

Discussion of the Importance of Freedom by Nozick

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Abstract: *Anarchy, State and Utopia is not only a classic in theory, but the political philosophy it expresses provided the ideological basis for the conservative turn in Western countries in the 1980s. Since the end of the Second World War, Western countries began to move toward the goal of a welfare state. Until the late 1960s, Western countries experienced a period of glorious social development. Rawls' Theory of Justice was the perfect philosophical expression of this historical era. By the 1980s, marked by the rise to power of President Reagan in the United States and Prime Minister Thatcher in Britain, the trend of political thought in the West changed and conservatism became popular. This conservatism is also a kind of liberalism, i.e., Lockean classical liberalism, and Noachic's extreme liberalism is the ideological representative of this political trend.*

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1. A brief biography of Nozick

Nozick was born on November 16, 1938, to Russian Jewish immigrants who ran a small business in Brooklyn, New York. Nozick attended the local public schools and then Columbia University to study philosophy. During this period, his thinking was very left-leaning. But by the time he was in graduate school at Princeton, influenced by the writings of Friedrich A. von Hayek and Milton Friedman, Nozick's thinking had shifted 180 degrees from being pro-socialist to fully pro-capitalist. In a 1975 interview, he admitted that he initially found the pro-capitalist arguments difficult to accept, "but the more I explored them, the more convincing they seemed. After a while I thought, 'OK, these arguments are right, capitalism is the best system, but only bad people think that way.' And then went to a certain point where my mind and heart finally became fully aligned."

Nozick's philosophical initiation was Plato's Republic. He once recounted that when he was fifteen or sixteen, he wandered the streets of Brooklyn with this book in hand. After graduating in 1959, Nozick quickly moved to Princeton University Graduate School, where he studied under the renowned philosopher of science Carl Hempel. He received his PhD in 1963 for his dissertation on The Normative Theory of Individual Choice. In this dissertation, he focused on the normative conditions of rational choice and some problems in game theory. Thus, Nozick was trained in a fully orthodox analytic philosophy and was first concerned with the problems of scientific explanation in the philosophy of science.

After graduating, he studied for a year at Oxford, England, on a scholarship, and taught at Princeton, Harvard, and Rockefeller University before returning to Harvard in 1969 to take up a full professorship in philosophy at the age of thirty. With Rawls's encouragement, he and Thomas Nagel organized a small Society for the Philosophy of Ethics and Law, which held regular monthly discussions attended by such prominent contemporary philosophers as Ronald Dworkin, Michael Walzer, and Judith Thomson. The young Nozick was best known among his peers for his devastating analytical skills. As early as Princeton, he was already a serious test for many visiting professors, as he was always able to find holes in the seemingly airtight arguments of others and persistently dismantle their ideas until they fell apart. This attitude of defying authority, pursuing originality, and taking all possibilities and counterexamples seriously is the most characteristic of Nozick's lifelong research and teaching[1].

2. Nozick's writings

Nozick published seven books in his lifetime, but the most widely known and influential, and most likely to make his name in the history of Western political philosophy, is undoubtedly his first book *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, published in 1974. With the success of *Anarchy*, Nozick, an unknown

young college philosopher, suddenly became an academic book award, and The Times Literary Supplement even rated him as one of the 100 most influential books after World War II. This book has also become a standard textbook for teaching contemporary political philosophy in British and American universities, and has been translated into more than ten foreign languages.

In this book, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* is divided into three parts. The title of the first part is "Theory of Natural State, or How to Trace the State Naturally", which discusses whether the smallest country can be born from anarchy in a way that does not violate individual rights. Nozick's answer is yes. He proved the legitimacy of the smallest country from the perspective of the emergence of the country, so his analysis began with the natural state and anarchy. Nozick believes that the worst natural state is undoubtedly better than the worst country, which is similar to a "monster that devours individual rights". However, is a better natural state more advantageous than the best country? Nozick doesn't think so, because people who are self-interested and have limited cognitive ability often make mistakes when it comes to their own interests, resulting in violations of others' rights, while safeguarding rights is prone to mistakes, excessive or inability to punish. In the long run, it will create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety. Nozick pointed out that a country in the weakest sense can be born naturally from the natural state without infringing people's rights. Nozick's logic is different from the traditional contract theory that the country was born when people gave up part of their rights in the natural state and signed a social contract. In fact, it puts forward an evolutionary argument, which is closer to the spontaneous order process proposed by Hayek and others. In the second part, *Beyond the Minimum Country?* Nozick put forward a historical view of justice based on rights-qualification theory, which is in direct opposition to Rawls' view of structural justice based on redistribution. Nozick provides a single-value political philosophy based on absolute ownership-self-ownership of oneself and ownership of external objects. Except for the purpose of punishment or self-protection, the only thing others have the right to do to me is what I agree-no one has the right to infringe on your person or property unless you agree. Freedom is only a derivative of this ownership. In the third part "Utopia", Nozick points out that all kinds of utopia ideals are really attractive, but this utopia concept often provides a single ideal goal, and all kinds of utopia ideals are in conflict. However, in the utopia of the smallest country, everyone can voluntarily choose to establish or join their favorite community, or choose to leave. People can try to live in various communities, live in a way closest to their wishes, and find the best world for themselves, which provides a beautiful and diversified "utopian framework"[2].

