

# Studying Social Inequality with Data Science

INFO 3370 / 5371  
Spring 2024

## Nozick and the Entitlement Theory of Justice

All page numbers refer to  
Nozick, Robert. 1974.  
*Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.  
Basic Books.

Why Nozick at all?

## Why Nozick at all?

“intellectual honesty demands that, occasionally at least, we go out of our way to confront strong arguments opposed to our views. How else are we to protect ourselves from continuing in error?”  
(p. x-xi)

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Nozick p. 161

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- ▶ “Wilt Chamberlain winds up with \$250,00...larger than  
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Nozick: No.

- ▶ “the term ‘redistributive’ applies to types of reasons for an arrangement, rather than to an arrangement itself” (p. 27)

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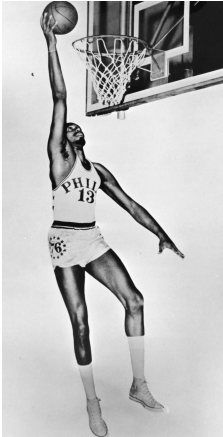
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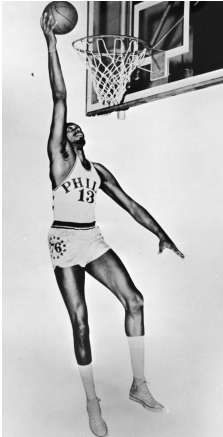
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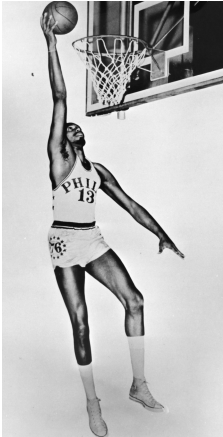


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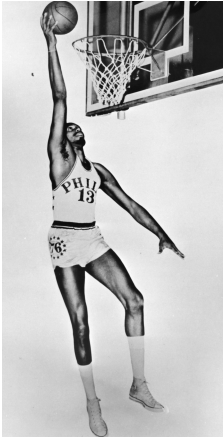
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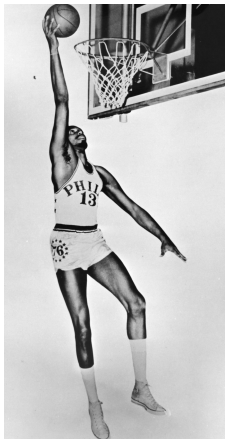
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Nozick: That law requires “continuous  
interference with people’s lives”  
which is morally unjustified

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# Entitlement theory of justice

p. 151

“Whatever arises from a just situation by just steps is itself just.”

1. original acquisition of holdings
2. transfer of holdings

**Nozick:** If people acquire things justly,  
then whatever distribution results is just

**Rawls:** A just distribution is the one that  
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Nozick p. 153

Could they ever lead to the same conclusion about redistribution?

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“If past injustice has shaped present holdings...what...ought to be done to rectify these injustices?”

# Past injustice

Nozick p. 231

“past injustices might be so great as to make necessary in the short run a more extensive state in order to rectify them”

Learning goals for today

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- ▶ critique any more extensive state on the grounds of individual rights (per Nozick)
- ▶ draw contrasts between
  - ▶ historical principles of justice Nozick
  - ▶ end-state principles of justice Rawls
- ▶ recognize how these different logics could both lead to redistribution today
  - ▶ Example: Correcting past injustice

## Extra: Nozick critiquing Rawls

p. 214

“Notice that there is no mention at all of how persons have chosen to develop their own natural assets. Why is that simply left out? Perhaps because such choices also are viewed as being the products of factors outside the person’s control, and thus ‘arbitrary from a moral point of view.’”

“This line of argument can succeed in blocking the introduction of a person’s autonomous choices and actions (and their results) only by attributing everything noteworthy about the person completely to certain sorts of ‘external’ factors. So denigrating a person’s autonomy and prime responsibility for his actions is a risky line to take for a theory that otherwise wishes to buttress the dignity and self-respect of autonomous beings; especially for a theory that founds so much (including a theory of the good) upon persons’ choices.”