expensive to produce. Opera-lovers often say, 'The state (or the city, etc.) should subsidize opera, so that we can all see it.

[5] M & Z, pg. 381
[6] M & Z, pg. 381
[7] M & Z, pg. 377

> Also it would be for the people's betterment, cultural benefit, etc.' But what they are advocating is nothing more or less than legalized plunder. They can't pay for the productions themselves, and yet they want to see opera, which involves a large number of people and their labor; so what they are saying, in effect, is, 'Get the money through legalized force. Take a little bit more out of every worker's paycheck every week to pay for the operas we want to see.' "[8]

Govier may respond to this particular example by saying that Opera and welfare are two totally different things; one is mere entertainment and one affects others' lives. That distinction is valid, but the issue at hand is: trying to spend more than you produce at the expense of others.

Am I responsible for your welfare? Unless I choose to be, you have no claim on my life or property. I am not hurting you by making money because there is not a static amount of money, it can be created at will simply with labor.[9]

If a portion of the population is very poor, the Permissivist would argue that there could conceivably be violence.[10] One of the roles of government, according to Locke, is to enforce property rights, so one solution is that the government would have to deal with the violence. It is more likely, however, because people have compassion, that *private* organizations would be set up to help the poor get back on their feet.

There is one major issue that has not yet been addressed: What about those who are willing to work, but cannot because of a disability? Are they *entitled* to a subsistence income? The Individualist reply is this: No, they are not **entitled** to anyone's labor, because no man may force another's wealth from him. If the disabled truly cannot produce

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[8] M & Z, pg. 353
[9] Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, pp. 410-415
[10] M & Z, pg. 378

anything of value, they are at the mercy of those who can. This may sound harsh, but if the Permissivists really *value* human life as much as they say, they will be more than willing to support these unproductive individuals. They still cannot spend more than they create. You have no duty to take care of my crippled child, it is your choice. Since I value my crippled son, I choose to care for him.

Govier's response to this would be, "A society which does not accept the responsibility for supplying such a person with the basic necessities of life is, in effect, endorsing a difference between its members which is without moral justification."[11] The point she is missing, however, is that my property – value I create – and the fact that I can create it *is* moral justification for the difference.

The question of Distributive Justice comes down to which is more important: Public Utilitarianism or the Natural Rights of Man. Locke's Rights of Man, when applied to Distributive Justice, produce a consistent model in which the individual has both liberty and responsibility for himself.

[11] M & Z, pg. 375