Nozick argues that only a minimal state with minimal government intervention is the most just and worthwhile political organization. The functions and powers of such a state are limited to preventing violence, theft, fraud, and ensuring the enforcement of contracts. In addition, the government should absolutely respect people's freedom of choice and private property rights, and should not redistribute wealth for other values such as equality or welfare. Nozick found that people often noticed that the distribution of wealth was unequal, so they naturally discussed how to make the distribution of wealth more equal. However, the author believes that it is unfair to force a person to work for the interests of others. The central authority has no right to centralize and distribute all items, and no one person or institution has the right to control all items. You can't deprive a person of his things for any beautiful reason. In civil activities and disputes, the role of the government is the arbitrator. "The state cannot use its coercive means to force some citizens to help others; Nor can people be prohibited from engaging in activities to promote their own interests or protect themselves by coercive means. "

In other words, Nozick wants to establish a solid moral foundation for laissez-faire market capitalism. Capitalism is worthy of support, not because it is efficient, not because it is the lesser of all evils, but because it best guarantees the basic rights of every human being, and is the best "utopia" that human beings can aspire to. *Anarchy, State and Utopia* was a controversial book when it was first published. It has been praised by some people for its strict defense of individual rights, but it has also been criticized by others for advocating the minimum form of state. This book has been the subject of many arguments and discussions since its publication. *Anarchy, State and Utopia* is a complex and challenging book, but it is also one of the most important political philosophy works in history. It had a profound influence on the development of libertarianism, and it is still read and studied by philosophers and political scientists. After the publication of *Anarchy*, Nozick was recognized as the leading representative of libertarianism on the right, reviving the basic ideas of classical liberalism and posing a strong doctrinal challenge to liberalism, utilitarianism, and Marxism on the left. On the realpolitik and public level, it provided a rich theoretical resource for the conservatism (or New Right) of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, which emerged in the 1980s. It is no exaggeration to say that Nozick embodied the spirit of New Right liberalism better than anyone else after the generations of state welfarism from Roosevelt's New Deal to Kennedy's, Johnson's, and Carter's, and led it into the Reagan and Bush years[3].

Nozick's other book, *The Examined Life* was published in 1989. Starting from his own life experience, Nozick tries to explore what constitutes the most valuable and meaningful thing in our life. Topics discussed include death, love between parents and children, sex, even evil and the Holocaust of Jews in World War II. In the tradition of analytical philosophy, few philosophers will try to touch on these issues. Nozick, on the other hand, can gradually lead readers to reflect deeply from the phenomenon in a sincere and wise way instead of preaching. It is particularly noteworthy that Nozick admits that the argument of Anarchy is seriously inadequate, and he no longer insists on *laissez-faire* in his early years. For example, he thinks that the government should levy inheritance tax, because the inequality caused by the inheritance accumulated from generation to generation is unfair. At the same time, he admits that *laissez-faire* has a narrow understanding of the government because it fails to fully consider the importance of mutual cooperation and unity among citizens in a democratic society. Nozick's frank confession must have gone through a long struggle and required great courage. He explained this: I wrote a book on political philosophy in my early years, indicating a specific point of view, an idea that I now think is seriously inadequate.

3. Nozick's criticism of Rawls

Rawls and Nozick are the most important representatives of contemporary liberalism, and their differences have dominated the development of Western political philosophy for nearly a quarter of a century, defining the main lines of Western political thought. They are both libertarians in name only. And as true liberals, their ideas are in many ways common: they both claim that their theories are deontological, they both strongly oppose utilitarianism, and they both articulate their views in opposition to utilitarianism; both rely on moral philosophy for their theories of justice, and both advocate the priority of the just over the good; both base their theories of justice on the individual, and both emphasize the diversity and difference of human beings. They both acknowledge the priority of freedom and affirm the liberal democracy currently prevailing in the West; both theories of justice ultimately resort to Kantian ethics, and both appeal to the idea that "man is an end and cannot be used as a means".

But what is impressive about them is not their commonality, but their differences. First, there is the question of procedure. Rawls' procedure is contractarian, and contractarianism emphasizes that the principle of justice is essentially a rational choice of man. Rawls sees two errors in classical contractarianism: first, it is based on a metaphysical theory of natural law; second, its parties are entirely selfish and know only the pursuit of personal good. For this reason, Rawls proposed the New Contract Theory. Through the design of the curtain of ignorance, he gave the new contract theory the force that any principles chosen in the original state are just, whatever they may be[4].

Nozick opposes contractarianism, but favors proceduralism and considers his own theory to be proceduralist. On the contrary, in Nozick's view, Rawls's contract theory appears proceduralist when it is not. Rawls devised a procedure for the production of his principle of justice, and any result achieved by this procedure is just, whatever it may be. But, Nozick criticizes, Rawls lays down an extrinsic criterion for this procedure, the difference principle, and any procedure that does not satisfy the difference principle is effectively ruled out. The difference principle itself is a result principle, not a procedural principle. Rawls' ostensible emphasis on procedures and his substantive emphasis on results appear proceduralist but are actually consequentialist. In this way Rawls is caught in a theoretical dilemma: if procedure is important, then Rawls' theory is flawed because it cannot produce a procedural principle of justice; if procedure is unimportant, then Rawls does not provide adequate support for his principle of justice, because the principle of justice should be the result of a just procedure[5]. Secondly the question of equality. The most important modern political values are liberty and equality. Regarding freedom, Nozick and Rawls have no substantive disagreement. The essence of the dispute between the two men is how to view equality.

Rawls believed that justice always implies equality, and thus inequality should and can be solved. Nozick, on the other hand, argues that justice has nothing to do with equality, and that justice lies in upholding the rights of man. Nozick complains that people treat equality and inequality differently and unfairly. If a distribution appears unequal, then people insist on a proof of an unequal distribution. But if the distribution is equal, then no proof is required, as if equality were a self-evident truth.

Nozick argues that equality also requires proof to be presented. The divergence in the theoretical bases of the two men is reflected in Nozick's criticism of Rawls. Rawls is an egalitarian libertarian, while Nozick is a rights-based libertarian. Rawls insisted on the inseparability of liberty and equality,

and Nozick insisted on the primacy of liberty. Rawls and Nozick's theory of justice is the most influential theory of justice in the western world today. From the perspective of Marxism, Rawls' theory of justice can be regarded as an improved version of Marxist theory of justice, while Nozick's theory of justice is a boycotted version of Marxist theory of justice. Both Rawls' and Nozick's theories of justice have their insights, but they also have major defects: both theories of justice embody the paradox between history and ideal in a deep level.

In addition, it is worth noting that Rawls and Nozick's theory of distribution justice provides a legal basis for capitalist distribution methods. Rawls tried to establish a fair and just "well-ordered society" on the basis of contract theory. Under this assumption, the private possession of the means of production is still legal and compatible with meeting the two principles of justice, although Rawls believes that the unequal distribution of wealth in the capitalist market economy should be moderately intervened. On the other hand, the right-wing liberal Pienozick proposed that holding justice is mainly based on obtaining justice and transferring justice. With the help of the principle of self-ownership, he demonstrated the legitimacy of private possession of means of production and tried his best to defend the legitimacy of capitalist economic relations[6]. Therefore, from this point of view, there is no substantial difference between the two theories of justice.

4. Conclusion

Nozick is an outstanding philosopher and thinker, Nozick's thought is of great significance for understanding the development of modern political philosophy and social concepts. His book *Anarchy, State and Utopia* is famous for its in-depth philosophical thinking and support for free market capitalism, which provides a solid theoretical foundation for contemporary political thoughts.

In Nozick's view, individual rights and freedom are the core values, and the government with minimal intervention is the key to realize justice and freedom. He believes that the government's function should be limited to preventing violence, theft and fraud, and ensuring the implementation of contracts. This minimum country can be formed through the evolution in the natural state, without relying on the idea of contract theory. According to Nozick's point of view, everyone has his own rights and property, and others have no right to infringe on these rights unless they agree. He emphasized the importance of individual freedom of choice and private property rights, and opposed the government's redistribution of wealth by coercive means. He firmly believes that only when the government respects people's freedom of choice and protects private property rights can real justice be achieved.

Nozick's thought played an important role in the conservative trend of thought that rose in the 1980s. He is opposite to Rawls' theory of justice, which holds that equality is the core element of justice and emphasizes the realization of social justice through redistribution of wealth. However, Nozick believes that justice is not the inevitable result of equality, but depends on safeguarding individual rights and freedoms. Although there are differences between the two philosophers on the issues of procedure and equality, both of their theories provide a legal basis for the capitalist mode of distribution. Their thoughts are of great significance to the conservative turn that arose in the 1980s, and occupy an important position in the history of western political philosophy.

Although Nozick's views are controversial in some aspects, his works provide us with a new perspective to examine the role of social organizations and government intervention. His thought challenged the traditional concept of government function and fair distribution, and emphasized the *laissez-faire* of market economy and the importance of personal choice.

In addition, Nozick's influence also transcends the field of political philosophy. His way of thinking is famous for his unique analytical skills, and he can always find loopholes in other people's opinions and tear them down persistently. This spirit of pursuing truth and despising authority has become the greatest feature of his research and teaching, and it has also inspired other scholars and philosophers to continue their in-depth exploration. His pursuit of knowledge innocence and academic sincerity, his serious reflection on life and his optimism and calmness in the face of death all reflect what he said. Philosophical activities should not only be external speculative arguments, but should be integrated with life and become a way of life.

In a word, Nozick's thought has an important influence on our understanding of the development of modern political and social concepts. By emphasizing individual rights and the value of free market capitalism, he provided a solid theoretical foundation for contemporary political thoughts. Despite the controversy, his works provide us with a new perspective to examine government intervention and

distributive justice. His way of thinking and unique analytical skills also inspired other scholars to continue their in-depth research and exploration.

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